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De Vitis Patrum (Vita Patris), Book Ia

By Jerome, presbyter, and various others

Life No 1

The Life of St Paul, the first hermit, [Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on Jan 15]

by Jerome, presbyter & divine [c.341 - 420. Biblical scholar and Doctor of the Church]

Prologue

There is a controversy among many people about who was the first person to take to living in the desert as a hermit. Some point back as far as the blessed Elijah and John the Baptist as being among the first. Yet Elijah seems to us to have been more of a prophet than a monk, and as for John, he began to prophesy even before he was born! (Luke 1.44). Others say that Antony was the first, an opinion that is commonly held by the mass of the people, but that is only partly true. For it is not so much that he was the first as that he was the one who did so much to encourage others to do so. Indeed, even the disciples of Antony, Amathas and Macarius, the former of whom buried Antony's body, nowadays assert that Paul of Thebes was the pioneer of this kind of life. I incline to that opinion myself, although there are many who will repeat all sorts of stories as the whim takes them, such as that Paul was only a man covered in hair right down to his feet living in a hole in the ground, and other invented tales too tedious to trouble with. Such impudent lies need to be refuted.

So then, seeing that Antony is now being diligently publicised both in Latin and Greek, [Athanasius' Life of Antony, written between 356 and 362, was widely circulated in the ancient world] I have decided to write something about the beginnings and end of Paul's life, not because I have any great confidence in my own ability, but simply because so far it has not been dealt with. What happened during the greater part of his life, or what battles with Satan he endured, it is not given to any man to know.

The Life

Chapter I

During the persecutions of Decius and Valerian a savage storm laid waste many of the churches of Egypt and the Thebaid. It was during this time that Cornelius at Rome and Cyprian at Carthage gloriously shed their blood. [Both celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on September 14. The year of their martyrdom was 253] To be put to the sword for the name of Christ was held to be a true Christian sacrifice. But the enemy wanted to subdue the soul even more than the body, and they invented ingenious, lingering ways of putting people to death. As Cyprian, who suffered like that, said, 'Although they wanted to die, death was withheld from them'. I shall give you a couple of examples of this so that the cruelty of it may be more thoroughly understood.

Chapter II

There was one particular martyr who persevered victoriously in the faith through tortures by racks and hot metal plates, so they ordered him to be smeared all over with honey and laid him out in the heat of the sun with his hands tied behind his back, hoping that even though he had survived the hot frying pan he might succumb to the burning pain of the insect bites.

Chapter III

They ordered another young man in the flower of his youth to be taken into a most pleasant little garden, with white lilies and red roses, and a gentle murmuring stream winding through it, and the wind making a sweet whisper though the leaves of the trees, where they made him lie down on a feather bed, and left him there, tied down with soft silken bonds to prevent him escaping. [They tried to bring a prostitute] in the hope of so inciting him to lust that she might win a shameless victory over him. I don't know how this soldier of Christ did it, or how he summoned up his resolve. But will pleasure be the victor where torments fail? For at length, inspired by heaven, he bit off his tongue and spat it in her face as she tried to kiss him. And so the immense pain which followed was stronger than the feeling of lust.

Chapter IV

At the time when these things were happening Paul was about fifteen years old. He and his married sister had lost both their parents, who had left them a

wealthy inheritance. He was highly educated in both Greek and Egyptian, a gentle soul, and a great lover of God. And when the storm of persecution exploded he fled secretly to a distant village. And then -

'how is it that you have such power over the human breast, O dedicated desire for gold?' -

[Virgil's Aeneid, Book 3]

his brother-in-law who should have sheltered him sought to betray him. The tears of his wife, their common family ties, not even God who sees all from on high could stop him in his wickedness. The pursuit of cruelty will drive people to extremes just as godliness does.

But when that most prudent youth heard of it, he fled to the mountains in the desert until the persecutions should come to an end. But what had been forced upon him by necessity came to be something which he welcomed, and as he gradually moved away, bit by bit as necessary, over and over again, he came at last upon a rocky mountain with a large cave at the foot of it and a large stone over the entrance. After removing the stone and going in, eager to explore the unknown with a human curiosity, he found a spacious chamber, with an opening to the sky above covered over by spreading branches of an ancient palm tree. There was a sparkling spring there, from which a stream overflowed through a little opening, and soaked away into the earth. There were also a few little buildings near the foot of the mountain containing the knives and anvils and mallets used to strike coins; Egyptian writings tell us that this used to be the site of a secret minting factory at the time when Antony and Cleopatra were together.

Chapter V

Accepting gratefully this dwelling which God had given him, he began to spend his time in prayer and solitude. The palm tree provided him with both food and clothing. And lest you think that is impossible, I call Jesus and his holy Angels to witness that in that part of the desert next to the Saracens of Syria I saw myself one of the monks who had been enclosed for thirty years living on barley bread and muddy water. There was another living in an old water cistern, in the pagan tongue of the Syrians known as a cuba, who survived on five dried figs a day. Such things might seem unbelievable to those outside the faith, but all things are possible to those who do believe.

Chapter VI

But to return from where I had digressed, by the time Paul reached the age of a hundred and thirteen, the ninety-year-old Antony was still living in another part of the desert. Antony used to say that it then occurred to him to wonder whether there was any monk in the desert more perfect than he was, and it was revealed to him at night while sleeping that there was one much better than he further into the mountain, and that he ought to make haste to visit him. As dawn broke the venerable old man set out he knew not where, supporting his weak old limbs with the help of a staff. By the middle of the day with the sun hot overhead he was burning with the heat, but did not consider for a minute abandoning the journey once begun.

"I believe in my God, " he said, "who will show me his servant as he has promised."

He had no sooner spoken than he saw a creature half man, half horse, which in the opinion of the poets is called a Hippocentaur. As soon as he saw it he signed himself on the forehead with the cross.

"You, there!" he cried, "Whereabouts in these parts does the servant of God live?"

The creature made strange, half crazy noises, mangling words which meant nothing, with a face all covered with bristly hair, while fawningly trying to make itself understood. It then pointed with its right hand in the desired direction, raced over the open countryside with the speed of a bird and vanished from sight. I don't rightly know whether this was an apparition sent by the devil to terrify him, or simply an animal spawned by the desert, which is a breeding ground for all sorts of monstrous beasts.

Chapter VII

Dumbfounded, Antony turned over in his mind what he had seen and went on a bit further. After a short time he saw a tiny little man in a stony hollow, with a hooked nose and horns on his forehead, with his lower parts ending in the hooves of a goat. Although apprehensive at this sight, Antony like the good warrior he was seized the shield of faith and the breastplate of hope (Ephesians 6.14). In spite of Antony's fears, this memorable creature by way of a peace offering offered him some dates as food for the journey, which he accepted and moved closer

"What are you?" Antony asked.

"I am mortal," he replied, "and one of those denizens of the desert which the pagans worshipped under the names of Fauns, Satyrs and Incubi. I come to

you as an envoy from my people. We beseech you that you will pray for us to our common God, who we know came to save the world, and sends out his sound into all lands" (Psalms 19.4).

At these words our long-lived traveller's face was freely furrowed with tears, indicating the depth of joy pouring into his heart. For he was rejoicing in the glory of Christ who has overcome Satan, at the same time giving thanks that he could understand what the creature was saying. He struck his staff on the ground and cried out.

"Woe to you, Alexandria, who worship portents instead of God; woe to you, O city that has played the harlot, where demons congregate from all over the world! What can you say now? For the very beasts speak of Christ, while you still worship portents instead of Christ."

He had hardly finished speaking when the horned animal fled as if it had wings. Lest anyone should be tempted to disbelieve any of this, remember that the whole world bears witness to the fact that during the reign of the Emperor Constantius [Died in 306. He was the father of Constantine the Great] a living creature like this was put on show in Alexandria, providing the people with an extraordinary sight. And later its dead body was taken to Antioch, preserved in salt lest it rot in the heat, where the Emperor himself saw it.

Chapter VIII

But to return to my story, Antony continued on his journey as he had begun, looking out for the tracks of wild beasts in the wide vastness of the desert. How he did it, and where his path took him, I know not. Another day had come to an end, finding him untroubled, as one who was confident that Christ would not desert him. He passed the second spell of darkness in prayer the whole night through, and in the dim light of dawn he saw a wolf, panting with a burning thirst, creeping towards the foot of a mountain. He watched where it went, and after it had reappeared out of a cave and gone away, he went towards the cave himself. He began to look inside, but could see nothing to satisfy his curiosity, for darkness obscured his vision. But as Scripture says, 'perfect love casts out fear' (I John 4.18), so he went in with slow steps and bated breath, like a skilled explorer. Little by little he went a bit further, with frequent pauses, until suddenly he heard a sound. And then through the oppressive sightless darkness he caught a glimpse of a light in the distance. He hastened towards it eagerly, and struck his foot against a stone, making another loud noise. When the blessed Paul heard this he closed the door which

had been open, thinking that now he could shut the wolf out. Antony then walked about outside it until it was later than the sixth hour, begging for admittance.

"You know who I am, where I came from, and why I have come," he said. "I know I don't deserve to see you. However, I shan't go away till I do. You take wild animals in to you. Why do you drive human beings away? I have searched for you and found you. I have knocked, so please open up! If I don't succeed I shall die right outside your own doorposts. And you will have to bury my body."

'He stayed there unmoving, persisting in bringing these things to mind.

[Virgil's Aeneid, Book 2] To which the hero replied in a few words, thus'.

[Virgil's Aeneid, Book 6]

"Certainly, no one asks like that if he is about to threaten trouble," he said, "and no one who is weeping such tears is likely to do anyone any harm, but why should you wonder that I have not opened my door, since you yourself have said that you are coming here to die?"

And Paul at last opened his door with a smile. They embraced each other, greeted each other by name, gave thanks to God together, gave each other a holy kiss, and sat down.

"There now!" said Paul. "Just look at what you have gone to so much trouble to find: nothing but uncared for grey hairs covering limbs wasted with old age. See, I am nothing but a human being, and will soon be nothing but dust. But still, since 'charity beareth all things' (1 Corinthians 13.7), tell me how the human race is going on, whether new buildings have been going up in the ancient cities, how the world is governed, and if there is anyone left still under the power of the demons."

Chapter IX

As they were speaking, they saw a raven coming to rest in the branches of the tree. It gently flew down and placed a whole loaf of bread before their wondering eyes before flying off again.

"How marvellous!" said Paul. "The kind and most merciful Lord for the last sixty years has been sending me half a loaf of bread. And now because of your coming he has sent his servants a double measure!"

They gave thanks for the works of the Lord and sat down by the side of the sparkling spring. From then until evening time they had an argument about who should break the bread. Paul said that the guest should do so, Antony said

the elder should. At last they came to a compromise, that each should take hold of one end of the loaf and pull, with the result that each would have a portion of the loaf in his hands. Each of them then drank a little water lying face downwards, after which they spent the night in a vigil, offering God the sacrifice of praise.

Chapter X

When day at last returned to the earth, Paul had this to say to Antony.

"For a long time, brother, I have known that you lived in these parts. He promised me that one day he would send you to be my fellow servant. But the time of my going is at hand, and I have ever been longing to 'depart and be with Christ' (Phillipians 1.23). 'I have finished the course, there remains for me the crown of righteousness' (2 Timothy 4.7-8). The Lord has sent you to me to cover my body with earth. - yes, indeed, you will give back earth to earth."

Antony wept and lamented at the thought of being thus deserted, and prayed that he might share such a journey with him.

"You don't need to know your own end," said Paul, "but that of another. All you need to do is to follow the Lamb until the time comes for you to lay down the burden of the flesh, and it will be for other brothers to follow the example of what you are now about to do. Hasten, therefore, before it is too late, and bring me the cloak which Archbishop Athanasius gave you, so that you can wrap my body in it."

Blessed Paul asked this not because he greatly cared whether his body would rot either clothed or naked, for he had been clothed anyway for a very long time in clothes made from palm leaves, but that Antony's sadness over his coming death would be lessened if he were to go away.

Chapter XI

Antony was quite stunned by what Paul said about Athanasius and his cloak, but, as if he were listening to the words of Christ himself, with the fear of God in his heart, he did not dare do otherwise, but with silent tears he kissed Paul's eyes and hands, and returned to that monastery which later was occupied by the Saracens. His going was not to his liking, for his body was weak because of his age and his fasting, and yet his spirit enabled him to overcome the effects of age. His journey done, he arrived at last at his cell, tired out and panting for breath. The two disciples who had ministered to him for a very

long time came running to meet him.

"Where have you been all this time, father?" they asked.

"Woe is me, a sinner," he replied. "It is deceitful for me to be called a monk. For I have seen Elijah, and John the Baptist in the desert, and truly, Paul in paradise."

He said no more but beat his breast and took the cloak out of the cell.

"Won't you tell us any more about what is going on?" the disciples asked.

"There is a time for speaking and a time for keeping quiet," (Ecclesiastes 3.7) he replied, and without taking even a small portion of food, went out and took the road by which he had just come, aching for Paul, longing to see him, making pictures of him in his mind. For he feared that in his absence he might have given up his spirit to Christ. Which was, in fact, what had happened.

Chapter XII

For at the third hour of the next day he saw Paul, shining brightly in a robe as white as snow, ascending into heaven in the midst of choirs of prophets and angels, and immediately he fell on his face, threw sand all over his head, and wept and wailed.

"Why have you left us, Paul?" he cried. "Why have you gone without bidding farewell? I have only now begun to know you; why have you so suddenly departed?"

The blessed Antony said later that he ran the rest of the way so quickly that it was as if he were flying. And rightly so. For when he went in to the cave he found Paul on his knees with his head and arms stretched out, his body motionless. Thinking at first that Paul was praying he prayed also. But when he heard none of the usual responses being uttered, he rushed towards him with a tearful kiss, and realised that this was indeed the corpse of the holy man. And he offered the prayers for the dead to the God unto whom all things live.

Chapter XIII

He wrapped the body up and dragged it outside, singing the traditional Christian hymns and psalms. He was worried that he had no spade to dig the ground with, and turned the problem over in his mind, weighing up the various possibilities.

"If I go back to the monastery," he said, "it will be a three day journey. But if I stay here, there is nothing I can do. So then, let me die here, as is fitting. Let

me take my last breath, O Christ, next to your warrior, Paul."

In the midst of his perplexity he was suddenly aware of two lions bounding towards him out of the desert, their manes streaming out behind them. At first he was terrified, then turning his mind back towards God, he stood there quite calmly, as if it were only two doves he was looking at. The lions ran straight to the holy man's body, with their tails between their legs, lay down at his feet and roared loudly, so that Antony could not fail to understand that they were indeed mourning in the only way they knew how. Then they began to scrape away the earth at a little distance, hollowing out the sand to make a grave big enough for a human being. Then as if to seek a reward for their deed, they came towards Antony with their ears pricked up and their necks stretched out to lick his hands and feet. And he realised that they were asking for his blessing. Without delay he poured out praise to Christ that even dumb animals looked to God.

"O God, without whom not a leaf flutters down from the tree and not a sparrow falls to the ground, (Matthew 10.29), be it unto these creatures according to your will."

And he motioned with his hand for them to go. After they had gone he carried the body on his bent and aged shoulders and put it in the grave, covered it over with earth, and built a mound over it according to the custom. Another day dawned, and Antony, as the only heir of this man who had died intestate, took possession of the tunic which Paul had woven for himself out of palm leaves in a basket weave pattern. And so he went back to his monastery, where he gave his disciples an account of everything that had happened. And from then on he always wore the tunic of Paul on the solemn feasts of Easter and Pentecost.

Chapter XIV

To conclude this little work, let me ask those who don't know the extent of their inheritance, who live in marble halls, and who make sure that an only son will benefit from all their wealth, whether this old man ever lacked anything in his nakedness. You drink from precious goblets, he was satisfied with his cupped hands, you wear tunics of golden thread, his clothing was rougher than that of your meanest slave. But to him in his deepest poverty the gates of paradise were opened, you with your gold will inherit hell. He, naked, was clothed with Christ, you in your silks have lost Christ's covering. Paul, buried in barren dust, will rise again in glory, you vaunting yourselves in

sumptuous tombs, will burn with all your works. I beg you, share, share out at least some of your cherished riches. Why are your dead entombed in golden shrouds? How is it that your ambition is not slaked even in the midst of the tears of mourning? Do you imagine that the bodies of the dead will not rot if wrapped in silk?

Whoever you are that reads this story, I beg that you will remember Jerome, a sinner, who if the Lord were to give him a choice, would much prefer the tunic of Paul with all its merit than the purple of kings and their kingdoms.

Life No 2

The Life of Antony

by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria

The life and conversation of our holy Father, Antony: written and sent to the monks in foreign parts by our Father among the Saints, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius [1] the bishop to the brethren in foreign parts.

You have entered upon a noble rivalry with the monks of Egypt by your determination either to equal or surpass them in your training in the way of virtue. For by this time there are monasteries among you, and the name of monk receives public recognition. With reason, therefore, all men will approve this determination, and in answer to your prayers God will give its fulfilment. Now since you asked me to give you an account of the blessed Antony's way of life, and are wishful to learn how he began the discipline, who and what manner of man he was previous to this, how he closed his life, and whether the things told of him are true, that you also may bring yourselves to imitate him, I very readily accepted your behest, for to me also the bare recollection of Antony is a great accession of help. And I know that you, when you have heard, apart from your admiration of the man, will be wishful to emulate his determination; seeing that for monks the life of Antony is a sufficient pattern of discipline. Wherefore do not refuse credence to what you have heard from those who brought tidings of him; but think rather that they have told you only a few things, for at all events they scarcely can have given circumstances of so great import in any detail. And because I at your request have called to mind a few circumstances about him, and shall send as much as I can tell in a letter, do not neglect to question those who sail from here: for possibly when all have told their tale, the account will hardly be in

proportion to his merits. On account of this I was desirous, when I received your letter, to send for certain of the monks, those especially who were wont to be more frequently with him, that if I could learn any fresh details I might send them to you. But since the season for sailing was coming to an end and the letter-carrier urgent, I hastened to write to your piety what I myself know, having seen him many times, and what I was able to learn from him, for I was his attendant for a long time, and poured water on his hands [2]; in all points being mindful of the truth, that no one should disbelieve through hearing too much, nor on the other hand by hearing too little should despise the man.

I. Antony you must know was by descent an Egyptian: his parents were of good family and possessed considerable wealth [2a], and as they were Christians he also was reared in the same Faith. In infancy he was brought up with his parents, knowing nought else but them and his home. But when he was grown and arrived at boyhood, and was advancing in years, he could not endure to learn [2b] letters, not caring to associate with other boys; but all his desire was, as it is written of Jacob, to live a plain man at home [3]. With his parents he used to attend the Lord's House, and neither as a child was he idle nor when older did he despise them; but was both obedient to his father and mother and attentive to what was read, keeping in his heart what was profitable in what he heard. And though as a child brought up in moderate affluence, he did not trouble his parents for varied or luxurious fare, nor was this a source of pleasure to him; but was content simply with what he found nor sought anything further.

2. After the death of his father and mother he was left alone with one little sister: his age was about eighteen or twenty, and on him the care both of home and sister rested. Now it was not six months after the death of his parents, and going according to custom into the Lord's House, he communed with himself and reflected as he walked how the Apostles [4] left all and followed the Saviour; and how they in the Acts [5] sold their possessions and brought and laid them at the Apostles' feet for distribution to then needy, and what and how great a hope was laid up for them in heaven. Pondering over these things he entered the church, and it happened the Gospel was being read, and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man [6], 'If thou wouldest be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor; and come follow Me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' Antony, as though God had put him in mind of the Saints,

and the passage had been read on his account, went out immediately from the church, and gave the possessions of his forefathers to the villagers--they were three hundred acres [7], productive and very fair --that they should be no more a clog upon himself and his sister [8]. And all the rest that was movable he sold, and having got together much money he gave it to the poor, reserving a little however for his sister's sake.

3. And again as he went into the church, hearing the Lord say in the Gospel [9], 'be not anxious for the morrow,' he could stay no longer, but went out and gave those things also to the poor. Having committed his sister to known and faithful virgins, and put her into a convent [10] to be brought up, he henceforth devoted himself outside his house to discipline [11], taking heed to himself and training himself with patience. For there were not yet so many monasteries [12] in Egypt, and no monk at all knew of the distant desert; but all who wished to give heed to themselves practised the discipline in solitude near their own village. Now there was then in the next village an old man who had lived the life of a hermit from his youth up. Antony, after he had seen this man, imitated him in piety. And at first he began to abide in places out side the village: then if he heard of a good man anywhere, like the prudent bee, he went forth and sought him, nor turned back to his own palace until he had seen him; and he returned, having got from the good man as it were supplies for his journey in the way of virtue. So dwelling there at first, he confirmed his purpose not to return to the abode of his fathers nor to the remembrance of his kinsfolk; but to keep all his desire and energy for perfecting his discipline. He worked, however. with his hands, having heard, 'he who is idle let him not eat [13],' and part he spent on bread and part he gave to the needy. And he was constant in prayer, knowing that a man ought to pray in secret unceasingly [14]. For he had given such heed to what was read that none of the things that were written fell from him to the ground, but he remembered all, and afterwards his memory served him for books.

4. Thus conducting himself, Antony was beloved by all. He subjected himself in sincerity to the good men whom he visited, and learned thoroughly where each surpassed him in zeal and discipline. He observed the graciousness of one; the unceasing prayer of another; he took knowledge of another's freedom from anger and another's loving-kindness; he gave heed to one as he watched, to another as he studied; one he admired for his endurance, another for his

fasting and sleeping on the ground; the meekness of one and the long-suffering of another he watched with care, while he took note of the piety towards Christ and the mutual love which animated all. Thus filled, he returned to his own place of discipline, and henceforth would strive to unite the qualities of each, and was eager to show in himself the virtues of all. With others of the same age he had no rivalry; save this only, that he should not be second to them in higher things. And this he did so as to hurt the feelings of nobody, but made them rejoice over him. So all they of that village and the good men in whose intimacy he was, when they saw that he was a man of this sort, used to call him God-beloved. And some welcomed him as a son, others as a brother.

5. But the devil, who hates and envies what is good, could not endure to see such a resolution in a youth, but endeavoured to carry out against him what he had been wont to effect against others. First of all he tried to lead him away from the discipline, whispering to him the remembrance of his wealth, care for his sister, claims of kindred, love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table and the other relaxations of life, and at last the difficulty of virtue and the labour of it; he suggested also the infirmity of the body and the length of the time. In a word he raised in his mind a great dust of debate, wishing to debar him from his settled purpose. But when the enemy saw himself to be too weak for Antony's determination, and that he rather was conquered by the other's firmness, overthrown by his great faith and falling through his constant prayers, then at length putting his trust in the weapons which are [15] 'in the navel of his belly' and boasting in them--for they are his first snare for the young--he attacked the young man, disturbing him by night and harassing him by day, so that even the onlookers saw the struggle which was going on between them. The one would suggest foul thoughts and the other counter them with prayers: the one fire him with lust the other, as one who seemed to blush, fortify his body with faith, prayers, and fasting. And the devil, unhappy wight, one night even took upon him the shape of a woman and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Antony. But he, his mind filled with Christ and the nobility inspired by Him, and considering the spirituality of the soul, quenched the coal of the other's deceit. Again the enemy suggested the ease of pleasure. But he like a man filled with rage and grief turned his thoughts to the threatened fire and the gnawing worm, and setting these in array against his adversary, passed through the temptation unscathed. All this was a source of shame to his foe. For he, deeming himself like God, was now

mocked by a young man; and he who boasted himself against flesh and blood was being put to flight by a man in the flesh. For the Lord was working with Antony--the Lord who for our sake took flesh [16] and gave the body victory over the devil, so that all who truly fight can say [17], 'not I but the grace of God which was with me.'

6. At last when the dragon could not even thus overthrow Antony, but saw himself thrust out of his heart, gnashing his teeth as it is written, and as it were beside himself, he appeared to Antony like a black boy, taking a visible shape [17a] in accordance with the colour of his mind. And cringing to him, as it were, he plied him with thoughts no longer, for guileful as he was, he had been worsted, but at last spoke in human voice and said, 'Many I deceived, many I cast down; but now attacking thee and thy labours as I had many others, I proved weak.' When Antony asked, 'Who art thou who speakest thus with me?' he answered with a lamentable voice, 'I am the friend of whoredom, and have taken upon me incitements which lead to it against the young. I am called the spirit of lust. How many have I deceived who wished to live soberly, how many are the chaste whom by my incitements I have over-persuaded! I am he on account of whom also the prophet reproves those who have fallen, saying [17b], "Ye have been caused to err by the spirit of whoredom." For by me they have been tripped up. I am he who have so often troubled thee and have so often been overthrown by thee.' But Antony having given thanks to the Lord, with good courage said to him, 'Thou art very despicable then, for thou art black-hearted and weak as a child. Henceforth I shall have no trouble from thee [18], "for the Lord is my helper, and I shall look down on mine enemies." Having heard this, the black one straightway fled, shuddering at the words and dreading any longer even to come near the man.

7. This was Antony's first struggle against the devil, or rather this victory was the Saviour's work in Antony [19], 'Who condemned sin in the flesh that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.' But neither did Antony, although the evil one had fallen, henceforth relax his care and despise him; nor did the enemy as though conquered cease to lay snares for him. For again he went round as a lion seeking some occasion against him. But Antony having learned from the Scriptures that the devices [20] of the devil are many, zealously continued the

discipline, reckoning that though the devil had not been able to deceive his heart by bodily pleasure, he would endeavour to ensnare him by other means. For the demon loves sin. Wherefore more and more he repressed the body and kept it in subjection [1], lest haply having conquered on one side, he should be dragged down on the other. He therefore planned to accustom himself to a severer mode of life. And many marvelled, but he himself used to bear the labour easily; for the eagerness of soul, through the length of time it had abode in him, had wrought a good habit in him, so that taking but little initiation from others he shewed great zeal in this matter. He kept vigil to such an extent that he often continued the whole night without sleep; and this not once but often, to the marvel of other. He ate once a day, after sunset, sometimes once in two days, and often even in four. His food was bread and salt, his drink, water only. Of flesh and wine it is superfluous even to speak, since no such thing was found with the other earnest men. A rush mat served him to sleep upon, but for the most part he lay upon the bare ground. He would not anoint himself with oil, saying it behoved young men to be earnest in training and not to seek what would enervate the body; but they must accustom it to labour, mindful of the Apostle's words [2], 'when I am weak, then am I strong.' 'For,' said he, 'the fibre of the soul is then sound when the pleasures of the body are diminished.' And he had come to this truly wonderful conclusion, 'that progress in virtue, and retirement from the world for the sake of it, ought not to be measured by time, but by desire and fixity of purpose. He at least gave no thought to the past, but day by day, as if he were at the beginning of his discipline, applied greater pares for advancement, often repeating to himself the saying of Paul [3]: 'Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before.' He was also mindful of the words spoken by the prophet Elias [4], 'the Lord liveth before whose presence I stand to-day.' For he observed that in saying 'to-day' the prophet did not compute the time that had gone by: but daily as though ever commencing he eagerly endeavoured to make himself fit to appear before God, being pure in heart and ever ready to submit to His counsel, and to Him alone. And he used to say to himself that from the life of the great Elias the hermit ought to see his own as in a mirror.

8. Thus tightening his hold upon himself, Antony departed to the tombs, which happened to be at a distance from the village; and having bid one of his acquaintances to bring him bread at intervals of many days, he entered one of

the tombs, and the other having shut the door on him, he remained within alone. And when the enemy could not endure it. but was even fearful that in a short time Antony would fill the desert with the discipline, coming one night with a multitude of demons, he so cut him with stripes that he lay on the ground speechless from the excessive pain. For he affirmed that the torture had been so excessive that no blows inflicted by man could ever have caused him such torment. But by the Providence of God--for the Lord never overlooks them that hope in Him--the next day his acquaintance came bringing him the loaves. And having opened the door and seeing him lying on the ground as though dead, he lifted him up and carried him to the church in the village, and laid him upon the ground. And many of his kinsfolk and the villagers sat around Antony as round a corpse. But about midnight he came to himself and arose, and when he saw them all asleep and his comrade alone watching, he motioned with his head for him to approach, and asked him to carry him again to the tombs without waking anybody.

9. He was carried therefore by the man, and as he was wont, when the door was shut he was within alone. And he could not stand up on account of the blows, but he prayed as he lay. And after he had prayed, he said with a shout, Here am I, Antony; I flee not from your stripes, for even if you inflict more nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ. And then he sang, 'though a camp be set against me, my heart shall not be afraid [6].' These were the thoughts and words of this ascetic. But the enemy, who hates good, marvelling that after the blows he dared to return, called together his hounds and burst forth, 'Ye see,' said he, 'that neither by the spirit of lust nor by blows did we stay the man, but that he braves us, let us attack him in another fashion.' But changes of form for evil are easy for the devil, so in the night they made such a din that the whole of that place seemed to be shaken by an earthquake, and the demons as if breaking the four walls of the dwelling seemed to enter through them, coming in the likeness of beasts and creeping things. And the place was on a sudden filled with the forms of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents, asps, scorpions, and wolves, and each of them was moving according to his nature. The lion was roaring, wishing to attack, the bull seeming to toss with its horns, the serpent writhing but unable to approach, and the wolf as it rushed on was restrained; altogether the noises of the apparitions, with their angry ragings, were dreadful. But Antony, stricken and goaded by them, felt bodily pains severer still. He lay watching, however,

with unshaken soul, groaning from bodily anguish; but his mind was clear, and as in mockery he said, 'If there had been any power in you, it would have sufficed had one of you come, but since the Lord hath made you weak you attempt to terrify me by numbers: and a proof of your weakness is that you take the shapes of brute beasts.' And again with boldness he said, 'If you are able, and have received power against me, delay not to attack; but if you are unable, why trouble me in vain ? For faith in our Lord is a seal and a wall of safety to us.' So after many attempts they gnashed their teeth upon him, because they were mocking themselves rather than him.

10. Nor was the Lord then forgetful of Antony's wrestling, but was at hand to help him. So looking up he saw the roof as it were opened, and a ray of light descending to him. The demons suddenly vanished, the pain of his body straightway ceased, and the building was again whole. But Antony feeling the help, and getting his breath again, and being freed from pain, besought the vision which had appeared to him, saying, 'Where wert thou ? Why didst thou not appear at the beginning to make my pains to cease?' And a voice came to him, 'Antony, I was here, but I waited to see thy fight; wherefore since thou hast endured, and hast not been worsted, I will ever be a succour to thee, and will make thy name known everywhere.' Having heard this, Antony arose and prayed, and received such strength that he perceived that he had more power in his body than formerly. And he was then about thirty-five years old.

11. And on the day following he went forth still more eagerly bent on the service of God and having fallen in with the old man he had met previously, he asked him to dwell with him in the desert. But when the other declined on account of his great age, and because as yet there was no such custom, Antony himself set off forthwith to the mountain. And yet again the enemy seeing his zeal and wishing to hinder it, east in his way what seemed to be a great silver dish. But Antony, seeing the guile of the Evil One, stood, and having looked on the dish, he put the devil in it to shame, saying, 'Whence comes a dish in the desert ? This road is not well-worn, nor is there here a trace of any wayfarer; it could not have fallen without being missed on account of its size; and he who had lost it having turned back, to seek it, would have found it, for it is a desert place. This is some wile of the devil. O thou Evil One, not with this shalt thou hinder my purpose; let it go with thee to destruction. [3]' And when Antony had said this it vanished like smoke from the face of fire.

12. Then again as he went on he saw what was this time not visionary, but real gold scattered in the way. But whether the devil showed it, or some better power to try the athlete and show the Evil One that Antony truly cared nought for money, neither he told nor do we know. But it is certain that that which appeared was gold. And Antony marvelled at the quantity, but passed it by as though he were going over fire; so he did not even turn, but hurried on at a run to lose sight of the place. More and more confirmed in his purpose, he hurried to the mountain, and having found a fort, so long deserted that it was full of creeping things, on the other side of the river; he crossed over to it and dwelt there. The reptiles, as though some one were chasing them, immediately left the place. But he built up the entrance completely, having stored up loaves for six months--this is a custom of the Thebans, and the loaves often remain fresh a whole year--and as he found water within, he descended as into a shrine, and abode within by himself, never going forth nor looking at any one who came. Thus he employed a long time training himself, and received loaves, let down from above, twice in the year.

13. But those of his acquaintances who came, since he did not permit them to enter, often used to spend days and nights outside, and heard as it were crowds within clamouring, dinning, sending forth piteous voices and crying, 'Go from what is ours. What dost thou even in the desert? Thou canst not abide our attack.' So at first those outside thought there were some men fighting with him, and that they had entered by ladders; but when stooping down they saw through a hole there was nobody, they were afraid, accounting them to be demons, and they called on Antony. Then he quickly heard, though he had not given a thought to the demons, and coming to the door he besought them to depart and not to be afraid, 'for thus,' said he, 'the demons make their seeming onslaughts against those who are cowardly. Sign yourselves therefore with the cross [4], and depart boldly, and let these make sport for themselves.' So they departed fortified with the sign of the Cross. But he remained in no wise harmed by the evil spirits, nor was he wearied with the contest, for there came to his aid visions from above, and the weakness of the foe relieved him of much trouble and armed him with greater zeal. For his acquaintances used often to come expecting to find him dead, and would hear him singing [5], 'Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered, let them also that hate Him flee before His face. As smoke vanisheth, let them vanish; as wax melteth

before the face of fire, so let the sinners perish from the face of God ;' and again, 'All nations compassed me about, and in the name of the Lord I requited them [6].'

14. And so for nearly twenty years he continued training himself in solitude, never going forth, and but seldom seen by any. After this when many were eager and wishful to imitate his discipline, and his acquaintances came and began to cast down and wrench off the door by force, Antony, as from a shrine, came forth initiated in the mysteries and filled with the Spirit of God. Then for the first time he was seen outside the fort by those who came to see him. And they, when they saw him, wondered at the sight, for he had the same habit of body as before, and was neither fat, like a man without exercise, nor lean from fasting and striving with the demons, but he was just the same as they had known him before his retirement, And again his soul was free from blemish, for it was neither contracted as if by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor possessed by laughter or dejection, for he was not troubled when he beheld the crowd, nor overjoyed at being saluted by so many. But he was altogether even as being guided by reason, and abiding in a natural state. Through him the Lord healed the bodily ailments of many present, and cleansed others from evil spirits. And He gave grace to Antony in speaking, so that he consoled many that were sorrowful, and set those at variance at one, exhorting all to prefer the love of Christ before all that is in the world. And while he exhorted and advised them to remember the good things to come, and the loving-kindness of God towards us, 'Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all [7],' he persuaded many to embrace the solitary life. And thus it happened in the end that cells arose even in the mountains, and the desert was colonised by monks, who came forth from their own people, and enrolled themselves for the citizenship in the heavens.

15. But when he was obliged to cross the Arsenoitic Canal [8]--and the occasion of it was the visitation of the brethren--the canal was full of crocodiles. And by simply praying, he entered it, and all they with him, and passed over in safety. And having returned to his cell, he applied himself to the same noble and valiant exercises; and by frequent conversation he increased the eagerness of those already monks, stirred up in most of the rest the love of the discipline, and speedily by the attraction of his words. cells multiplied, and he directed them all as a father.

16. One day when he had gone forth because all the monks had assembled to him and asked to hear words from him, he spoke to them in the Egyptian tongue as follows: 'The Scriptures are enough for instruction [9], but it is a good thing to encourage one another in the faith, and to stir up with words. Wherefore you, as children, carry that which you know to your father; and I as the elder share my knowledge and what experience has taught me with you. Let this especially be the common aim of all, neither to give way having once begun, nor to faint in trouble, nor to say: We have lived in the discipline a long time: but rather as though making a beginning daily let us increase our earnestness. For the whole life of man is very short, measured by the ages to come, wherefore all our time is nothing compared with eternal life. And in the world everything is sold at its price, and a man exchanges one equivalent for another; but the promise of eternal life is bought for a trifle. For it is written, "The days of our life in them are threescore years and ten, but if they are in strength, fourscore years, and what is more than these is labour and sorrow [10]. "Whenever, therefore, we live full fourscore years, or even a hundred in the discipline, not for a hundred years only shall we reign, but instead of a hundred we shall reign for ever and ever. And though we fought on earth, we shall not receive our inheritance on earth, but we have the promises in heaven; and having put off the body which is corrupt, we shall receive it incorrupt.

17. ' Wherefore, children, let us not faint nor deem that the time is long, or that we are doing something great, "for the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward [11]" Nor let us think, as we look at the world, that we have renounced anything of much consequence, for the whole earth is very small compared with all the heaven. Wherefore if it even chanced that we were lords of all the earth and gave it all up, it would be nought worthy of comparison with the kingdom of heaven. For as if a man should despise a copper drachma to gain a hundred drachmas of gold; so if a man were lord of all the earth and were to renounce it, that which he gives up is little, and he receives a hundredfold. But if not even the whole earth is equal in value to the heavens, then he who has given up a few acres leaves as it were nothing; and even if he have given up a house or much gold he ought not to boast nor be low-spirited. Further, we should consider that even if we do not relinquish them for virtue's sake, still afterwards when we die we shall leave them behind--very often, as the Preacher saith [12], to those to whom we do not wish. Why then should we

not give them up for virtue's sake, that we may inherit even a kingdom? Therefore let the desire of possession take hold of no one, for what gain is it to acquire these things which we cannot take with us? Why not rather get those things which we can take away with us--to wit, prudence, justice, temperance, courage, understanding, love, kindness to the poor, faith in Christ, freedom from wrath, hospitality? If we possess these, we shall find them of themselves preparing for us a welcome there in the land of the meek-hearted.

18. 'And so from such things let a man persuade himself not to make light of it, especially if he considers that he himself is the servant of the Lord, and ought to serve his Master. Wherefore as a servant would not dare to say, because I worked yesterday, I will not work today; and considering the past will do no work in the future; but, as it is written in the Gospel, daily shows the same readiness to please his master, and to avoid risk: so let us daily abide firm in our discipline, knowing that if we are careless for a single day the Lord will not pardon us, for the sake of the past, but will be wrath against us for our neglect. As also we have heard in Ezekiel [13]; and as Judas because of one night destroyed his previous labour.

19. 'Wherefore, children, let us hold fast our discipline, and let us not be careless. For in it the Lord is our fellow-worker, as it is written, "to all that choose the good, God worketh with them for good [14]." But to avoid being heedless, it is good to consider the word of the Apostle, "I die daily. [15]." For if we too live as though dying daily, we shall not sin. And the meaning of that saying is, that as we rise day by day we should think that we shall not abide till evening; and again, when about to lie down to sleep, we should think that we shall not rise up. For our life is naturally uncertain, and Providence allots it to us daily. But thus ordering our daily life, we shall neither fall into sin, nor have a lust for anything, nor cherish wrath against any, nor shall we heap up treasure upon earth. But, as though under the daily expectation of death, we shall be without wealth, and shall forgive all things to all men, nor shall we retain at all the desire of women or of any other foul pleasure. But we shall turn from it as past and gone, ever striving and looking forward to the day of Judgment. For the greater dread and danger of torment ever destroys the ease of pleasure, and sets up the soul if it is like to fall.

20. 'Wherefore having already begun and set out in the way of virtue, let us

strive the more that we may attain those things that are before. And let no one turn to the things behind, like Lot's wife, all the more so that the Lord hath said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and turning back, is fit for the kingdom of heavens [16]." And this turning back is nought else but to feel regret, and to be once more worldly-minded. But fear not to hear of virtue, nor be astonished at the name. For it is not far from us, nor is it without ourselves, but it is within us, and is easy if only we are willing. That they may get knowledge, the Greeks live abroad and cross the sea, but we have no need to depart from home for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for the sake of virtue. For the Lord aforetime hath said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you [17]." Wherefore virtue hath need at our hands of willingness alone, since it is in us and is formed from us. For when the soul hath its spiritual faculty in a natural state virtue is formed. And it is in a natural state when it remains as it came into existence. And when it came into existence it was fair and exceeding honest. For this cause Joshua, the son of Nun, in his exhortation said to the people, "Make straight your heart unto the Lord God of Israel [18]," and John, "Make your paths straight [19]." For rectitude of soul consists in its having its spiritual part in its natural state as created. But on the other hand, when it swerves and turns away from its natural state, that is called vice of the soul. Thus the matter is not difficult. If we abide as we have been made, we are in a state of virtue, but if we think of ignoble things we shall be accounted evil. If, therefore, this thing had to be acquired from without, it would be difficult in reality; but if it is in us, let us keep ourselves from foul thoughts. And as we have received the soul as a deposit, let us preserve it for the Lord, that He may recognise His work as being the same as He made it.

21. 'And let us strive that wrath rule us not nor lust overcome us, for it is written, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. And lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin, and the sin when it is full grown bringeth forth death [20]." Thus living, let us keep guard carefully, and as it is written, "keep our hearts with all watchfulness [1]." For we have terrible and crafty foes--the evil spirits--and against them we wrestle, as the Apostle said, "Not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places [1a]." Great is their number in the air around us", and they are not far from us. Now there are great distinctions

among them; and concerning their nature and distinctions much could be said, but such a description is for others of greater powers than we possess. But at this time it is pressing and necessary for us only to know their wiles against ourselves.

22. 'First, therefore, we must know this: that the demons have not been created like what we mean when we call them by that name for God made nothing evil, but even they have been made good. Having fallen, however, from the heavenly wisdom, since then they have been grovelling on earth. On the one hand they deceived the Greeks with their displays, while out of envy of us Christians they move all things in their desire to hinder us from entry into the heavens; in order that we should not ascend up thither from whence they fell. Thus there is need of much prayer and of discipline, that when a man has received through the Spirit the gift of discerning spirits, he may have power to recognise their characteristics: which of them are less and which more evil; of what nature is the special pursuit of each, and how each of them is overthrown and cast out. For their villainies and the changes in their plots are many. The blessed Apostle and his followers knew such things when they said, "for we are not ignorant of his devices [3];" and we, from the temptations we have suffered at their hands, ought to correct one another under them. Wherefore I, having had proof of them, speak as to children.

23. 'The demons, therefore, if they see all Christians, and monks especially, labouring cheerfully and advancing, first make an attack by temptation and place hindrances to hamper our way, to wit, evil thoughts. But we need not fear their suggestions, for by prayer, fasting, and faith in the Lord their attack immediately fails. But even when it does they cease not, but knavishly by subtlety come on again. For when they cannot deceive the heart openly with foul pleasures they approach in different guise, and thenceforth shaping displays they attempt to strike fear, changing their shapes, taking the forms of women, wild beasts, creeping things, gigantic bodies, and troops of soldiers. But not even then need ye fear their deceitful displays. For they are nothing and quickly disappear, especially if a man fortify himself beforehand with faith and the sign of the cross [4]. Yet are they bold and very shameless, for if thus they are worsted they make an onslaught in another manner, and pretend to prophesy and foretell the future, and to shew themselves of a height reaching to the roof and of great breadth; that they may stealthily catch by such displays those who could not be deceived by their arguments. If here also

they find the soul strengthened by faith and a hopeful mind, then they bring their leader to their aid.

24. 'And he said they often appeared as the Lord revealed the devil to Job, saying, "His eyes are as the morning star. From his mouth proceed burning lamps and hearths of fire are east forth. The smoke of a furnace blazing with the fire of coals proceeds from his nostrils. His breath is coals and from his mouth issues flames." When the prince of the demons appears in this wise, the crafty one, as I said before, strikes terror by speaking great things, as again the Lord convicted him saying to Job, for "he counteth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood, yea he counteth the sea as a pot of ointment, and the depth of the abyss as a captive, and the abyss as a covered walk [6]." And by the prophet, "the enemy said, I will pursue and overtake [7]," and again by another, "I will grasp the whole world in my hand as a nest, and take it up as eggs that have been left [8]." Such, in a word, are their boasts and professions that they may deceive the godly. But not even then ought we, the faithful, to fear his appearance or give heed to his words. For he is a liar and speaketh of truth never a word. And though speaking words so many and so great in his boldness, without doubt, like a dragon he was drawn with a hook by the Saviour [9], and as a beast of burden he received the halter round his nostrils, and as a runaway his nostrils were bound with a ring, and his lips bored with an armlet [10]. And he was bound by the Lord as a sparrow, that we should mock him. And with him are placed the demons his fellows, like serpents and scorpions to be trodden underfoot by us Christians. And the proof of this is that we now live opposed to him. For he who threatened to dry the sea and seize upon the world, behold now cannot stay our discipline, nor even me speaking against him. Let us then heed not his words, for he is a liar: and let us not fear his visions, seeing that they themselves are deceptive. For that which appears in them is no true light, but they are rather the preludes and likenesses of the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned. Doubtless they appear; but in a moment disappear again, hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive themselves. Wherefore it is unfitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the grace of Christ all their practices are in vain.

25. 'Again they are treacherous, and are ready to change themselves into all

forms and assume all appearances. Very often also without appearing they imitate the music of harp and voice, and recall the words of Scripture. Sometimes, too, while we are reading they immediately repeat many times, like an echo, what is read. They arouse us from our sleep to prayers; and this constantly, hardly allowing us to sleep at all. At another time they assume the appearance of monks and feign the speech of holy men, that by their similarity they may deceive and thus drag their victims where they will. But no heed must be paid them even if they arouse to prayer, even if they counsel us not to eat at all even though they seem to accuse and cast shame upon us for those things which once they allowed. For they do this not for the sake of piety or truth, but that they may carry off the simple to despair; and that they may say the discipline is useless, and make men loathe the solitary life as a trouble and burden, and hinder those who in spite of them walk in it.

26. 'Wherefore the prophet sent by the Lord declared them to be wretched, saying: "Wo is he who giveth his neighbours to drink muddy destruction [11]." For such practices and devices are subversive of the way which leads to virtue. And the Lord Himself, even if the demons spoke the truth,--for they said truly "Thou art the Son of God [12]" --still bridled their mouths and suffered them not to speak lest haply they should sow their evil along with the truth, and that He might accustom us never to give heed to them even though they appear to speak what is true. For it is unseemly that we, having the holy Scriptures and freedom from the Saviour, should be taught by the devil who hath not kept his own order but hath gone from one mind to another [13]. Wherefore even when he uses the language of Scripture He forbids him, saying: "But to the sinner said God, Wherefore dost thou declare My ordinances and takest My covenant in thy mouth [14]?" For the demons do all things --they prate, they confuse, they dissemble, they confound--to deceive the simple. They din, laugh madly, and whistle; but if no heed is paid to them forthwith they weep and lament as though vanquished.

27. 'The Lord therefore, as God, stayed the mouths of the demons: and it is fitting that we, taught by the saints, should do like them and imitate their courage. For they when they saw these things used to say: "When the sinner rose against me, I was dumb and humble, and kept silence from good words [15]." And again: "But I was as a deaf man and heard not, and as a dumb man who openeth not his mouth, and I became as a man who heareth not [16]." So

let us neither hear them as being strangers to us, nor give heed to them even through they arouse us to prayer and speak concerning fasting. But let us rather apply ourselves to our resolve of discipline, and let us not be deceived by them who do all things in deceit, even though they threaten death. For they are weak and can do nought but threaten.

28. 'Already in passing I have spoken on these things, and now I must not shrink from speaking on them at greater length, for to put you in remembrance will be a source of safety. Since the Lord visited earth [17], the enemy is fallen and his powers weakened. Wherefore although he could do nothing, still like a tyrant, he did not bear his fall quietly, but threatened, though his threats were words only. And let each one of you consider this, and he will be able to despise the demons. Now if they were hampered with such bodies as we are, it would be possible for them to say, "Men when they are hidden we cannot find, but whenever we do find them we do them hurt." And we also by lying in concealment could escape them, shutting the doors against them. But if they are not of such a nature as this, but are able to enter in, though the doors be shut, and haunt all the air, both they and their leader the devil, and are wishful for evil and ready to injure; and, as the Saviour said, "From the beginning the devil is a manslayer and a father of vice [18];" while we, though this is so, are alive, and spend our lives all the more in opposing him; it is plain they are powerless. For place is no hindrance to their plots, nor do they look on us as friends that they should spare us; nor are they lovers of good that they should amend. But on the contrary they are evil, and nothing is so much sought after by them as wounding them that love virtue and fear God. But since they have no power to effect anything, they do nought but threaten. But if they could, they would not hesitate, but forthwith work evil (for all their desire is set on this), and especially against us. Behold now we are gathered together and speak against them, and they know when we advance they grow weak. If therefore they had power they would permit none of us Christians to live, for godliness is an abomination to a sinner [19]. But since they can do nothing they inflict the greater wounds on themselves; for they can fulfil none of their threats. Next this ought to be considered, that we may be in no fear of them: that if they had the power they would not come in crowds, nor fashion displays, nor with change of form would they frame deceits. But it would suffice that one only should come and accomplish that which he was both able and willing to do: especially as every one who has the power neither slays with display nor strikes fear with tumult, but forthwith makes full use of his

authority as he wishes. But the demons as they have no power are like actors on the stage changing their shape and frightening children with tumultuous apparition and various forms: from which they ought rather to be despised as shewing their weakness. At least the true angel of the Lord sent against the Assyrian had no need for tumults nor displays from without, nor noises nor rattlings, but in quiet he used his power and forthwith destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand. But demons like these, who have no power, try to terrify at least by their displays [20].

29. 'But if any one having in mind the history of Job [1] should say, Why then hath the devil gone forth and accomplished all things against him; and stripped him of all his possessions, and slew his children, and smote him with evil ulcers? let such a one, on the other hand, recognise that the devil was not the strong man, but God who delivered Job to him to be tried. Certainly he had no power to do anything, but he asked, and having received it, he hath wrought what he did. So also from this the enemy is the more to be condemned, for although willing he could not prevail against one just man. For if he could have, he would not have asked permission. But having asked not once but also a second time, he shows his weakness and want of power. And it is no wonder if he could do nothing against Job, when destruction would not have come even on his cattle had not God allowed it. And he has not the power over swine, for as it is written in the Gospel, they besought the Lord, saying, "Let us enter the swine [2]." But if they had power not even against swine, much less have they any over men formed [3] in the image of God.

30. 'So then we ought to fear God only, and despise the demons, and be in no fear of them. But the more they do these things the more let us intensify our discipline against them, for a good life and faith in God is a great weapon. At any rate they fear the fasting, the sleeplessness, the prayers, the meekness, the quietness, the contempt of money and vainglory, the humility, the love of the poor, the alms, the freedom from anger of the ascetics, and, chief of all, their piety towards Christ. Wherefore they do all things that they may not have any that trample on them, knowing the grace given to the faithful against them by the Saviour, when He says, "Behold I have given to you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy [4]."

31. 'Wherefore if they pretend to foretell the future, let no one give heed, for often they announce beforehand that the brethren are coming days after. And they do come. The demons, however, do this not from any care for the hearers, but to gain their trust, and that then at length, having got them in their power, they may destroy them. Whence we must give no heed to them, but ought rather to confute them when speaking, since we do not need them. For what wonder is it, if with more subtle bodies than men have, when they have seen them start on their journey, they surpass them in speed, and announce their coming? Just as a horseman getting a start of a man on foot announces the arrival of the latter beforehand, so in this there is no need for us to wonder at them. For they know none of those things which are not yet in existence; but God only is He who knoweth all things before their birth [6]. But these, like thieves, running off first with what they see, proclaim it: to how many already have they announced our business--that we are assembled together, and discuss measures against them, before any one of us could go and tell these things. This in good truth a fleet-footed boy could do, getting far ahead of one less swift. But what I mean is this. If any one begins to walk from the Thebaid, or from any other district, before he begins to walk, they do not know whether he will walk. But when they have seen him walking they run on, and before he comes up report his approach. And so it falls out that after a few days the travellers arrive. But often the walkers turn back, and the demons prove false. 35. 'So, too, with respect to the water of the river, they sometimes make foolish statements, For having seen that there has been much rain in the regions of Ethiopia, and knowing that they are the cause of the flood of the river before the water has come to Egypt they run on and announce it. And this men could have told, if they had as great power of running as the demons. And as David's spy [7] going up to a lofty place saw the man approaching better than one who stayed down below, and the forerunner himself announced, before the others came up, not those things which had not taken place, but those things which were already on the way and were being accomplished, so these also prefer to labour, and declare what is happening to others simply for the sake of deceiving them. If, however, Providence meantime plans anything different for the waters or wayfarers--for Providence can do this--the demons are deceived, and those who gave heed to them cheated. 33. 'Thus in days gone by arose the oracles of the Greeks, and thus they were led astray by the demons. But thus also thenceforth their deception was brought to an end by the coming of the Lord [8], who brought to nought

the demons and their devices. For they know nothing of themselves, but, like thieves, what they get to know from others they pass on, and guess at rather than foretell things. Therefore if sometimes they speak the truth, let no one marvel at them for this. For experienced physicians also, since they see the same malady in different people, often foretell what it is, making it out by their acquaintance with it. Pilots, too, and farmers, from their familiarity with the weather, tell at a glance the state of the atmosphere, and forecast whether it will be stormy or fine. And no one would say that they do this by inspiration, but from experience and practice. So if the demons sometimes do the same by guesswork, let no one wonder at it or heed them. For what use to the hearers is it to know from them what is going to happen before the time? Or what concern have we to know such things, even if the knowledge be true? For it is not productive of virtue, nor is it any token of goodness. For none of us is judged for what he knows not, and no one is called blessed because he hath learning and knowledge. But each one will be called to judgment in these points--whether he have kept the faith and truly observed the commandments.

34. 'Wherefore there is no need to set much value on these things, nor for the sake of them to practise a life of discipline and labour; but that living well we may please God. And we neither ought to pray to know the future, nor to ask for it as the reward of our discipline; but our prayer should be that the Lord may be our fellow-helper for victory over the devil. And if even once we have a desire to know the future, let us be pure in mind, for I believe that if a soul is perfectly pure and in its natural state, it is able [9], being clear-sighted, to see more and further than the demons--for it has the Lord who reveals to it--like the soul of Elisha, which saw what was done [10] by Gehazi, and beheld the hosts [11] standing on its side.

35. 'When, therefore, they come by night to you and wish to tell the future, or say, "we are the angels," give no heed, for they lie. Yea even if they praise your discipline and call you blessed, hear them not, and have no dealings with them; but rather sign yourselves and your houses, and pray, and you shall see them vanish. For they are cowards, and greatly fear the sign of the Lord's Cross, since of a truth in it the Saviour stripped them, and made an example of them [11a]. But if they shamelessly stand their ground, capering and changing their forms of appearance, fear them not, nor shrink, nor heed them as though they were good spirits. For the presence either of the good or evil by the help

of God can easily be distinguished. The vision of the holy ones is not fraught with distraction: "For they will not strive, nor cry, nor shall any one hear their voice [12]." But it comes so quietly and gently that immediately joy, gladness and courage arise in the soul. For the Lord who is our joy is with them, and the power of God the Father. And the thoughts of the soul remain unruffled and undisturbed, so that it, enlightened as it were with rays, beholds by itself those who appear. For the love of what is divine and of the things to come possesses it, and willingly it would be wholly joined with them if it could depart along with them. But if, being men, some fear the vision of the good, those who appear immediately take fear away; as Gabriel [13] did in the case of Zacharias, and as the angel [14] did who appeared to the women at the holy sepulchre, and as He did who said to the shepherds in the Gospel, "Fear not." For their fear arose not from timidity, but from the recognition of the presence of superior beings. Such then is the nature of the visions of the holy ones.

36. 'But the inroad and the display of the evil spirits is fraught with confusion, with din, with sounds and cryings such as the disturbance of boorish youths or robbers would occasion. From which arise fear in the heart, tumult and confusion of thought, dejection, hatred towards them who live a life of discipline, indifference, grief, remembrance of kinsfolk and fear of death, and finally desire of evil things, disregard of virtue and unsettled habits.

Whenever, therefore, ye have seen ought and are afraid, if your fear is immediately taken away and in place of it comes joy unspeakable, cheerfulness, courage, renewed strength, calmness of thought and all those I named before boldness and love toward God,--take courage and pray. For joy and a settled state of soul show the holiness of him who is present. Thus Abraham beholding the Lord rejoiced [14]; so also John [15] at the voice of Mary, the God-bearer [16], leaped for gladness. But if at the appearance of any there is confusion, knocking without, worldly display, threats of death and the other things which I have already mentioned, know ye that it is an onslaught of evil spirits.

37. 'And let this also be a token for you: whenever the soul remains fearful there is a presence of the enemies. For the demons do not take away the fear of their presence as the great archangel Gabriel did for Mary and Zacharias, and as he did who appeared to the women at the tomb; but rather whenever they see men afraid they increase their delusions that men may be terrified the

more; and at last attacking they mock them, saying, "fall down and worship." Thus they deceived the Greeks, and thus by them they were considered gods, falsely so called. But the Lord did not suffer us to be deceived by the devil, for He rebuked him whenever he framed such delusions against Him, saying: "Get behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve [17]." More and more, therefore, let the deceiver be despised by us; for what the Lord hath said, this for our sakes He hath done: that the demons hearing like words from us may be put to flight through the Lord who rebuked them in those words.

38. 'And it is not fitting to boast at the casting forth of the demons, nor to be uplifted by the healing of diseases: nor is it fitting that he who casts out devils should alone be highly esteemed, while he who casts them not out should be considered nought. But let a man learn the discipline of each one and either imitate, rival, or correct it. For the working of signs is not ours but the Saviour's work: and so He said to His disciples: "Rejoice not that the demons are subject to you, but that your names are written in the heavens [18]." For the fact that our names are written in heaven is a proof of our virtuous life, but to cast out demons is a favour of the Saviour who granted it. Wherefore to those who boasted in signs but not in virtue, and said: "Lord, in Thy name did we not cast out demons, and in Thy name did many mighty works [19]?" He answered, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not;" for the Lord knoweth not the ways of the wicked. But we ought always to pray, as I said above, that we may receive the gift of discerning spirits; that, as it is written [20], we may not believe every spirit.

39. 'I should have liked to speak no further and to say nothing from my own promptings, satisfied with what I have said: but lest you should think that I speak at random and believe that I detail these things without experience or truth; for this cause even though I should become as a fool, yet the Lord who heareth knoweth the clearness of my conscience, and that it is not for my own sake, but on account of your affection towards me and at your petition that I again tell what I saw of the practices of evil spirits. How often have they called me blessed and I have cursed them in the name of the Lord! How often have they predicted the rising of the river, and I answered them, "What have you to do with it?" Once they came threatening and surrounded me like soldiers in full armour. At another time they filled the house with horses, wild

beasts and creeping things, and I sang: "Some in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God [1];" and at the prayers they were turned to flight by the Lord. Once they came in darkness, bearing the appearance of a light, and said, "We are come to give thee a light, Antony." But I closed my eyes and prayed, and immediately the light of the wicked ones was quenched. And a few months after they came as though singing psalms and babbling the words of Scripture, "But I like a deaf man, heard not [2]." Once they shook the cell [3] with an earthquake, but I continued praying with unshaken heart. And after this they came again making noises, whistling and dancing. But as I prayed and lay singing psalms to myself they forthwith began to lament and weep, as if their strength had failed them. But I gave glory to the Lord who had brought down and made an example of their daring and madness.

40. 'Once a demon exceeding high appeared with pomp, and dared to say, "I am the power of God and I am Providence, what dost thou wish that I shall give thee?" But I then so much the more breathed upon him [3a], and spoke the name of Christ, and set about to smite him. And I seemed to have smitten him, and forthwith he, big as he was, together with all his demons, disappeared at the name of Christ. At another time, while I was fasting, he came full of craft, under the semblance of a monk, with what seemed to be loaves, and gave me counsel, saying, "Eat and cease from thy many labours. Thou also art a man and art like to fall sick." But I, perceiving his device, rose up to pray; and he endured it not, for he departed, and through the door there seemed to go out as it were smoke. How often in the desert has he displayed what resembled gold, that I should only touch it and look on it. But I sang psalms against him, and he vanished away. Often they would beat me with stripes, and I repeated again and again, "Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ [4]," and at this they rather fell to beating one another. Nor was it I that stayed them and destroyed their power, but it was the Lord, who said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heavens; [5]" but I, children, mindful of the Apostle's words, transferred [6] this to myself, that you might learn not to faint in discipline, nor to fear the devil nor the delusions of the demons.

41. 'And since I have become a fool in detailing these things, receive this also as an aid to your safety and fearlessness; and believe me for I do not lie. Once some one knocked at the door of my cell, and going forth I saw one who

seemed of great size and tall. Then when I enquired, "Who art thou?" he said, "I am Satan." Then when I said, "Why art thou here?" he answered, "Why do the monks and all other Christians blame me undeservedly? Why do they curse me hourly?" Then I answered, "Wherefore dost thou trouble them?" He said, "I am not he who troubles them, but they trouble themselves, for I am become weak. Have they not read [7], "The swords of the enemy have come to an end, and thou hast destroyed the cities ?" I have no longer a place, a weapon, a city. The Christians are spread everywhere, and at length even the desert is filled with monks. Let them take heed to themselves, and let them not curse me unreservedly." Then I marvelled at the grace of the Lord, and said to him: "Thou who art ever a liar and never speakest the truth, this at length, even against thy will, thou hast truly spoken. For the coming of Christ hath made thee weak, and He hath cast thee down and stripped thee." But he having heard the Saviour's name, and not being able to bear the burning from it, vanished.

42. 'If, therefore, the devil himself confesses that his power is gone, we ought utterly to despise both him and his demons; and since the enemy with his hounds has but devices of this sort, we, having got to know their weakness, are able to despise them. Wherefore let us not despond after this fashion, nor let us have a thought of cowardice in our heart, nor frame fears for ourselves, saying, I am afraid lest a demon should come and overthrow me; lest he should lift me up and cast me down; or lest rising against me on a sudden he confound me. Such thoughts let us not have in mind at all, nor let us be sorrowful as though we were perishing; but rather let us be courageous and rejoice always, believing that we are safe Let us consider in our soul that the Lord is with us, who put the evil spirits to flight and broke their power. Let us consider and lay to heart that while the Lord is with us, our foes can do us no hurt. For when they come they approach us in a form corresponding to the state in which they discover us [8], and adapt their delusions to the condition of mind in which they find us. If, therefore, they find us timid and confused, they forthwith beset the place, like robbers, having found it unguarded; and what we of ourselves are thinking, they do, and more also. For if they find us faint-hearted and cowardly, they mightily increase our terror, by their delusions and threats; and with these the unhappy soul is thenceforth tormented. But if they see us rejoicing in the Lord, contemplating the bliss of the future, mindful of the Lord, deeming all things in His hand, and that no

evil spirit has any strength against the Christian, nor any power at all over any one--when they behold the soul fortified with these thoughts--they are discomfited and turned backwards. Thus the enemy, seeing Job fenced round with them, withdrew from him; but finding Judas unguarded, him he took captive. Thus if we are wishful to despise the enemy, let us ever ponder over the things of the Lord, and let the soul ever rejoice in hope. And we shall see the snares of the demon are like smoke, and the evil ones themselves flee rather than pursue. For they are, as I said before, exceeding fearful, ever looking forward to the fire prepared for them.

43. 'And for your fearlessness against them hold this sure sign--whenever there is any apparition, be not prostrate with fear, but whatsoever it be, first boldly ask, Who art thou? And from whence comest thou? And if it should be a vision of holy ones they will assure you, and change your fear into joy. But if the vision should be from the devil, immediately it becomes feeble, beholding your firm purpose of mind. For merely to ask, Who art thou [9]? and whence comest thou? is a proof of coolness. By thus asking, the son of Nun learned who his helper was; nor did the enemy escape the questioning of Daniel [10].'

44. While Antony was thus speaking all rejoiced; in some the love of virtue increased, in others carelessness was thrown aside, the self-conceit of others was stopped; and all were persuaded to despise the assaults of the Evil One, and marvelled at the grace given to Antony from the Lord for the discerning of spirits. So their cells were in the mountains, like filled with holy bands of men who sang psalms, loved reading, fasted, prayed, rejoiced in the hope of things to come, laboured in alms-giving, and preserved love and harmony one with another. And truly it was possible, as it were, to behold a land set by itself, filled with piety and justice. For then there was neither the evil-doer, nor the injured, nor the reproaches of the tax-gatherer: but instead a multitude of ascetics; and the one purpose of them all was to aim at virtue. So that any one beholding the cells again, and seeing such good order among the monks, would lift up his voice and say, 'How goodly are thy dwellings, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel; as shady glens and as a garden [11] by a river; as tents which the Lord hath pitched, and like cedars near waters [12].'

45. Antony, however, according to his custom, returned alone to his own cell

increased his discipline, and sighed daily as he thought of the mansions in Heaven, having his desire fixed on them, and pondering over the shortness of man's life. And he used to eat and sleep, and go about all other bodily necessities with shame when he thought of the spiritual faculties of the soul. So often, when about to eat with any other hermits, recollecting the spiritual food, he begged to be excused, and departed far off from them, deeming it a matter for shame if he should be seen eating by others. He used, however, when by himself, to eat through bodily necessity, but often also with the brethren; covered with shame on these occasions, yet speaking boldly words of help. And he used to say that it behoved a man to give all his time to his soul rather than his body, yet to grant a short space to the body through its necessities; but all the more earnestly to give up the whole remainder to the soul and seek its profit, that it might not be dragged down by the pleasures of the body, but, on the contrary, the body might be in subjection to the soul. For this is that which was spoken by the Saviour: 'Be not anxious for your life what ye shall eat, nor for your body what ye shall put on. And do ye seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, and be not of a doubtful mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after. But your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Howbeit seek ye first His Kingdom, and all these things shall be added unto you [13].'

46. After this the Church was seized by the persecution which then [14] took place under Maximinus, and when the holy martyrs were led to Alexandria, Antony also followed, leaving his cell, and saying, Let us go too, that if called, we may contend or behold them that are contending. And he longed to suffer martyrdom, but not being willing to give himself up, he ministered to the confessors in the mines and in the prisons. And he was very zealous in the judgment hall to stir up to readiness those who were summoned when in their contest, while those who were being martyred he received and brought on their way until they were perfected. The judge, therefore, beholding the fearlessness of Antony and his companions, and their zeal in this matter, commanded that no monk should appear in the judgment hall, nor remain at all in the city. So all the rest thought it good to hide themselves that day, but Antony gave so little heed to the command that he washed his garment, and stood all next day on a raised place before them, and appeared in his best before the governor. Therefore when all the rest wondered at this, and the governor saw and passed by with his array, he stood fearlessly, shewing the

readiness of us Christians. For, as I said before, he prayed himself to be a martyr, wherefore he seemed as one grieved that he had not borne his witness. But the Lord was keeping him for our profit and that of others, that he should become a teacher to many of the discipline which he had learned from the Scriptures. For many only beholding his manner of life were eager to be imitators of his ways. So he again ministered as usual to the confessors, and as though he were their fellow captive he laboured in his ministry.

47. And when at last the persecution ceased, and the blessed Bishop Peter [15] had borne his testimony; Antony departed, and again withdrew to his cell, and was there daily a martyr to his conscience, and contending in the conflicts of faith. And his discipline was much severer, for he was ever fasting, and he had a garment of hair on the inside, while the outside was skin, which he kept until his end. And he neither bathed his body with water to free himself from filth, nor did he ever wash his feet nor even endure so much as to put them into water, unless compelled by necessity. Nor did any one even see him unclothed, nor his body naked at all, except after his death, when he was buried.

48. When therefore he had retired and determined to fix a time, after which neither to go forth himself nor admit anybody, Martinian, a military officer, came and disturbed Antony. For he had a daughter afflicted with an evil spirit. But when he continued for a long while knocking at the door, and asking him to come out and pray to God for his child, Antony, not bearing to open, looked out from above and said, 'Man, why dost thou call on me? I also am a man even as you. But if you believe on Christ whom I serve, go, and according as you believe, pray to God, and it shall come to pass.' Straightway, therefore, he departed, believing and calling upon Christ, and he received his daughter cleansed from the devil. Many other things also through Antony the Lord did, who saith, 'Seek and it shall be given unto you [16].' For many of the sufferers, when he would not open his door, slept outside his cell, and by their faith and sincere prayers were healed.

49. But when he saw himself beset by many, and not suffered to withdraw himself according to his intent as he wished, fearing because of the signs which the Lord wrought by him, that either he should be puffed up, or that some other should think of him above what he ought to think, he considered

and set off to go into the upper Thebaid, among those to whom he was unknown. And having received loaves from the brethren, he sat down by the bank of the river, looking whether a boat would go by, that, having embarked thereon, he might go up the river with them. While he was considering these things, a voice came to him from above, 'Antony, whither goest thou and wherefore?' But he no way disturbed, but as he had been accustomed to be called [16a] often thus, giving ear to it, answered, saying, 'Since the multitude permit me not to be still, I wish to go into the upper Thebaid on account of the many hindrances that come upon me here, and especially because they demand of me things beyond my power.' But the voice said unto him, 'Even though you should go into the Thebaid, or even though, as you have in mind, i you should go down to the Bucolia [17], you will have to endure more, aye, double the amount of toil. But if you wish really to be in quiet, depart now into the inner desert.' And when Antony said, 'Who will show me the way for I know it not?' immediately the voice pointed out to him Saracens about to go that way. So Antony approached, and drew near them, and asked that he might go with them into the desert. And they, as though they had been commanded by Providence, received him willingly. And having journeyed with them three days and three nights, he came to a very lofty mountain, and at the foot of the mountain ran a clear spring, whose waters were sweet and very cold; outside there was a plain and a few uncared-for palm trees.

50. Antony then, as it were, moved by God, loved the place [18], for this was the spot which he who had spoken with him by the banks of the river had pointed out. So having first received loaves from his fellow travellers, he abode in the mountain alone, no one else being with him. And recognising it as his own home, he remained in that place for the future. But the Saracens, having seen the earnestness of Antony, purposely used to journey that way, and joyfully brought him loaves, while now and then the palm trees also afforded him a poor and frugal relish. But after this, the brethren learning of the place, like children mindful of their father, took care to send to him. But when Antony saw that the bread was the cause of trouble and hardships to some of them, to spare the monks this, he resolved to ask some of those who came to bring him a spade, an axe, and a little corn. And when these were brought, he went over the land round the mountain, and having found a small plot of suitable ground, tilled it; and having a plentiful supply of water for watering, he sowed. This doing year by year, he got his bread from thence,

rejoicing that thus he would be troublesome to no one, and because he kept himself from being a burden to anybody. But after this, seeing again that people came, he cultivated a few pot-herbs, that he who came to him might have some slight solace after the labour of that hard journey. At first, however, the wild beasts in the desert, coming because of the water, often injured his seeds and husbandry. But he, gently laying hold of one of them, said to them all, 'Why do you hurt me, when I hurt none of you? Depart, and in the name of the Lord come not nigh this spot.' And from that time forward, as though fearful of his command, they no more came near the place.

51. So he was alone in the inner mountain, spending his time in prayer and discipline. And the brethren who served him asked that they might come every month and bring him olives, pulse and oil, for by now he was an old man. There then he passed his life, and endured such great wrestlings, 'Not against flesh and blood [19],' as it is written, but against opposing demons, as we learned from those who visited him. For there they heard tumults, many voices, and, as it were, the clash of arms. At night they saw the mountain become full of wild beasts, and him also fighting as though against visible beings, and praying against them. And those who came to him he encouraged, while kneeling he contended and prayed to the Lord. Surely it was a marvellous thing that a man, alone in such a desert, feared neither the demons who rose up against him, nor the fierceness of the four-footed beasts and creeping things, for all they were so many. But in truth, as it is written, 'He trusted in the Lord as Mount Sion [20],' with a mind unshaken and undisturbed; so that the demons rather fled from him, and the wild beasts, as it is written [21], 'kept peace with him.'

52. The devil, therefore, as David says in the Psalms [1], observed Antony and gnashed his teeth against him. But Antony was consoled by the Saviour and continued unhurt by his wiles and varied devices. As he was watching in the night the devil sent wild beasts against him. And almost all the hyenas in that desert came forth from their dens and surrounded him; and he was in the midst, while each one threatened to bite. Seeing that it was a trick of the enemy he said to them all: 'If ye have received power against me I am ready to be devoured by you; but if ye were sent against me by demons, stay not, but depart, for I am a servant of Christ.' When Antony said this they fled, driven by that word as with a whip.

53. A few days after, as he was working (for he was careful to work hard), some one stood at the door and pulled the plait which he was working, for he used to weave baskets, which he gave to those who came in return for what they brought him. And rising up he saw a beast like a man to the thighs but having legs and feet like those of an ass. And Antony only signed himself and said, 'I am a servant of Christ. If thou art sent against me, behold I am here.' But the beast together with his evil spirits fled, so that, through his speed, he fell and died. And the death of the beast was the fall of the demons. For they strove in all manner of ways to lead Antony from the desert and were not able.

54. And once being asked by the monks to come down and visit them and their abodes after a time, he journeyed with those who came to him. And a camel carried the loaves and the water for them. For all that desert is dry, and there is no water at all that is fit to drink, save in that mountain from whence they drew the water, and in which Antony's cell was. So when the water failed them on their way, and the heat was very great, they all were in danger. For having gone round the neighbour-hood and finding no water, they could walk no further, but lay on the ground and despairing of themselves, let the camel go. But the old man seeing that they were all in jeopardy, groaning in deep grief, departed a little way from them, and kneeling down he stretched forth his hands and prayed. And immediately the Lord made water to well forth where he had stood praying, and so all drank and were revived. And having filled their bottles they sought the camel and found her, for the rope happened to have caught in a stone and so was held fast. Having led it and watered it they placed the bottles on its back and finished their journey in safety. And when he came to the outer cells all saluted him, looking on him as a father. And he too, as though bringing supplies from the mountain, entertained them with his words and gave them a share of help. And again there was joy in the mountains, zeal for improvement and consolation through their mutual faith. Antony also rejoiced when he beheld the earnestness of the monks, and his sister grown old in virginity, and that she herself also was the leader of other virgins.

55. So after certain days he went in again to the mountain. And henceforth many resorted to him, and others who were suffering ventured to go in. To all the monks therefore who came to him, he continually gave this precept:

'Believe on the Lord and love Him; keep yourselves from filthy thoughts and fleshly pleasures, and as it is written in the Proverbs, be not deceived "by the fulness of the belly [a]." Pray continually; avoid vainglory; sing psalms before sleep and on awaking; hold in your heart the commandments of Scripture; be mindful of the works of the saints that your souls being put in remembrance of the commandments may be brought into harmony with the zeal of the saints.' And especially he counselled them to meditate continually on the apostle's word, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath? And he considered this was spoken of all commandments in common, and that not on wrath alone, but not on any other sin of ours, ought the sun to go down. For it was good and needful that neither the sun should condemn us for an evil by day nor the moon for a sin by night, or even for an evil thought. That this state may I be preserved in us it is good to hear the apostle and keep his words, for he says, 'Try your own selves and prove your own selves [4].' Daily, therefore, let each one take from himself the tale of his actions both by day and night; and if he have sinned, let him cease from it; while if he have not, let him not be boastful. But let him abide in that which is good, without being negligent, nor condemning his neighbours, nor justifying himself, 'until the Lord come who searcheth out hidden things [5],' as saith the blessed apostle Paul. For often unawares we do things that we know not of but the Lord seeth all things. Wherefore committing the judgment to Him, let us have sympathy one with another. Let us bear each other's burdens [6]: but let us examine our own selves and hasten to fill up that in which we are lacking. And as a safeguard against sin let the following be observed. Let us each one note and write down our actions and the impulses of our soul as though we were going to relate them to each other. And be assured that if we should be utterly ashamed to have them known, we shall abstain from sin and harbour no base thoughts in our mind. For who wishes to be seen while sinning? or who will not rather lie after the commission of a sin, through the wish to escape notice? As then while we are looking at one another, we would not commit carnal sin, so if we record our thoughts as though about to tell them to one another, we shall the more easily keep ourselves free from vile thoughts through shame lest they should be known. Wherefore let that which is written be to us in place of the eyes of our fellow hermits, that blushing as much to write as if we had been caught, we may never think of what is unseemly. Thus fashioning ourselves we shall be able to keep the body in subjection, to please the Lord, and to trample on the devices of the enemy.

56. This was the advice he gave to those who came to him. And with those who suffered he sympathised and prayed. And oft-times the Lord heard him on behalf of many: yet he boasted not because he was heard, nor did he murmur if he were not. But always he gave the Lord thanks and besought the sufferer to be patient, and to know that healing belonged neither to him nor to man at all, but only to the Lord, who doeth good when and to whom He will. The sufferers therefore used to receive the words of the old man as though they were a cure, learning not to be downhearted but rather to be long-suffering. And those who were healed were taught not to give thanks to Antony but to God alone.

57. Wherefore a man, Fronto by name, who was an officer of the Court and had a terrible disease, for he used to bite his own tongue and was in danger of injury to his eyes, having come to the mountain, asked Antony to pray for him. But Antony said to him, 'Depart and thou shalt be healed.' But when he was violent and remained within some days, Antony waited and said, 'If thou stayest here, thou canst not be healed. Go, and having come into Egypt thou shall see the sign wrought in thee.' And he believed and went. And as soon as he set eyes on Egypt his sufferings ceased, and the man became whole according to the word of Antony, which the Saviour had revealed to him in prayer.

58. There was also a maiden from Busiris Tripolitana, who had a terrible and very hideous disorder. For the runnings of her eyes, nose, and ears fell to the ground and immediately became worms. She was paralysed also and squinted. Her parents having heard of monks going to Antony, and believing on the Lord who healed [7] the woman with the issue of blood, asked to be allowed, together with their daughter, to journey with them. And when they suffered them, the parents together with the girl, remained outside the mountain with Paphnutius, the confessor and monk; but the monks went in to Antony. And when they only wished to tell about the damsel, he anticipated them, and detailed both the sufferings of the child and how she journeyed with them. Then when they asked that she should be admitted, Antony did not allow it, but said, 'Go, and if she be not dead, you will find her healed: for the accomplishment of this is not mine, that she should come to me, wretched man that I am, but her healing is the work of the Saviour, who in every place

sheweth His pity to them that call upon Him. Wherefore the Lord hath inclined to her as she prayed, and His loving-kindness hath declared to me that He will heal the child where she now is.' So the wonder took place; and going out they found the parents rejoicing and the girl whole.

59. But when two brethren were coming to him, the water failed on the way, and one died and the other was at the point of death, for he had no strength to go on, but lay upon the ground expecting to die. But Antony sitting in the mountain called two monks, who chanced to be there, and urged them saying, 'Take a pitcher of water and run on the road towards Egypt. For of two men who were coming, one is already dead and the other will die unless you hasten. For this has been revealed to me as I was praying.' The monks therefore went, and found one lying dead, whom they buried, and the other they restored with water and led him to the old man. For it was a day's journey [7a]. But if any one asks, why he did not speak before the other died, the question ought not to be asked. For the punishment of death was not Antony's but God's, who also judged the one and revealed the condition of the other. But the marvel here was only in the case of Antony: that he sitting in the mountain had his heart watchful, and had the Lord to show him things afar off.

60. And this is so, for once again he was sitting on the mountain, and looking up saw in the air some one being borne upwards, and there was much joy among those who met him. Then wondering and deeming a company of that kind to be blessed, he prayed to learn what this might be. And immediately a voice came to him: 'This is the soul of Amun, the monk at Nitria.' Now Amun had persevered in the discipline up to old age; and the distance from Nitria to the mountain where Antony was, was thirteen days' journey. The companions of Antony therefore, seeing the old man amazed, asked to learn, and heard that Amun was just dead [8]. And he was well known, for he had stayed there very often, and many signs had been wrought by his means. And this is one of them. Once when he had need to cross the river called Lycus (now it was the season of the flood), he asked his comrade Theodorus to remain at a distance, that they should not see one another naked as they swam the water. Then when Theodorus was departed he again felt ashamed even to see himself naked. While, therefore, he was pondering filled with shame, on a sudden he was borne over to the other side. Theodorus, therefore, himself being a good man,

approached, and seeing Amun across first without a drop of water falling from him, enquired how he had got over. And when he saw that Amun was unwilling to tell him, he held him by the feet and declared that he would not let him go before he had learned it from him. So Amun seeing the determination of Theodorus especially from what he had said, and having asked him to tell no man before his death, told him that he had been carried and placed on the further side. And that he had not even set foot on the water, nor was that possible for man, but for the Lord alone and those whom He permits, as He did for the great apostle Peter [9]. Theodorus therefore told this after the death of Amun. And the monks to whom Antony spoke concerning Amun's death marked the day; and when the brethren came up from Nitria thirty days after, they enquired of them and learned that Amun had fallen asleep at that day and hour in which the old man had seen his soul borne upwards. And both these and the others marvelled at the purity of Antony's soul, how he had immediately learned that which was taking place at a distance of thirteen days' journey, and had seen the soul as it was taken up.

61. And Archelaus too, the Count, on a time having found him in the outer mountain, asked him merely to pray for Polycratia of Laodicea, an excellent and Christian [9a] maiden, for she suffered terribly in the stomach and side through over much discipline, and was altogether weakly of body. Antony prayed therefore, and the Count noted the day in which the prayer was made, and having departed to Laodicea he found the maiden whole. And having enquired when and on what day she was relieved of her infirmity, he produced the paper on which he had written the time of the prayer, and having read it he immediately shewed the writing on the paper. And all wondered when they knew that the Lord had relieved her of pain at the time when Antony was praying and invoking the goodness of the Saviour on her behalf.

62. And concerning those who came to him, he often foretold some days or sometimes a month beforehand what was the cause of their coming. For some came only for the sake of seeing him, others through sickness, and others suffering from evil spirits. And all thought the labour of the journey neither trouble nor loss. For each one returned aware that he had received benefit. But though saying such things and beholding such sights, he used to ask that no one should wonder at him for this; but should rather marvel at the Lord for having granted to us men to know Him as far as our powers extended.

63. Afterwards, on another occasion, having descended to the outer cells, he was asked to enter a vessel and pray with the monks, and he alone perceived an exceedingly unpleasant smell. But those on board said that the stench arose from the fish and salt meat in the ship. He replied however, the smell was different from that; and while he was speaking, a youth with an evil spirit, who had come and hidden himself in the ship, cried out. But the demon being rebuked in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ departed from him, and the man became whole. And all knew that the evil smell arose from the demon.

64. And another, a person of rank, came to him, possessed by a demon; and the demon was so terrible that the man possessed did not know that he was coming to Antony. But he even ate the excreta from his body. So those who brought him besought Antony to pray for him. And Antony pitying the young man prayed and kept watch with him all the night. And about dawn the young man suddenly attacked Antony and gave him a push. But when those who came with him were angry, Antony said, 'Be not angry with the young man, for it is not he, but the demon which is in him. And being rebuked and commanded to go into dry places, the demon became raging mad, and he has done this. Wherefore give thanks to the Lord, for his attack on me thus is a sign of the departure of the evil spirit.' When Antony had said this, straightway the young man had become whole, and having come at last to his right mind, knew where he was, and saluted the old man and gave thanks to God.

65. And many monks have related with the greatest agreement and unanimity that many other such like things were done by him. But still these do not seem as marvellous as certain other things appear to be. For once, when about to eat, having risen up to pray about the ninth hour, he perceived that he was caught up in the spirit, and, wonderful to tell, he stood and saw himself, as it were, from outside himself, and that he was led in the air by certain ones. Next certain bitter and terrible beings stood in the air and wished to hinder him from passing through. But when his conductors opposed them, they demanded whether he was not accountable to them. And when they wished to sum up the account from his birth, Antony's conductors stopped them, saying, 'The Lord hath wiped out the sins from his birth, but from the time he became a monk, and devoted himself to God, it is permitted you to make a reckoning.' Then

when they accused him and could not convict him, his way was free and unhindered. And immediately he saw himself, as it were, coming and standing by himself, and again he was Antony as before. Then forgetful of eating, he remained the rest of the day and through the whole of the night groaning and praying. For he was astonished when he saw against what mighty opponents our wrestling is, and by what labours we have to pass through the air. And he remembered that this is what the Apostle said, 'according to the prince of the power of the air [10].' For in it the enemy hath power to fight and to attempt to hinder those who pass through. Wherefore most earnestly he exhorted, 'Take up the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day [11],' that the enemy, 'having no evil thing to say against us, may be ashamed [12].' And we who have learned this, let us be mindful of the Apostle when he says, 'whether in the body I know not, or whether out of the body I know not; God knoweth [13].' But Paul was caught up unto the third heaven, and having heard things unspeakable he came down; while Antony saw that he had come to the air, and contended until he was free.

66. And he had also this favour granted him. For as he was sitting alone on the mountain, if ever he was in perplexity in his meditations, this was revealed to him by Providence in prayer. And the happy man, as it is written, was taught of God [14]. After this, when he once had a discussion with certain men who had come to him concerning the state of the soul and of what nature its place will be after this life, the following night one from above called him, saying, 'Antony, rise, go out and look.' Having gone out therefore (for he knew whom he ought to obey) looking up, he beheld one standing and reaching to the clouds, tall, hideous, and fearful, and others ascending as though they were winged. And the figure stretched forth his hands, and some of those who were ascending were stayed by him, while others flew above, and having escaped heavenward, were borne aloft free from care. At such, therefore, the giant gnashed his teeth, but rejoiced over those who fell back. And forthwith a voice came to Antony, 'Understandest thou what thou seest?' And his understanding was opened, and he understood that it was the passing of souls, and that the tall being who stood was the enemy who envies the faithful. And those whom he caught and stopped from passing through are accountable to him, while those whom he was unable to hold as they passed upwards had not been subservient to him. So having seen this, and as it were being reminded, he struggled the more daily to advance towards those things which were before.

And these visions he was unwilling to tell, but as he spent much time in prayer, and was amazed, when those who were with him pressed him with questions and forced him, he was compelled to speak, as a father who cannot withhold ought from his children. And he thought that as his conscience was clear, the account would be beneficial for them, that they might learn that discipline bore good fruit, and that visions were oftentimes the solace of their labours.

67. Added to this he was tolerant in disposition and humble in spirit. For though he was such a man, he observed the rule of the Church most rigidly, and was willing that all the clergy should be honoured above himself [17]. For he was not ashamed to bow his head to bishops and presbyters, and if ever a deacon came to him for help he discoursed with him on what was profitable, but gave place to him in prayer, not being ashamed to learn himself. For often he would ask questions, and desired to listen to those who were present, and if any one said anything that was useful he confessed that he was profited. And besides, his countenance had a great and wonderful grace. This gift also he had from the Saviour. For if he were present in a great company of monks, and any one who did not know him previously, wished to see him, immediately coming forward he passed by the rest, and hurried to Antony, as though attracted by his appearance. Yet neither in height nor breadth was he conspicuous above others, but in the serenity of his manner and the purity of his soul. For as his soul was free from disturbances, his outward appearance was calm; so from the joy of his soul he possessed a cheerful countenance, and from his bodily movements could be perceived the condition of his soul, as it is written, 'When the heart is merry the countenance is cheerful, but when it is sorrowful it is cast down [18].' Thus Jacob recognised the counsel Laban had in his heart, and said to his wives, 'The countenance of your father is not as it was yesterday and the day before [19].' Thus Samuel recognised David, for he had mirthful eyes, and teeth white as milk. Thus Antony was recognised, for he was never disturbed, for his soul was at peace; he was never downcast, for his mind was joyous.

68. And he was altogether wonderful in faith and religious, for he never held communion with the Meletian schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostasy from the beginning; nor had he friendly dealings with the Manichaeans or any other heretics; or, if he had, only as far as advice that they

should change to piety. For he thought and asserted that intercourse with these was harmful and destructive to the soul. In the same manner also he loathed the heresy of the Arians, and exhorted all neither to approach them nor to bold their erroneous belief. And once when certain Arian madmen came to him, when he had questioned them and learned their impiety, he drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of serpents.

69. And once also the Arians having lyingly asserted that Antony's opinions were the same as theirs, he was displeased and wroth against them. Then being summoned by the bishops and all the brethren, he descended from the mountain, and having entered Alexandria [19a], he denounced the Arians, saying that their heresy was the last of all and a forerunner of Antichrist. And he taught the people that the Son of God was not a created being, neither had He come into being from non-existence, but that He was the Eternal Word and Wisdom of the Essence of the Father. And therefore it was impious to say, 'there was a time when He was not,' for the Word was always co-existent with the Father. Wherefore have no fellowship with the most impious Arians. For there is no communion between light and darkness [20]. For you are good Christians, but they, when they say that the Son of the Father, the Word of God, is a created being, differ in nought from the heathen, since they worship that which is created, rather than God the creator [1]. But believe ye that the Creation itself is angry with them because they number the Creator, the Lord of all, by whom all things came into being, with those things which were originated.

70. All the people, therefore, rejoiced when they heard the anti-Christian heresy anathematised by such a man. And all the people in the city ran together to see Antony; and the Greeks and those who are called their Priests, came into the church, saying, 'We ask to see the man of God,' for so they all called him. For in that place also the Lord cleansed many of demons, and healed those who were mad. And many Greeks asked that they might even but touch the old man, believing that they should be profited. Assuredly as many became Christians in those few days as one would have seen made in a year. Then when some thought that he was troubled by the crowds, and on this account turned them all away from him, he said, undisturbedly, that there were not more of them than of the demons with whom he wrestled in the mountain.

71. But when he was departing, and we were setting him forth on his way, as we [2] arrived at the gate a woman from behind cried out, 'Stay, thou man of God, my daughter is grievously vexed by a devil. Stay, I beseech thee, lest I too harm myself with running.' And the old man when he heard her, and was asked by us, willingly stayed. And when the woman drew near, the child was cast on the ground. But when Antony had prayed and called upon the name of Christ, the child was raised whole, for the unclean spirit was gone forth. And the mother blessed God, and all gave thanks. And Antony himself also rejoiced, departing to the mountain as though it were to his own home.

72. And Antony also was exceeding prudent, and the wonder was that although he had not learned letters, he was a ready-witted and sagacious man. At all events two Greek philosophers once came, thinking they could try their skill on Antony; and he was in the outer mountain, and having recognised who they were from their appearance, he came to them and said to them by means of an interpreter, 'Why, philosophers, did ye trouble yourselves so much to come to a foolish man?' And when they said that he was not a foolish man, but exceedingly prudent, he said to them, 'If you came to a foolish man, your labour is superfluous; but if you think me prudent become as I am, for we ought to imitate what is good. And if I had come to you I should have imitated you; but if you to me, become as I am, for I am a Christian.' But they departed with wonder, for they saw that even demons feared Antony.

73. And again others such as these met him in the outer mountain and thought to mock [3], him because he had not learned letters. And Antony said to them, 'What say ye? which is first, mind or letters? And which is the cause of which--mind of letters or letters of mind?' And when they answered mind is first and the inventor of letters, Antony said, 'Whoever, therefore, hath a sound mind hath not need of letters.' This answer amazed both the bystanders and the philosophers, and they departed marvelling that they had seen so much understanding in an ignorant man. For his manners were not rough as though he had been reared in the mountain and there grown old, but graceful and polite, and his speech was seasoned with the divine salt, so that no one was envious, but rather all rejoiced over him who visited him.

74. After this again certain others came; and these were men who were deemed wise among the Greeks, and they asked him a reason for our faith in

Christ. But when they attempted to dispute concerning the preaching of the divine Cross and meant to mock, Antony stopped for a little, and first pitying their ignorance, said, through an interpreter, who could skilfully interpret his words, 'Which is more beautiful, to confess the Cross or to attribute to those whom you call gods adultery and the seduction of boys? For that which is chosen by us is a sign of courage and a sure token of the contempt of death, while yours are the passions of licentiousness. Next, which is better, to say that the Word of God was not changed, but, being the same, He took a human body for the salvation and well-being of man, that having shared in human birth He might make man partake in the divine and spiritual nature [4]; or to liken the divine to senseless animals and consequently to worship four-footed beasts, creeping things and the likenesses of men? For these things, are the objects of reverence of you wise men. But how do you dare to mock us, who say that Christ has appeared as man, seeing that you, bringing the soul from heaven, assert that it has strayed and fallen from the vault of the sky into body [5]? And would that you had said that it had fallen into human body alone, and not asserted that it passes and changes into four-footed beasts and creeping things. For our faith declares that the coming of Christ was for the salvation of men. But you err because you speak of soul as not generated. And we, considering the power and loving-kindness of Providence, think that the coming of Christ in the flesh was not impossible with God. But you, although calling the soul the likeness of Mind [6], connect it with falls and feign in your myths that it is changeable, and consequently introduce the idea that Mind itself is changeable by reason of the soul. For whatever is the nature of a likeness, such necessarily is the nature of that of which it is a likeness. But whenever you think such a thought concerning Mind, remember that you blaspheme even the Father of Mind Himself [7].

75. But concerning the Cross, which would you say to be the better, to bear it, when a plot is brought about by wicked men, nor to be in fear of death brought about under any form whatever [8]; or to prate about the wanderings of Osiris and Isis, the plots of Typhon, the flight of Cronos, his eating his children and the slaughter of his father. For this is your wisdom. But how, if you mock the Cross, do you not marvel at the resurrection? For the same men who told us of the latter wrote the former, Or why when you make mention of the Cross are you silent about the dead who were raised, the blind who received their sight, the paralytics who were healed, the lepers who were

cleansed, the walking upon the sea, and the rest of the signs and wonders, which shew that Christ is no longer a man but God? To me you seem to do yourselves much injustice and not to have carefully read our Scriptures. But read and see that the deeds of Christ prove Him to be God come upon earth for the salvation of men.

76. But do you tell us your religious beliefs. What can you say of senseless creatures except senselessness and ferocity? But if, as I hear, you wish to say that these things are spoken of by you as legends, and you allegorize the rape of the maiden Persephone of the earth; the lameness of Hephaestus of fire; and allegorize the air as Hera, the sun as Apollo, the moon as Artemis, and the sea as Poseidon; none the less, you do not worship God Himself, but serve the creature rather than God who created all things. For if because creation is: beautiful you composed such legends, still it was fitting that you should stop short at admiration and not make gods of the things created; so that you should not give the honour of the Creator to that which is created. Since, if you do, it is time for you to divert the honour of the master builder to the house built by him; and of the general to the soldier. What then can you reply to these things, that we may know whether the Cross hath anything worthy of mockery?"

77. But when they were at a loss, turning hither and thither, Antony smiled and said--again through an interpreter--'Sight itself carries the conviction of these things. But as you prefer to lean upon demonstrative arguments, and as you, having this art, wish us also not to worship God, until after such proof, do you tell first how things in general and specially the recognition of God are accurately known. Is it through demonstrative argument or the working of faith? And which is better, faith which comes through the inworking (of God) or demonstration by arguments?' And when they answered that faith which comes through the inworking was better and was accurate knowledge, Antony said, 'You have answered well, for faith arises from disposition of soul, but dialectic from the skill of its inventors. Wherefore to those who have the inworking through faith, demonstrative argument is needless, or even superfluous. For what we know through faith this you attempt to prove through words, and often you are not even able to express what we understand. So the inworking through faith is better and stronger than your professional arguments.

78. 'We Christians therefore hold the mystery not in the wisdom of Greek arguments, but in the power of faith richly supplied to us by God through Jesus Christ. And to show that this statement is true, behold now, without having learned letters, we believe in God, knowing through His works His providence over all things. And to show that our faith is effective, so now we are supported by faith in Christ, but you by professional logomachies. The portents of the idols among you are being done away, but our faith is extending everywhere. You by your arguments and quibbles have converted none from Christianity to Paganism. We, teaching the faith on Christ, expose your superstition, since all recognise that Christ is God and the Son of God. You by your eloquence do not hinder the teaching of Christ. But we by the mention of Christ crucified put all demons to flight, whom you fear as if they were gods. Where the sign of the Cross is [9], magic is weak and witchcraft has no strength.

79. ' Tell us therefore where your oracles are now? Where are the charms of the Egyptians? Where the delusions of the magicians? When did all these things cease and grow weak except when the Cross of Christ arose? Is It then a fit subject for mockery, and not rather the things brought to nought by it, and convicted of weakness? For this is a marvellous thing, that your religion was never persecuted, but even was honoured by men in every city, while the followers of Christ are persecuted, and still our side flourishes and multiplies over yours. What is yours, though praised and honoured, perishes, while the faith and teaching of Christ, though mocked by you and often persecuted by kings, has filled the world. For when has the knowledge of God so shone forth? or when has self-control and the excellence of virginity appeared as now? or when has death been so despised except when the Cross of Christ has appeared? And this no one doubts when he sees [10] the martyr despising death for the sake of Christ, when he sees for Christ's sake the virgins of the Church keeping themselves pure and undefiled.

80. 'And these signs are sufficient to prove that the faith of Christ alone is the true religion. But see! you still do not believe and are seeking for arguments. We however make our proof "not in the persuasive words of Greek wisdom [11]" as our teacher has it, but we persuade by the faith which manifestly precedes argumentative proof. Behold there are here some vexed with demons

;'--now there were certain who had come to him very disquieted by demons, and bringing them into the midst he said,--'Do you cleanse them either by arguments and by whatever art or magic you choose, calling upon your idols, or if you are unable, put away your strife with us and you shall see the power of the Cross of Christ.' And having said this he called upon Christ, and signed the sufferers two or three times with the sign of the Cross. And immediately the men stood up whole, and in their right mind, and forthwith gave thanks unto the Lord. And the philosophers, as they are called, wondered, and were astonished exceedingly at the understanding of the man and at the sign which had been wrought. But Antony said, 'Why marvel ye at this? We are not the doers of these things, but it is Christ who worketh them by means of those who believe on Him. Believe, therefore, also yourselves, and you shall see that with us there is no trick of words, but faith through love which is wrought in us towards Christ; which if you yourselves should obtain you will no longer seek demonstrative arguments, but will consider faith in Christ sufficient.' These are the words of Antony. And they marvelling at this also, saluted him and departed, confessing the benefit they had received from him [12].

81. And the fame of Antony came even unto kings. For Constantine Augustus, and his sons Constantius and Constans the Augusti wrote letters to him, as to a father, and begged an answer from him. But he made nothing very much of the letters, nor did he rejoice at the messages. but was the same as he had been before the Emperors wrote to him. But when they brought him the letters he called the monks and said, 'Do not be astonished if an emperor writes to us, for he is a man; but rather wonder that God wrote the Law for men and has spoken to us [13] through His own Son.' And so he was unwilling to receive the letters, saying that he did not know how to write an answer to such things. But being urged by the monks because the emperors were Christians, and lest they should take offence on the ground that they had been spurned, he consented that they should be read, and wrote an answer approving them because they worshipped Christ, and giving them counsel on things pertaining to salvation: 'not to think much of the present, but rather to remember the judgment that is coming, and to know that Christ alone was the true and Eternal King.' He begged them to be merciful and to give heed to justice and the poor. And they having received the answer rejoiced. Thus he was dear to all, and all desired to consider him as a father.

82. Being known to be so great a man, therefore, and having thus given answers to those who visited him, he returned again to the inner mountain, and maintained his wonted discipline. And often when people-came to him, as he was sitting or walking, as it is written in Daniel [14], he became dumb, and after a season he resumed the thread of what he had been saying before to the brethren who were with him. And his companions perceived that he was seeing a vision. For often when he was on the mountains he saw what was happening in Egypt, and told it to Sera-pion the bishop [15], who was indoors with him, and who saw that Antony was wrapped in a vision. Once as he was sitting and working, he fell, as it were, into a trance, and groaned much at what he saw. Then after a time, having turned to the bystanders with groans and trembling, he prayed, and falling on his knees remained so a long time. And having arisen the old man wept. His companions, therefore, trembling and terrified, desired to learn from him what it was. And they troubled him much, until he was forced to speak. And with many groans he spake as follows: 'O, my children, it were better to die before what has appeared in the vision come to pass.' And when again they asked him, having burst into tears, he said, 'Wrath is about to seize the Church, and it is on the point of being given up to men who are like senseless beasts. For I saw the table of the Lord's House, and mules standing around it on all sides in a ring, and kicking the things therein, just like a herd kicks when it leaps in confusion. And you saw,' said he, 'how I groaned, for I heard a voice saying, "My altar shall be defiled."' These things the old man saw, and after two years the present [16] inroad of the Arians and the plunder of the churches took place, when they violently carried off the vessels, and made the heathen carry them; and when they forced the heathen from the prisons to join in their services, and in their presence did upon the Table as they would. Then we all understood that these kicks of the mules signified to Antony what the Arians, senselessly like beasts, are now doing. But when he saw this vision, he comforted those with him, saying, 'Be not downcast, my children; for as the Lord has been angry, so again will He heal us, and the Church shall soon again receive her own order, and shall shine forth as she is wont. And you shall behold the persecuted restored, and wickedness again withdrawn to its own hiding-place, and pious faith speaking boldly in every place with all freedom. Only defile [17] not yourselves with the Arians, for their teaching is not that of the Apostles, but that of demons and their father the devil; yea, rather, it is barren and senseless, and without light understanding, like the senselessness of these mules.'

83. Such are the words of Antony, and we ought not to doubt whether such marvels were wrought by the hand of a man. For it is the promise of the Saviour, when He saith, 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, remove hence and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto yours [18].' And again, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, if ye shall ask the father in My name He will give it you. Ask and ye shall receive [19].' And He himself it is who saith to His disciples and to all who believe on Him, 'Heal the sick, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give [20].'

84. Antony, at any rate, healed not by commanding, but by prayer and speaking the name of Christ. So that it was clear to all that it was not he himself who worked, but the Lord who showed mercy by his means and healed the sufferers. But Antony's part was only prayer and discipline, for the sake of which he stayed in the mountain, rejoicing in the contemplation of divine things, but grieving when troubled by much people, and dragged to the outer mountain. For all judges used to ask him to come down, because it was impossible for them to enter on account of their following of litigants. But nevertheless they asked him to come that they might but see him. When therefore he avoided it and refused to go to them, they remained firm, and sent to him all the more the prisoners under charge of soldiers, that on account of these he might come down. Being forced by necessity, and seeing them lamenting, he came into the outer mountain, and again his labour was not unprofitable. For his coming was advantageous and serviceable to many; and he was of profit to the judges, counselling them to prefer justice to all things; to fear God, and to know, 'that with what judgment they judged, they should be judged [1].' But he loved more than all things his sojourn in the mountain.

85. At another time, suffering the same compulsion at the hands of them who had need, and after many entreaties from the commander of the soldiers, he came down, and when he was come he spoke to them shortly of the things which make for salvation, and concerning those who wanted him, and was hastening away. But when the duke, as he is called, entreated him to stay, he replied that he could not linger among them, and persuaded him by a pretty simile, saying, 'Fishes, if they remain long on dry land, die. And so monks lose their strength if they loiter among you and spend their time with you.'

Wherefore as fish must hurry to the sea, so must we hasten to the mountain. Lest haply if we delay we forget the things within us.' And the general having heard this and many other things from him, was amazed and said, 'Of a truth this man is the servant of God. For, unless he were beloved of God, whence could an ignorant man have such great understanding?'

86. And a certain general, Balacius by name, persecuted us Christians bitterly on account of his regard for the Arians--that name of ill-omen. And as his ruthlessness, was so great that he beat virgins, and stripped and scourged monks, Antony at this time wrote a letter as follows, and sent it to him. 'I see wrath coming upon thee, wherefore cease to persecute the Christians, lest haply wrath catch hold of thee, for even now it is on the point of coming upon thee[2].' But Balacius laughed and threw the letter on the ground, and spit on it, and insulted the bearers, bidding them tell this to Antony: 'Since thou takest thought for the monks, soon I will come after thee also.' And five days had not passed before wrath came upon him. For Balacius and Nestorius, the Prefect of Egypt[3], went forth to the first halting-place from Alexandria, which is called Chaereu, and both were on horseback, and the horses belonged to Balacius, and were the quietest of all his stable. But they had not gone far towards the place when the horses began to frisk with one another as they are wont to do; and suddenly the quieter, on which Nestorius sat[4], with a bite dismounted Balacius, and attacked him, and tore his thigh so badly with its teeth that he was borne straight back to the city, and in three days died. And all wondered because what Antony had foretold had been so speedily fulfilled.

87. Thus, therefore, he warned the cruel. But the rest who came to him he so instructed that they straightway forgot their lawsuits, and felicitated those who were in retirement from the world. And he championed those who were wronged in such a way that you would imagine that he, and not the others, was the sufferer. Further, he was able to be of such use to all, that many soldiers and men who had great possessions laid aside the burdens of life, and became monks for the rest of their days. And it was as if a physician had been given by God to Egypt. For who in grief met Antony and did not return rejoicing? Who came mourning for his dead and did not forthwith put off his sorrow? Who came in anger and was not converted to friendship? What poor and low-spirited man met him who, hearing him and looking upon him, did not despise wealth and console himself in his poverty? What monk, having

being neglectful, came to him and became not all the stronger? What young man having come to the mountain and seen Antony, did not forthwith deny himself pleasure and love temperance? Who when tempted by a demon, came to him and did not find rest? And who came troubled with doubts and did not get quietness of mind?

88. For this was the wonderful thing in Antony's discipline, that, as I said before, having the gift of discerning spirits, he recognised their movements, and was not ignorant whither any one of them turned his energy and made his attack. And not only was he not deceived by them himself, but cheering those who were troubled with doubts, he taught them how to defeat their plans, telling them of the weakness and craft of those who possessed them. Thus each one, as though prepared by him for battle, came down from the mountain, braving the designs of the devil and his demons. How many maidens who had suitors, having but seen Antony from afar, remained maidens for Christ's sake. And people came also from foreign parts to him, and like all others, having got some benefit, returned, as though set forward by a father. And certainly when he died, all as having been bereft of a father, consoled themselves solely by their remembrances of him, preserving at the same time his counsel and advice.

89. It is worth while that I should relate, and that you, as you wish it, should hear what his death was like. For this end of his is worthy of imitation. According to his custom he visited the monks in the outer mountain, and having learned from Providence that his own end was at hand, he said to the brethren, 'This is my last visit to you which I shall make. And I shall be surprised if we see each other again in this life. At length the time of my departure is at hand, for I am near a hundred and five years old.' And when they heard it they wept, and embraced, and kissed the old man. But he, as though sailing from a foreign city to his own, spoke joyously, and exhorted them 'Not to grow idle in their labours, nor to become faint in their training, but to live as though dying daily. And as he had said before, zealously to guard the soul from foul thoughts, eagerly to imitate the Saints, and to have nought to do with the Meletian schismatics, for you know their wicked and profane character. Nor have any fellowship with the Arians, for their impiety is clear to all. Nor be disturbed if you see the judges protect them, for it shall cease, and their pomp is mortal and of short duration. Wherefore keep

yourselves all the more untainted by them, and observe the traditions of the fathers, and chiefly the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which you have learned from the Scripture, and of which you have often been put in mind by me.'

90. But when the brethren were urging him to abide with them and there to die, he suffered. it not for many other reasons, as he showed by keeping silence, and especially for this:--The Egyptians are wont to honour with funeral rites, and to wrap in linen cloths at death the bodies of good men, and especially of the holy martyrs; and not to bury them underground, but to place them on couches, and to keep them in their houses, thinking in this to honour the departed. And Antony often urged the bishops to give commandment to the people on this matter. In like manner he taught the laity and reproved the women, saying, 'that this thing was neither lawful nor holy at all. For the bodies of the patriarchs and prophets are until now preserved in tombs, and the very body of the Lord was laid in a tomb, and a stone was laid upon it, and hid it until He rose on the third day[4a].' And thus saying, he showed that he who did not bury the bodies of the dead after death transgressed the law, even though they were sacred. For what is greater or more sacred than the body of the Lord? Many therefore having heard, henceforth buried the dead underground, and gave thanks to the Lord that they had been taught rightly.

91. But he, knowing the custom, and fearing that his body would be treated this way, hastened, and having bidden farewell to the monks in the outer mountain entered the inner mountain, where he was accustomed to abide. And after a few months he fell sick. Having summoned those who were there--they were two in number who had remained in the mountain fifteen years, practising the discipline and attending on Antony on account of his age--he said to them, 'I, as it is written[5], go the way of the fathers, for I perceive that I am called by the Lord, And do you be watchful and destroy not your long discipline, but as though now making a beginning, zealously preserve your determination. For ye know the treachery of the demons, how fierce they are, but how little power they have Where fore fear them not, but rather ever breathe Christ, and trust Him. Live as though dying daily. Give heed to yourselves, and remember the admonition you have heard from me. Have no fellowship with the schismatics, nor any dealings at all with the heretical Arians. For you know how I shunned them on account of their hostility to

Christ, and the strange doctrines of their heresy. Therefore be the more earnest always to be followers first of God and then of the Saints; that after death they also may receive you as well-known friends into the eternal habitations.

Ponder over these things and think of them, and if you have any care for me and are mindful of me as of a father, suffer no one to take my body into Egypt, lest haply they place me in the houses[6], for to avoid this I entered into the mountain and came here. Moreover you know how I always put to rebuke those who had this custom, and exhorted them to cease from it. Bury my body, therefore, and hide it underground yourselves, and let my words be observed by you that no one may know the place[6a] but you alone. For at the resurrection of the dead I shall receive it incorruptible from the Saviour. And divide my garments. To Athanasius the bishop give one sheepskin and the garment whereon I am laid, which he himself gave me new, but which with me has grown old. To Serapion the bishop give the other sheepskin, and keep the hair garment yourselves[7]. For the rest fare ye well, my children, for Antony is departing, and is with you no more.'

92. Having said this, when they had kissed him, he lifted up his feet, and as though he saw friends coming to him and was glad because of them--for as he lay his countenance appeared joyful--he died and was gathered to the fathers. And they afterward, according to his commandment, wrapped him up and buried him, hiding his body underground. And no one knows to this day where it was buried, save those two only. But each of those who received the sheepskin of the blessed Antony and the garment worn by him guards it as a precious treasure. For even to look on them is as it were to behold Antony; and he who is clothed in them seems with joy to bear his admonitions.

93. This is the end of Antony's life in the body and the above was the beginning of the discipline. Even if this account is small compared with his merit, still from this reflect how great Antony, the man of God, was. Who from his youth to so great an age preserved a uniform zeal for the discipline, and neither through old age was subdued by the desire of costly food, nor through the infirmity of his body changed the fashion of his clothing, nor washed even his feet with water, and yet remained entirely free from harm. For his eyes were undimmed and quite sound and he saw clearly; of his teeth he had not lost one, but they had become worn to the gums through the great age of the old man. He remained strong both in hands and feet; and while all men were using various foods, and washings and divers garments, he

appeared more cheerful and of greater strength. And the fact that his fame has been blazoned everywhere; that all regard him with wonder, and that those who have never seen him long for him, is clear proof of his virtue and God's love of his soul. For not from writings, nor from worldly wisdom, nor through any art, was Antony renowned, but solely from his piety towards God. That this was the gift of God no one will deny. For from whence into Spain and into Gaul, how into Rome and Africa, was the man heard of who abode hidden in a mountain, unless it was God who maketh His own known everywhere, who also promised this to Antony at the beginning? For even if they work secretly, even if they wish to remain in obscurity, yet the Lord shows them as lamps to lighten all, that those who hear may thus know that the precepts of God are able to make men prosper and thus be zealous in the path of virtue.

94. Read these words, therefore, to the rest of the brethren that they may learn what the life of monks ought to be; and may believe that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ glorifies those who glorify Him: and leads those who serve Him unto the end, not only to the kingdom of heaven, but here also--even though they hide themselves and are desirous of withdrawing from the world--makes them illustrious and well known everywhere on account of their virtue and the help they render others. And if need be, read this among the heathen, that even in this way they may learn that our Lord Jesus Christ is not only God and the Son of God, but also that the Christians who truly serve Him and religiously believe on Him, prove, not only that the demons, whom the Greeks themselves think to be gods, are no gods, but also tread them under foot and put them to flight, as deceivers and corrupters of mankind, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Life No 3

The Life of Saint Hilarion, Monk [Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on October 21]

by Jerome, presbyter & divine

Prologue

I beg that you will remember me in your holy prayers, Dame Asella (nonna Asella), glory and ornament of virgins that you are. [She was the sister of Marcella whose Life appears in Book 1d of the Vitae. She had lived a virgin

life on the Aventine in Rome from the age of ten] And as I begin to write about the life of the blessed Hilarion, I call upon the holy Spirit, who dwelt in him and showered him with virtues, to inspire me likewise with the words to describe him, so that my words may do justice to his deeds. For (as Crispus says) [Gaius Sallustius Crispus, a Roman historian, 86-34 BC] those who live virtuously are praised only in so far as there are talented writers to sing their praises. When Alexander the Great of Macedon, whom Daniel calls brass (Daniel 2.35), leopard (ibid. 7.6) and he-goat (ibid. 8.5), came to Achilles' tomb, he addressed him thus:

"Blessed are you, O hero forever young, for your merits have been extolled by no less than Homer himself."

Just so may I sing the life and deeds of this great man as if it were Homer still with us to understand him and fall under his spell.

I know that the holy Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, was an associate of Hilarion for a very long time, and has written a short letter in his praise which has had some circulation, but it is one thing to praise the dead in a general sort of way, and quite another to praise his virtues in serious detail. I begin this work about him not to diminish him but to extol him, and so I condemn those grumblers who, not content with criticising my account of Paul, now complain about Hilarion. Some cavil at his solitariness, others at his gregariousness. It is as if someone who was perpetually hidden away did not really exist, whereas someone in full view of many can only expect to be vilified. The Pharisees of old did exactly the same and more, criticising both John the Baptist fasting in the desert, and our Lord and Saviour eating and drinking in the midst of much company (Matthew 11.18-19). I block my ears to those rabid dogs, and, notwithstanding, set my hand to bringing this work to fruition. And I pray, O most holy Virgin, that you may be ever in Christ and mindful of me in your prayers.

The Life [Appears as a separate work in Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Oxford, 1893, not as a letter addressed to anyone in particular. Written probably in 390.]

Chapter I

Hilarion came from the village of Thabatha, which is about five miles from the town of Gaza in southern Palestine. Born of parents who worshipped idols, he was the rose among the thorns. They sent him to Alexandria to study with a

Grammarians, and the records show that at each stage of his life there he was both clever and well behaved. In short, he was skilled in speaking and popular with all. His belief in the Lord Jesus was greater than anyone's. He took no pleasure in the bloodstained sand and cruelty of the circus, nor in the decadence of the theatres. He was totally committed to the congregation of the Church.

Chapter II

Having heard of the celebrated name of Antony, which was being noised abroad among all the peoples of Egypt, he was seized with a desire to live like him and made his way to the desert. Once he had seen him he changed his lifestyle completely. He stayed with Antony for two months, observing his way of life and the integrity of his character. How instant in prayer he was, how humble in his dealings with the brothers, how severe in reproof, how eager in giving encouragement! Not even illness could make him break the accustomed severity of his abstinence from food.

But then Hilarion found himself unwilling to put up any longer with the numbers of people coming to Antony seeking help to overcome their passions and various attacks of the demons. He said that as he was a desert dweller it was not right that he should be surrounded by crowds of city people. So Hilarion all the more decided that just as Antony was now a strong man enjoying the rewards of victory, so it behoved him to start as Antony had done. He had not yet done any military service, so he returned to his native land with one or two monks. His parents were now dead, and he gave part of his inheritance to his brothers, setting aside some for the poor, but keeping back nothing for himself, fearing the example of the punishment given to Ananias and Sapphira in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5.1-5). And he was even more mindful of the words of the Lord: 'He who has not renounced everything he has cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14.33). He was fifteen years old.

Stripped of his possessions, clothed only in the armour of Christ, he went along the coast into the desert which begins on the left of the seventh milestone from Maiuma, the market town of Gaza, as you go down to Egypt. This was a dangerous place because of robbers, and his friends and relations had warned him about it, but his way of avoiding death was simply to despise death. Such bravery at such a young age would have been quite unbelievable had it not been for the flame burning in his breast which showed itself in the

light of faith sparkling in his eyes. His cheeks were smooth, his body slender and delicate, but he cared not for any discomforts either of cold or of heat.

Chapter III

He wore a tunic of sackcloth, with an over-garment of skins which Antony had given him as a parting present, and he also had a rough blanket. He lived in this vast and terrible solitude between the marshes and the sea, subsisting on fifteen figs a day, eaten after sunset. And because, as I have said, it is a region noted for its robbers, there was no one living there. When the devil noticed his presence he agonised about what he might do to convert this young man to himself. 'I shall ascend into the heavens, and set my throne above the stars, and I shall be like unto the Most High' had once been his boast (Isaiah 14.13), but now he could see himself being beaten by a mere boy. To avoid being trampled on, he knew what youthful sin he could tempt him with. He tickled his senses, suggesting how his pubescent body could be aflame with unlooked for pleasures. This little Christian novice was compelled to think about things which he had never thought about before, and a whole parade of ideas flooded through his mind about things of which he had had no experience. He got angry with himself and beat his breast with his fists as if he could drive his thoughts away by physical blows.

"You little donkey!" he said to his body, "I'll see to it that you don't trample me underfoot. I'll not give you any barley. Nothing but chaff! I will tame you by means of hunger and thirst, I will weigh you down with heavy burdens, I will subject you to both cold and heat! So you will end up thinking of nothing but food instead of lust!"

Every three or four days he maintained life in his gradually weakening body by the juice of herbs and a few figs. He prayed and sang psalms constantly, and cultivated the earth with a mattock, matching the labour of his fasting to the labour of his physical work. He also wove baskets from rushes, in imitation of the monks of Egypt and the saying of the Apostle: 'Whoso will not work, let him not eat' (2 Thessalonians 3.10). His flesh became so dry and wasted that it scarcely cleaved to his bones.

Chapter IV

At night he began to hear squalling babies, bleating sheep, bellowing cattle, wailing women, roaring lions, marching armies, and the noise as of an approaching horde of barbarians, striking terror into the heart just from the

sound of it, even before coming into sight. But he understood that these were all tricks of the demons, and he flung himself down, making the sign of the cross of Christ on his forehead. Protected by that helmet and by the breastplate of faith he battled all the more strongly as he lay there, looking about here and there, trying to catch a glimpse of whatever it was that was so frightening to listen to. Suddenly, without any warning, he could see in the light of the moon a four-wheeled chariot with frenzied horses bearing down upon him. He called on Jesus, and suddenly the whole terrifying spectacle was swallowed up into a hole in the ground before his very eyes.

"The horse and his rider he has cast into the sea" (Exodus 15.21), he said, "and 'Some put their trust in chariots, some in horses, but we will rejoice in the name of our God' (Psalms 20.7)."

Many were his temptations, and various the tricks of the devil, night and day. This book would not be big enough for me to relate them all. How many naked women did he see lying about? How many large banquet tables appeared to him as he fasted? Sometimes a howling wolf and a little barking fox jumped out at him as he prayed; a gladiator fight made a fine show in front of him as he sang psalms, and a slaughtered man fell at his feet, begging for burial. He put his forehead in the dust as he prayed, but he could not concentrate; his mind, following a natural human bent, strayed away to think about I know not what. A charioteer jumped on his back, kicked him in the ribs and belaboured his shoulders with a riding-whip.

"Come on!" he shouted. "Gallop! Wake up! You want to get your barley, don't you?"

Chapter V

From the age of sixteen till he was twenty the sun and the rain kept on beating down on the little shelter he had made for himself out of reeds and grasses.

Then he made a little cell for himself, which remains to this day, four feet wide and five feet high. That was much lower than his own height, though it was a bit longer than his body fully stretched out. As you can imagine, it was more like a coffin than a house. He did cut his hair, to be sure, once a year at Eastertide, but to the day of his death he slept on a bed of rushes laid upon the bare earth. Once he had put his sackcloth on he never washed it. It was quite superfluous to wash your clothes, he said. Nor did he change his other garment until it had been reduced to rags. When not reciting the prayers and psalms as if he were in the presence of God, he kept the holy Scriptures in his

mind. But since there is a lot to tell you about his great deeds through all the stages of his life, I will first of all summarise his various regimes for you, before returning to the order of my tale.

Chapter VI

From the age of twenty-one to twenty-seven, he ate half a pint of lentils soaked in cold water for the first three years, and dry bread with salt and water for the next three. From twenty-seven to thirty he subsisted on wild herbs and the raw roots of certain bushes. From thirty to thirty-five his food was half a loaf of barley-bread and a little bit of vegetable cooked without any oil. At this point he found that his eyes were becoming misty and his whole body began to burn with a sort of rough and scabrous impetigo, so he added a little oil to his diet and continued in this abstemious regime till the age of sixty-three, with no fruit, no pulse or anything tasty. When he felt that his body was getting weaker and the end of his life was getting near, he gave up bread, so that from his sixty-fourth year till the age of eighty, with incredible strength of mind, it was as if he were coming anew to the service of God, at an age when others begin to be a bit more relaxed. He would make a sort of weak broth of flour mingled with oil, and weight out about five ounces of it, to serve for both food and drink. And he went on like this, never eating before sunset, never relaxing his fasting, not even for holy days or when he was ill.

Chapter VII

But now I must return to my story. One night when he was aged eighteen and still living under his rough shelter, a band of robbers came, perhaps because they thought he might have something which they could steal, or else simply because they thought they might be held in contempt if they were not able to instil fear in such a mere boy. They ran about between the sea and the marshes from dusk to sunrise without being able to find where he was sleeping. It was not until the day had dawned that they were able to find him.

"What would you do," they asked him, half jokingly, "if robbers came to visit you?"

"Nakedness fears no robbery," he replied.

"Yes, but you might easily get killed."

"Possibly, possibly, but I'm still not afraid of robbers, for I'm quite prepared to die."

They could not but admire the firmness of his faith, and after admitting to him

how they had been blindly stumbling about all night, they promised to amend their ways in future.

Chapter VIII

By the time he was twenty-two years old his reputation was widely known through all the towns of Palestine, including Eleutheropolis, [A town about one day's journey from Jerusalem on the road to Ascalon.]

where there was a woman who felt herself to be despised by her husband, because although they had been married for fifteen years she had not borne him any children. She was the first person bold enough to invade the privacy of the blessed Hilarion. Without fear or mistrust she embraced his knees.

"Forgive my boldness," she said, "but please listen to my troubles. Why are you looking away? Why try to run away from someone who needs your help? Don't look at me as a woman, but just as someone utterly miserable. Don't forget that it was my sex who gave birth to the Saviour, and 'it is not the healthy who need a physician but the sick' (Mark 2.17)".

This was the first time he had seen a woman in all that time, but he stopped resisting and asked her why she had come and why she was weeping. After learning the cause of her distress, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, urged her to have faith, and shed tears himself as she departed. After a year had passed she had a son.

Chapter IX

That was the first of the signs he did. A much greater one made him even more widely known. Aristaeneta was the wife of Elpidius who later became commander-in-chief of the praetorian guard. She was highly regarded among their colleagues and even more so among the Christians. She and her husband and three children were returning to Palestine from a visit to Antony when they stopped at Gaza, where her three children all fell ill of a fever and were given up for dead by the doctors. The poor woman wept, inconsolable, running from one son to another, scarcely knowing which one to grieve for first. The disease may have been caused by something in the air, or perhaps (as was afterwards made plain) simply in order that the name of Hilarion, the servant of God, might be glorified. For when she was told that there was a monk in the neighbouring desert, she hardly needed any persuasion from her husband to lay aside all her dignity of state and act simply like a mother. She mounted a mule, and accompanied by servants and eunuchs made her way to

Hilarion.

"In the name of the cross and blood of Jesus, our most merciful God," she cried to Hilarion, "I beg that God may send the servant of God to Gaza, that my three sons may be restored to me, that the name of the Lord our Saviour may be glorified in that city of the gentiles, and the temples of the ungodly be cast down."

"No, I can't do that," he replied. "I never leave my cell. I never go into the villages, let alone the cities."

She flung herself to the ground.

"Hilarion, servant of God," she cried over and over again, "restore my three sons to me! Antony welcomed us in Egypt. We need you to care for us in Syria."

Everyone there dissolved into tears. Hilarion wept in spite of himself. What more can I say? The woman would not go until Hilarion had promised that after sunset he would go into Gaza.

When he got there he went to the beds of each one of them, and saw their dry and feverish limbs. He called upon the name of Jesus, and - O marvellous wonder! - sweat burst forth from them like three fountains. Within the hour they had taken food, recognised their grieving mother, and blessing God, had kissed the hands of the holy man. When this became known far and wide, people from Syria and Egypt flocked to him, and many believed in Christ and formed a monastery. For at that time there were no monasteries in Palestine, no monk in Syria before Hilarion. He was the first, the founder and teacher of this way of life in the province. The Lord Jesus had the old man Antony in Egypt; in Palestine he had the young Hilarion.

Chapter X

Facidia is a village near the town of Rhinocorura in Egypt. Ten years ago a blind woman was brought from this village to Hilarion by a number of monks who were with her. They told Hilarion that she had spent all her money on doctors.

"If you had given to the poor," said the holy man, "what you have spent on doctors, you would have been cured by the true doctor, Jesus."

She cried, and begged for mercy, whereupon Hilarion, following the example of the power of the Saviour, spat in her eyes and her sight was restored.

Chapter XI

There was a charioteer in Gaza who was struck by a demon so that he could move none of his limbs nor turn his head. He was carried to Hilarion in a litter, the only movement possible for him being that of his tongue which he used to pray for help. He was told that he could not be healed unless he believed in Jesus and promised to give up his former profession. He believed, he promised, he was cured, rejoicing more in the salvation of his soul than in that of his body.

Chapter XII

Another example: There was a very strong young man called Marsitas in the region of Jerusalem who had such confidence in his own strength that he was able to carry about three hundred pounds [quindecim modios A 'modium' equals approximately one peck. A peck of water weighs about 20 lbs] on his shoulders for quite a long time. This would win a prize in a weightlifting contest, as it was more than a beast of burden could carry. This man became infested with a malicious demon; chains, fetters, even locked doors proved no obstacle to him. He attacked many people by biting off their noses or ears, he broke the feet of some, and the jaws of others. Everyone was so terrified of him that they treated him like a wild bull and tied him up with chains and ropes which they wound around him in every possible way. They took him to the monastery where the Brothers took one look at him and were petrified with fear (for he was enormously large), and went to tell the Father [i.e. Hilarion.] about him. He sat down and ordered Marsitas to be brought to him and loosed of his bonds.

"Bow your head, and come here," he said. Trembling, the poor wretch bent his head and dared not disobey. All the aggression drained out of him, and he began to lick Hilarion's feet as he sat there. Hilarion spoke words of power to the demon infesting the young man, and twisted it out of him, so that at the end of seven days it had completely departed.

Chapter XIII (continued), Life of St Hilarion, Book 1a

We must also tell the story of Orion, the wealthy chief citizen of the town of Haila near the Red Sea. Possessed by demons he was brought to Hilarion with chains around his hands, neck, sides and feet, his staring eyes threatening savage violence. The Saint was walking with the Brothers discussing some portion of Scripture, when Orion burst free from the hands of those holding him, ran to the holy Hilarion, grasped him from behind, and lifted him off the ground. Everyone cried out in alarm; they were frightened that he would break

Hilarion's bones, weakened as they were by fasting. But the Saint just smiled, lifted his hands above his shoulders, found the man's head, grasped his hair, and pulled him down in front of him, causing both his hands to lose their grasp. He planted the soles of his feet on each side of the man's feet and cried out

"Twist yourselves out, you crowd of demons!" he shouted. "Twist yourselves out!"

Orion howled, bent his neck and touched the ground with the top of his head. "Lord Jesus!" he cried. "Release me from my misery! You are Lord of one and all!"

I tell you now something unheard of: from out of the mouth of this one man issued a multitude of voices, as of a confused crowd of people. And he was cured.

Not long after this he came to the monastery with his wife and children to give thanks, bringing a number of gifts.

"Haven't you read what happened to Gehazi and Simon?" asked the Saint.

"One of them accepted payment for the sake of base reward (2 Kings 5.22-27), the other offered payment to buy the grace of the holy Spirit (Acts 8.18)."

"Well, take it and give it to the poor," said Orion, weeping.

"You would have done better to distribute your own goods," he replied. "You are familiar with your town. You know who are the poor. As for myself, I have renounced everything. Why should I seek what belongs to someone else? In the eyes of many people the poor are people to be exploited without pity. But you can't do better than to be generous without seeking any benefit for yourself."

Orion lay prostrate on the sand, weeping..

"Don't be sad," Hilarion continued. "What I have done was for my own benefit as well as yours. And if I were to accept these gifts, not only would I be offending God, but the legion of devils would return to torment you."

Chapter XIV

And who could remain silent about Maiumites of Gaza? He was gathering stones for building from the seashore not very far away from the monastery, when he suddenly became completely paralysed. His working companions carried him to the Saint and he was then able to return to work immediately! Remember also the beach along the border between Palestine and Egypt. Although naturally soft, it had become hardened by the grains of sand

solidifying into small stones. But little by little, although it still looked like gravel it no longer felt like gravel.

Chapter XV

Thjere was an Italian citizen of Haila, a Christian, who kept horses and chariots to race against those of the two chief citizens of Gaza, a town given to the veneration of the image of Marnas. Marnas (or Consus, the god of secret plans) [Consus was also the god of agricultural fertility. The festival of the Consuelia, supposed to have been instituted by Romulus, was on August 31] .had been venerated in Roman towns since the time of Romulus, who won victory over the Sabines and seized their women, by means of his chariots racing round them seven times and overcoming the horses of the enemy. This Italian's rival used an evil magician, who by demonic incantations slowed down the Italian's horses, while improving the performance of his own. The Italian came to the blessed Hilarion, begging for help, not to cause injury to his opponent but to seek a defence against his spells.

"Wouldn't it be better to sell your horses," said Hilarion with a smile, "and give the money to the poor for the sake of your own salvation?"

"But the horses are state property," he replied. "I can't deal with them as I want, but only as I am told. And as a Christian man I can't make use of magic arts. I prefer to seek help from a servant of Christ, especially against the people of Gaza who are the enemies of God, not for my own sake so much as for the sake of the Church of Christ which they revile."

Hilarion asked the Brothers present for the clay beaker which he usually drank from, filled it with water and gave it to the Italian, who took it away and sprinkled it over the stable, the horses, the charioteers, the chariots, and the bars of the starting gates. His rival made a great joke out of this, much to the excited interest of the people, for he publicly promised victory for himself and failure for the Italian.

The signal was given, the Italian's horses flew like the wind and the wheels of their chariots were just a blur, the other horses struggled to keep up and were left far behind. The crowd gave vent to a great shout, with even the opponents joining in: MARNAS HAS BEEN BEATEN BY CHRIST! The losing team were furious and demanded that Hilarion, the Christian magician, should be punished. But it could not be denied that the victory here, and in many Circuses thereafter, brought many people to the faith.

Chapter XVI

In the market town of Gaza a young man was madly in love with his neighbour, a virgin of God. He tried various tactics, jokes, nods and whistles, and other such things by which it is hoped to make a conquest of someone's virginity, but to no avail. So he went to Memphis, where he hoped to be able to tell someone of his problem and go back to the virgin armed by magic arts. He spent a year under the tutelage of the priests of Aesculapius, which rather sent him further towards perdition than made him into a better person.

Glorying in the disgraceful course upon which he had embarked, he pushed lascivious letters and suggestive images inscribed on sheets of Cyprian copper under the virgin's door, which inflamed her on the spot, so that she stripped off her head covering, cried piteously and gnashed her teeth while calling out the young man's name. The strength of her passion had turned her raving mad. Her parents brought her to the old man at the monastery, where the demon in her immediately howled and gave himself away.

"I can't put up with this," it shouted. "I have been carried off here against my will, just when I was beautifully deceiving humans with the dreams of Memphis. O the pains, the tortures I am suffering! You are trying to drive me out, but I am beholden to none except those very spells and charms which were put under the door. I cannot go out unless commanded by the one who put me in here."

"How exceedingly bold you are!" said Hilarion. "And yet you admit you are controlled by those spells and charms. Tell me, why did you dare to enter this child of God?"

"To be a servant to that virgin."

"You, a servant? Protector of chastity, are you? Why not rather enter the one who sent you?"

"How could I enter him, when he already had my colleague the love-demon in him?"

Now the Saint had set his face against curing the virgin or the young man by attempting to order the demons out by dramatic actions, lest it should appear that he was using incantations himself and accommodating his faith to suit the words of the demons. The demons were masters of deceit, he said, and extremely skilled in dissimulation. Instead he restored the virgin to sanity by scolding her, and making her see what it was in her that had enabled the demon to gain entry.

Chapter XVII

His fame began to spread further, not only in Palestine and the neighbouring cities of Egypt and Syria, but also into distant provinces. For the Emperor Constantine had among his staff a tutor, with the red hair and fair complexion that showed where he came from (for he was one of the Saxons or Alamanni, called Germanics in the past, but now Franks). From an early age he had been possessed by a demon which at night compelled him to howl and groan and gnash his teeth. He quite frankly told the Emperor about this and asked for leave of absence, which was granted to him. He was given letters of introduction to the Consul in Palestine, from where he was conducted with great honour and a large retinue to Gaza. There he asked the local senators how to find Hilarion. They were absolutely terrified, thinking he had been specially sent by the Emperor, but took him to the monastery, showing him every respect in the hope that if the Emperor had taken offence at any past insults to Hilarion, they might be able to atone for them by their new-found attentiveness.

Hilarion was walking about on the sand, saying some psalms. Seeing this large crowd coming towards him he stood still. They all greeted each other and he blessed them. After an hour he told everyone to go away except the tutor, his personal servants, and clerical staff. He could tell by looking at his eyes and face why he had come. He asked him why nevertheless, and the tutor sprang up on tiptoe and answered with a great roar in the Syrian language - and you would have heard someone who knew only Frankish and Latin speaking pure Syrian, with not an accent, not an aspirate, not a Palestinian idiom out of place in his speech! The unclean spirit then confessed in that language the means by which he had gained entry, but so that the interpreters who knew both Greek and Latin would understand, Hilarion asked him to speak in Greek.

"Many spells and incantations were needed," confessed the spirit, "and I needed the services of many magic arts."

"I don't much care how you got in," replied Hilarion, "but I command that you now go, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He was cured, and with a kind of rustic simplicity he offered Hilarion ten pounds of gold. Hilarion immediately offered him some barley bread.

"Anyone content with barley bread," said Hilarion, "has no more use for gold than for mud."

Chapter XVIII

So much for talking about humans, it was unmanageable brute beasts also who were brought to him daily. One such animal was an enormous Bactrian camel who had injured many people. It took thirty men or more to restrain it with strong ropes and bring it to Hilarion. Its eyes were bloodshot, it frothed at the mouth, its swollen tongue rolled about, and its ear-splitting roar struck terror into all around. The old man ordered it to be untied. To a man, they all fled, those who had brought it as well as those who were with Hilarion, till there was only Hilarion standing in front of it.

"You devil in such a great shapeless mass," said Hilarion, "you don't frighten me! Camels and little foxes (Song of Songs 2.15) are, after all, exactly the same."

And he just stood there, with his hand stretched out. The raging beast rushed towards him, as if about to devour him, then suddenly stopped and lowered its head to the ground, to the astonishment of all the onlookers that such a fierce beast could be reduced to such gentleness.

"It is because of human beings that the devil can corrupt even the beasts of burden," Hilarion told them. "The devils are filled with such hatred of human beings that they long to destroy not only them but also everything that belongs to them. As evidence of this, note that before the devil was allowed to put Job to the test he destroyed everything he possessed (Job 1.12). And let no one object that it was by order of the Lord himself that two thousand swine were sent to their death by the devils (Mark 5.13). For those who witnessed the event would not have been convinced that so many demons could have been expelled out of one man unless an equal number of swine had all perished together as if each one were being individually driven."

Chapter XIX

Time does not allow me to narrate all the signs done by this man. God gave him so much glory that when the blessed Antony heard about him he wrote to him, and was delighted to receive letters from him in return. And if anyone from the Syrian regions brought their troubles to Antony he would say to them, "Why have you taken the trouble to make such a long journey, when you have got my son Hilarion so close to you?"

Following Hilarion's example monasteries were springing up everywhere throughout the whole of Palestine, and zealous monks were flocking to them. When Hilarion recognised this he praised the grace of God and urged that

each soul should make progress, reminding them that this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7.31), but that the true life could only be purchased by doing violence to our lives in this world. He set an example of humility and service by visiting the cells of all the brothers on certain set days before the grape harvest. When his own Brothers realised what he was doing they joined in with him, and they visited all the monasteries, each one taking with him food for the journey. Sometimes there would be as many as two thousand men gathered together. And as time went on each little hamlet would offer food to the monks, glad to cast in their lot with the Saints.

Chapter XX

He was so conscientious that no brother, however humble, however poor, was overlooked. So it happened that as he was on his way to visit a brother living in the desert of Kadesh, he and a great company of monks entered the town of Eleusa on a day when by chance the whole population were gathered together in the temple of Venus for an annual feast in honour of Lucifer, whom the whole Saracen nation worshipped. (This town was generally regarded as being semibarbarous, because of its isolated locality.) Now many of the Saracens there had been delivered from demons by Hilarion, and when they heard that he was there they all rushed to see him, along with their wives and children. They bent their heads before him crying 'Barech', that is, 'Bless', He received them all gently and humbly, and urged them to worship the true God rather than stone idols. Weeping freely, he gazed up to heaven and assured them that if they believed in Christ he would surely come to them. And by the marvellous grace of God, before he was permitted to continue on his way they had marked out a site for a future church, and their Priest was signed with the cross as though he was being crowned.

Chapter XXI

In another year, when about to go out to visit the monasteries, they were drawing up a list of whom they could stay with and whom they would simply visit in passing, when some of the monks suggested that they stay with a certain brother whom they knew to be rather niggardly, hoping thereby to cure him of his fault.

"Why are you showing yourselves up in such a bad light," asked Hilarion, "in your desire to irritate your brother?"

The brother in question understood what was being said, blushed furiously

and somewhat unwillingly was overcome by the force of public opinion and asked for his name to be put on the list of places where the visitors might stay. When they arrived at his place on the tenth day, they found that there were guards on his vineyard armed with slings and stones and clods of earth to keep off intruders, as if it belonged to somebody else. Without picking any grapes they departed the next day, but Hilarion had a slight smile on his lips, pretending not to know what was going on. And when they went to the next monk whose name was Sabas (we don't mind naming him as he was generous, though we would not dream of naming the niggardly one), they were all invited into the vineyard to refresh themselves with some grapes after the trials of their journey. Now it was Sunday and long before the usual hour for taking food.

"We can't approve of refreshing the body before seeing to the needs of the soul," said Hilarion. "Let us pray, let us sing psalms, let us offer God service, and then let us enjoy your hospitality."

When the service was over, he stood by the vineyard and blessed it and dismissed his flock to their pasture. There must have been at least three thousand of them. The usual estimate for this vineyard was that it would produce a hundred bottles, but on the twentieth day after this it was found to have produced three hundred! The niggardly brother was accustomed to producing much less, but he was distressed to find that even what he had produced had turned to vinegar. And this is what Hilarion had predicted to many of the brothers beforehand.

Chapter XXII

What he detested above all was the way some monks lacked faith in their future, and saved up their possessions, worrying too much about how much their clothing was going to cost, or any other such transitory worldly item. So he ceased to look kindly upon one of the monks, who lived about five miles away, because he knew that this monk had acted far too timidly and cautiously in the management of his little garden, through which he had saved up a little bit of money. This monk wanted to be restored to the old man's favour. He often visited the brothers, especially Hesychius, of whom he was very fond, so one day he brought with him a packet of green chickpeas which Hesychius put on the table as part of the evening meal.

"This stuff smells absolutely rotten," exclaimed the old man. "Where did it come from?"

"A brother brought it as a gift of first fruits for the monastery," replied Hesychius.

"Can't you smell how terribly rotten it is?" he asked. "And what these chickpeas stink of is avarice! Give it to the oxen, give it to the brute beasts, and see whether they will eat it."

He did as he was told and put it in the manger. The oxen were terrified, lowed unusually loudly, broke their tethers and fled.

The old man had this gift of being able to tell from the smell of anyone's body or clothing or anything that he had touched what sort of demon or vice was lurking underneath.

Chapter XXIII

In the sixty-third year of his life he looked about him and saw this great monastery and the large number of brothers living with him, and saw how many of them had attracted to themselves various degenerate and unclean spirits. The desert round about was filled with all kinds of people, so that he wept daily and was filled with an overwhelming nostalgia for his earliest way of life. The brothers asked him what was the matter, what was troubling him. "I have returned to the world," he said, "and I have received my reward in this life. All Palestine and the neighbouring provinces think I am somebody important, and I, under the excuse of building a monastery for the use of the brothers, possess a large mansion and everything that goes with it."

The brothers tended him with extra care, especially Hesychius, whose veneration and love for him knew no bounds.

Chapter XXIV

After he had mourned like that for two years Aristaeneta came to visit him. She was the wife of the Prefect whom we have already mentioned, [See Chapter IX, above] though without the Prefect's vaunting ambition. She told Hilarion that she was intending to visit Antony.

"That is where I would like to go, too," he said, weeping, "if I weren't held prisoner shut up in this monastery, and if it were any use to do so. For in two days' time the world will be deprived of this great father."

She believed him and went no further. In a few days someone brought the news that Antony had indeed fallen asleep.

Chapter XXV

Marvellous were the signs and portents which he did, marvellous his incredible abstinence, his knowledge, his humility. I am never so overcome with amazement as when I think how he was completely unaffected by all the glory and honour paid to him. For bishops flocked to him, presbyters, crowds of clerics and monks, Christian matrons (a great source of temptation!), crowds of ordinary people from the towns and countryside, judges and people in high places, all wanting to receive from him a portion of blessed bread or oil. But he thought continually of nothing else but solitude.

One day he suddenly made up his mind to set out. He saddled an ass and set out on his journey (for he was so wasted by fasting that he could hardly walk). When it was rumoured about that he was leaving Palestine for the desert vastness, more than ten thousand people of all ages and sexes gathered together in an attempt to stop him. He was unmoved by their prayers as he talked with them, stirring up the sand with his staff.

"I will not make God a liar," (1 John 1.10) he said, "but I shall not see the overthrow of the Churches, the altars broken, or the blood of my sons."

Those who heard him say this understood that some secret message had been revealed to him which he did not want to reveal in total, but nevertheless they surrounded him to prevent him going on any further. In a loud voice he argued with them, saying that he would take no food or drink until they let him pass. After seven days, growing weaker because of his fasting he was allowed to say farewell to most of them and move on to the town of Bethelia, still accompanied by quite a crowd. There he succeeded in persuading the crowds to turn back, but chose forty monks to stay with him who carried with them food for the journey and who were practised in fasting, that is, refraining from food till after sunset.

Chapter XXV (continued), Life of St Hilarion, Book 1a

On the fifth day he arrived at Pelusium and visited the Brothers in a neighbouring desert place called Lychnos. Three days later he arrived at the fortress of Thebatum where he saw Dracontius, the bishop and confessor who was in exile there. He was incredibly delighted at meeting such a great man. After another three days he arrived at Babylon, where he met bishop Philo, who was also a confessor. They had both been exiled to these places by the Emperor Constantius, who favoured the Arian heresy. Two days after leaving there he got to the town of Aphroditos, where he met up with the deacon Baisanes. Here he obtained camels, the only possible means of transport

through the waterless desert, for he now told his brothers that he intended to observe the anniversary of Antony's death by keeping a night's vigil in the place where he died. After three further days in the vast and horrible wilderness he arrived at Antony's high mountain where he found two monks, Isaac and Pelusianus, Antony's interpreter.

Chapter XXVI

Now that we have got to this point in our story, and the occasion presents itself, it seems right to describe briefly the place where the great man lived. It is a rocky mountain about a mile high, with a spring of water at the base of it. Some of the water soaks away into the sand, but the rest of it falls away to form a small stream. On either bank there are a great number of palm trees, lending charm to the place as well as usefulness. Antony's disciples took the old man with them here and there to show him everything.

"This is where he would sing his psalms", they said, "here he would pray, here work, here he would rest when tired. These vines he planted himself, as well as these little trees. He made this garden bed with his own hands. Much sweat went into the making of this pond, which irrigates his little garden. And here is the hoe which he used for many years to cultivate the ground with."

Hilarion lay down on Antony's bed, and embraced the covers as if they were still warm. This was in a little cell, square-shaped, just big enough for a man to stretch out in and lie down. There were two other cells of the same size at the top of the mountain, which could only be reached by climbing up like a snail with a great deal of effort. Antony used to escape here to get away from visitors and the common life of his disciples. These cells had been cut out of the living rock, though extra porches had been added on. The disciples then led him to the orchard.

"See these fruit-bearing trees in the midst of the others?" said Isaac. "About three years ago a herd of wild donkeys caused great damage to them. Antony ordered the leader of them to stand still, belaboured him with his stick and asked it how it dared to eat that which it had not sowed. After that they often came to drink from the stream but never touched the trees or the fruit."

Hilarion asked them if they could show him Antony's burial place. They came a little closer to him and said it was not possible either to show him or not to show him, for in accordance with Antony's instructions, the grave was kept secret to prevent a local very rich man called Pergamius from coming to take the body to his villa and making a martyr's shrine for it.

Chapter XXVII

He returned to Aphroditos, and, keeping only two of the brothers with him, remained nearby in the desert for a while, using such abstinence and silence as if he were only just beginning to serve Christ. The surrounding country had been suffering from a drought for the previous three years, and the people said that even the elements were mourning the death of Antony. Hilarion's fame was well known to the farmers round about, and both men and women, their lips bloodless and their bodies wasted with hunger, urgently begged the servant of Christ, as the successor of the blessed Antony, to pray for rain. Seeing their plight, Hilarion was filled with compassion, and raising his eyes to heaven and stretching out both his hands he immediately prayed for what they had asked. The rains fell on the dry and thirsty land, suddenly bringing forth a multitude of serpents and poisonous beasts, which bit a great number of people. If they had not run immediately to Hilarion for help they would have died, for he anointed the wounds of the shepherds and farmers with blessed oil and restored them to health.

Chapter XXVIII

He was showered with praise as a result, so he fled to Alexandria, intending to go on from there to the desert of Oasis [About 40 miles west of Alexandria]. But since he had never stayed in a city in all the time since he had become a monk, he went on to certain brothers whom he knew in Bruchium, not far from Alexandria, who received him with great joy. It was not long before night began to fall, when they suddenly saw Hilarion's disciples saddling the donkey and preparing for departure. They fell at Hilarion's feet, begging him not to go. They lay down across their doorway, saying that they would rather die than be held guilty of such a grievous lack of hospitality.

"I was just thinking that I had better move on," said Hilarion, "lest I cause you a great deal of trouble. Future events will show you that I was right to leave so suddenly."

He knew that next day people would come from Gaza with the Prefect's lictors and search the monastery looking for him.

"Isn't it true what we have heard about him?" they said, when they found no trace of him. "He is a magician, and can tell the future!"

For after Hilarion had left Palestine Julian had succeeded as Emperor, and the people of Gaza had destroyed his monastery and begged the new Emperor that

Hilarion and Hesychius be put to death. It was decreed that both should be sought for throughout the whole world. But he had already left Bruchium and set out for Oasis through the trackless desert. He stayed there for about a year, but even there his fame had preceded him. There seemed to be nowhere in the East where he could hide, and he considered the possibility of sailing to some desert island. Even though there was nowhere to hide on land, he thought that perhaps the sea might be able to conceal him.

Chapter XXIX

But just then Hadrianus his disciple came from Palestine, saying that Julian had been killed, [363 AD. The new Emperor was Jovian]. that a Christian Emperor now reigned, and that he ought to return to what was left of his monastery. But Hilarion would hear none of it, and instead went westward on a camel to the seaside town of Paretonium in Libya, where Hadrianus, in an ill-fated desire to return to Palestine, betrayed Hilarion grievously. For he thought to acquire for himself some of the glory which had earlier belonged to his master, and packed up all the goods which the brothers had put in his care and set off without Hilarion's knowledge. This is a convenient place for me to relate something which might strike terror into the hearts of those who do not respect their masters, for it was not long after this that Hadrianus was stricken with jaundice.

Chapter XXX

He still had with him Zananus, and together they took ship for Sicily, knowing he could pay for the passage by selling a copy of the Gospels, which he had copied out himself as a young man. In the middle of the Adriatic the captain's son was possessed by a demon and began to shout loudly:

"Hilarion, servant of God, why can't we even be safe from you in the middle of the sea? Give me a bit of breathing space till we get to land, lest you cast me out and I fall into the abyss."

"If my God allows you to stay," said Hilarion, "well, stay! But if he casts you out, why should you blame me, penniless sinner that I am?"

He said this to discourage the sailors, as well as the merchants who were aboard, from handing him over when they got to land. The boy was purged of the demon not long after that, and his father and the others who were there gave their word that that they would not mention his name to anyone at a later date.

When they docked at Cape Pachynum in Sicily he offered the Gospel to the captain as payment for his passage, but he would not accept it, especially as he could see that apart from that book and the clothes they stood up in they possessed absolutely nothing. But the old man was quite happy to put his faith in being poor, rejoicing all the more in possessing nothing of this world, and that he should be thought a beggar by those he came into contact with. On the other hand he feared lest the merchants from the East might make his name known, so he fled from the coast twenty miles away to a lonely spot where he collected bundles of wood each day and loaded up his disciple with them. By selling these in a nearby village he was able to provide for his needs and also offer a little bread to anyone who might come to him.

Chapter XXXI

But, indeed, as it is written in Scripture, 'a city set on a hill cannot be hidden' (Matthew 5.14). A certain Scutarius, tormented by a demon, cried out in the basilica of the blessed Peter in Rome,

"A few days ago Hilarion, the servant of Christ, arrived in Sicily and no one recognised him. He thought he was safe, but I am going there to reveal where he is."

Accompanied by a youthful retinue, he straightaway went to the harbour and took ship for Pachynum, where, driven by the demon, he prostrated himself outside Hilarion's dwelling. Hilarion immediately cured him.

This beginning of signs in Sicily prompted a great multitude of sick people to seek him out, as well as many of the ordinary faithful. Among the first who came to him was one suffering from dropsy, who was cured on that same day. He offered to reward the Saint with a large gift, only to hear him repeat the saying of the Saviour: 'Freely have you received, freely give' (Matthew 10.8).

Chapter XXXII

While this had been going on in Sicily, his disciple Hesychius had been searching everywhere trying to find him. He searched the coasts and he went into the deserts, buoyed up by the conviction that wherever Hilarion went he could not possibly go unnoticed. After three years' wandering he heard from a Jew in Messina, 'a city selling the people cheap trash', [Horace, Letters 1.vii] that a Christian prophet had appeared in Sicily, doing so many signs and miracles that he was thought to be one of the Saints of old time. But he was unable to get any answers to his questions about how he was dressed, how old

he was, what language he spoke or his means of travel. His informant could tell him only that a great number of people had mentioned his fame to him. Hesychius went to Adria and took a quick passage to Pachynum, where in all the little villages along the coast he heard about the old man's fame. Everyone he spoke to knew where he was and what he was doing, and were never so full of admiration for him as for his not accepting from anybody in any of those places so much as a crust of bread by way of a reward for his many signs and miracles.

Chapter XXXIII

To cut a long story short, the holy Hesychius fell on his knees before the Master, watering his feet with his tears. The old man lifted him up and they spoke together for two or three days, until Zananus told Hesychius that the old man could no longer live in these parts, but wanted to go to some of the more barbarian places where his name and reputation were unknown. So they went to Epidaurus, a town in Dalmatia, but after having lived in a quiet little spot near the town for a few days, he found he could no longer remain hidden away. For a beast of enormous size was laying the district waste. The local people called these beasts 'cattlers' [boas] because they were able to swallow up cattle [boves] in one gulp. It could devour not only plough oxen and store cattle but also farmers and shepherds, who were irresistibly dragged towards it by the fascination of its power. Hilarion caused a pyre to be built, prayed to Christ, summoned the beast and made it ascend to the top of the pile of wood. And then, as all the people looked on, he set fire to the pyre and cremated the enormous beast. He began to wonder what he should do next, and where he should turn to, and prepared to flee once more, wanting desperately to be able to wander the earth alone, regretting that people were already spreading the news about how he had performed a miracle without even saying anything at all.

In the tempestuous earthquake which followed the death of Julian, the sea burst its bounds as if God were threatening the whole world with another flood, or reducing everything to a state of primeval chaos. Ships were smashed and carried up on to the hillsides where they were left stranded. The people of Epidaurus were terrified that the size and violent movement of the waves with their mountainous whirlpools would suck away the beaches, and they were frightened that the foundations of the town would be washed away, which they had already seen happen once before. They ran to the old man, and

made him go to the seashore, in the very forefront of the battle. He made the sign of the cross three times in the sand and stretched out his hands. Incredible to relate, a high and swelling wall of water stopped still in front of him, and gradually subsided back into itself. To this day, the people of Epidaurus, and the whole region round about, talk about this event. Mothers tell their children about it, and so the memory of it is transmitted to posterity. What was said to the Apostles is absolutely true: 'If you have faith you shall say to this mountain, be cast into the sea, and it shall be done' (Matthew 17.20). This can be fulfilled quite literally, if anyone has faith such as that which the Lord commanded that the Apostles should have. There is not a great deal of difference, after all, between a mountain being removed into the sea, and, on the other hand, mountainous waves suddenly being arrested and gently subsiding in front of the rock-like presence of one old man. The whole region wondered, and this remarkable sign was noised abroad as far as Salon.

Chapter XXXIV

When the old man realised this, he fled by night, and after two days boarded a merchant ship going to Cyprus. When they were half way between the islands of Malea and Cythera, pirates left the shore in two fast warships, sweeping the waves with their oars, striking fear into the occupants of the merchant ship.

They wept, they ran about panic-stricken, they prepared what weapons they had, and cried out to Hilarion that pirates were coming, as if he did not know already. He had already seen them in the distance, smiled, and said to his disciples, "'O ye of little faith, what are you frightened of?' (Matthew 8.26). Are these greater than the armies of Pharaoh? Yet by the will of God they were all drowned" (Exodus 14.27). As he was speaking the hostile ships with foaming prows were only a stone's throw away. But he stood in the bows of the ship, and thrust his hand out towards them.

"Thus far and no farther!" he shouted.

Miracle of faith! The ships stopped, and quite contrary to the movement of the oars, began to go backwards. The pirates were stunned. They had no desire to go back to shore, but in spite of everything they could do, toiling away trying to make the ships go forward, they went back more quickly than they had come.

Chapter XXXV

I pass over the rest of the voyage, lest my narrative get too big for one

volume. Suffice it to say that they sailed safely past the Cyclades, from whence they heard the voices of unclean spirits arising from the towns and villages, spreading down even as far as the coast, and arrived at last at the port of Paphus in Cyprus, a town celebrated in the songs of the poets. Here they saw the ruins of what once used to be, destroyed by the frequency of the earthquakes, and took up a humble existence about two miles from the city, rejoicing greatly at being able to remain in silence for a few days. But not twenty full days later, anyone throughout the whole island who was possessed by unclean spirits began to shout: "Hilarion the servant of Christ is here!" and felt compelled to seek him out. The people of Salamina, Cyrium, Lapetha and other towns all had the same cry, some of them shouting that they themselves were Hilarion, the servant of God, without knowing where he really was! Nevertheless, before a month had passed there were already about two hundred people, both men and women, gathered about him. He gazed at them, grieving that he was not being allowed to stay in silence, but nevertheless did violence to his own inclinations by belabouring them with urgent prayer, such that some of them were cured immediately, some within two or three days, and all of them by the end of a week.

Chapter XXXVI

He stayed there for two years, constantly wondering where he could fly to next. He sent Hesychius to Palestine to send greetings to the brothers and inspect the ashes of his monastery, telling him to return in Spring. When Hesychius returned, Hilarion then thought of going to Bucolia in Egypt, for the reason that there were no Christians there, only a wild and barbarous people, but Hesychius persuaded him it would be better simply to go to a more secret spot without leaving the island. He searched about in many directions, and at last took Hilarion to a place about twelve miles inland among steep and deserted mountains which it was hardly possible to climb up on hands and knees.

Once there he could take comfort in being in a remote and daunting environment, surrounded by trees, and yet with a stream flowing down from the upper slopes, an area which had obviously once been cultivated and had fruit bearing trees in abundance - from which however he never picked any fruit! There were the ruins of an ancient temple nearby, from which numberless voices of demons emanated night and day, so much so that you might have thought an army was approaching (so he said, and his disciples

bore this out). Being able to battle against the enemy at such close quarters pleased him, and he stayed there five years, with Hesychius keeping a constant eye on him. In this last phase of his life he was able to refocus himself, for only very rarely was anyone willing and able to seek him out because of the severe difficulties involved in getting there. Besides which the ordinary people were convinced that the place was haunted by ghosts.

Chapter XXXVII

One day he went out into the garden and found a man totally paralysed lying just outside. He asked Hesychius who he was and how he had got there.

"He is the bailiff of this estate," he replied, "which includes the garden we are in."

Hilarion wept and stretched out his hand.

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," he said, stand up and walk!"

Amazing speed! The words had hardly come out of his mouth before the man's limbs regained their strength and enabled him to stand up.

After this became widely known, many people in need refused to let a difficult and trackless journey deter them, and they found that there was nothing about the place which would enable him to escape from them. He began to drop hints that he would not be able to stay there much longer, not because of any thoughtless, childish pique, but because he shunned popularity, which he hated. He never desired anything other than to live humbly and in silence.

Chapter XXXVIII

In the eightieth year of Hilarion's age, while Hesychius was away, he wrote with his own hand a letter by way of making a will, leaving Hesychius everything he possessed, that is, a book of the Gospels, a sackcloth tunic, a cowl and a cloak. He became very ill, and many religious men came from Paphus to see him, many of whom heard him say that he was about to depart to the Lord, liberated from the chains of the flesh. A certain holy woman called Constantia, whose niece Hilarion had saved from death by anointing her with oil, urged them all not to delay for a minute after his death before covering him with earth in the garden, clothed in his hairshirt, his cowl and his sackcloth. While there was still a little warmth left in his body, and before his living human senses had departed from him, he opened his eyes and spoke:

"Go, what have you to fear?" he said. "Go, my soul, why do you hesitate? Nearly seventy years you have served Christ, how can you be frightened of

death?"

With these words he gave up his spirit. He was buried at once in the earth, before the news of his death was announced in the city. When the holy Hesychius heard in Palestine, he hurried back to Cyprus, making out that he wanted to live in that same garden, in order to ease the plight of a faithful farmer who in great peril of his life had been guarding it, and had concealed the body there for nearly ten months. He took it back to Maiuma, in the presence of a great crowd of monks and townspeople, where he laid him to rest in his old monastery, clothed in his old ragged tunic and cowl and sackcloth. His body was as incorrupt as if he were still alive, and gave off a sweet smell as if he had been anointed with perfumes.

Chapter XXXIX

As this little book draws to a close I must not keep silent about the devotion of that holy woman Constantia. When she was told the news that the body of Hilarion was in Palestine, the breath left her body, showing her love for the servant of God even in death. For she had been accustomed to spending nights in vigil as if present at his tomb, talking to him as if he were present and begging for his prayers. Even today, there is still a great rivalry between the Palestinians and the Cyprians, the former boasting of his body, but the latter quite certain that it was they who possessed his spirit. And yet it is in both places that great signs are to be seen daily, but especially in that little garden in Cyprus, a place which perhaps he had loved above all.

Life No 4, Book 1a

The Life of Saint Malchus, (Also St Onuphrius, further down page)

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on October 21.

This Life appears in Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, op.cit. not as a letter addressed to anyone in particular. Written probably in 391.]

Monk and Captive

by Jerome, presbyter

Prologue

Sailors contemplating a naval battle first of all steer their ship into the calm

waters of a harbour, ship the oars, get the grappling hooks ready, arrange the troops in order, take up their station, accustom themselves to stand firm as the ship glides on, so that what they learn in a simulated battle will hold no fears for them when it comes to the real thing. So, seeing that I have been silent for a long time (for the person who complained about my writings made me keep silent), I thought perhaps I might get in some practice, by writing just a brief article, before engaging in a longer history. If the Lord gives me time, and if my enemies won't follow me now that I am a fugitive and enclosed in a monastery, I plan to cover events from the coming of the Saviour until the present age, that is, from the Apostles to the latest minute of our time, how and by whom the Church was born and nourished, how it suffered under persecutions and has been crowned with martyrs, after which we come to the age of Christian princes, greater in power and riches, but meaner in virtues. But that can await another time. [This project apparently never came to fruition, though doubtless these Lives would have formed part of it.] For the present, let us do as we have just said.

The Life

Chapter I

Maronias is a quite unimportant little village about thirty miles to the east of Antioch in Syria. When I was a youth in Syria it used to be ruled by many different masters or patrons until it came into the possession of Pope Evagrius, [Bishop of Antioch at that time, well known to Jerome.] a necessary move in my opinion. I mention this to prove how I know the details of what I am writing about.

In those days there was an old man called Malchus, of Syrian nationality and language and, as I understand, a native of that place. I suppose in the Latin language 'Malchus' would become 'King'. There was an old woman who was associated with him, very infirm, not far away from death, as it seemed, and both of them were very devout in their religious practices. They spent so much time in the church that you would have thought they were another Zacharias and Elisabeth as described in the Gospel (Luke 1.5), except that there wasn't any John in evidence. I asked some of the local people about them, curious about their links with each other, whether they were actually married, or related, or just soul-mates. Everyone I asked declared with one voice that they were holy and pleasing to God and had done who knows how many miracles. Devoured with curiosity I went to see the man himself, hoping to find out the

truth of the matter. This is what he told me:

Chapter II

I was born in the hamlet of Nisibenus, the only child of my parents. Because I was the heir and the only hope of the family name continuing, they wanted me to marry, but I told them that I would rather become a monk. My father threatened me, my mother tried to soft-soap me into losing my virginity, which resulted in my running away from both home and family. I could not go east to Persia because it was occupied by the Roman army, so I went west, carrying with me a little food to keep me from starvation. I arrived at length at a desert near Chalcidos [a town in Syria], between Beroea and Imma, and slightly to the south of them. Here I found some monks, and I gave myself over into their governance, earning my bread by the labour of my hands and curbing my youthful lusts by fasting.

Chapter III

Many years later, thoughts of returning to my native land began to come into my mind, for I had heard that my father had died, though my mother was still alive. I thought I might care for her in her widowed state, and eventually sell the property, give some to the poor, build a monastery with some and keep enough to live on. How I blush to confess this faithlessness! My Abbot objected that this was a temptation of the devil. It was an occasion of sin presented by the ancient enemy under the guise of a good intention. It would be like a dog returning to his own vomit (Proverbs 26.11). Many monks were deceived in this way, for the devil never betrayed anyone by a frontal attack. He put many examples from Scripture before me, Adam and Eve to start with (Genesis 3.5), who were brought down by expecting to become gods.

When he could not dissuade me by argument he went down on his knees and begged me not to desert him, not to lose my own soul, for, having put my hand to the plough, I ought not to look back (Luke 9.62). Miserable wretch that I am, the worst possible course of action won the day, for I thought he was simply seeking his own advantage, not my own welfare at all. He followed me out of the monastery as if he were at a funeral paying his last respects.

"I see you, my son," he cried, "caught up in the snares of the devil. I brook no argument, I accept no excuses. He who leaves the sheepfold can expect to get bitten by wolves!"

Chapter IV

On the way from Beroea to Edessa, the public pathway passes through a deserted region, where the Saracens emerge from various hidden dens to make raids here and there. The risk they pose leads travellers to band together in these places, in order to minimise the danger. In the group that I was with there were men, women, old and young, as well as little children, to the number of about seventy. Suddenly there appeared a band of half naked Ishmaelites, riding camels and horses, wearing headbands, trailing long scarves behind them, quiverfuls of arrows hanging from their shoulders, and waving long bows and spears. They had come not to kill but to rob.

They seized us, divided us up into small groups, and carried us off in various different directions. So there was I, already repenting of my plans, heir to a considerable property, finding my only inheritance was to be slavery, in which I found my chance companion was to be a young woman. We were led, or rather carried on camels, through a vast desert, hanging on to them rather than just sitting on them, frightened of falling off. Our food was half-cooked meat, our drink camel's milk. We came at last to a wide river, over which we crossed to an inner desert, where, according to their custom, we were made to bow our heads before their leader, who was a woman, and her children. We had to learn how to accept that we were prisoners, with different clothing, that is, we were left almost bare, apart from a loincloth, such was the climate of the place.

I was put in charge of keeping the sheep, which was a great comfort to me in my misfortune, for it meant that I saw my masters and fellow slaves only rarely. It seemed to me that I had something in common with holy Jacob (Genesis 29). I also remembered Moses, both of whom in former times tended cattle in the desert. I was fed on cheese and milk. I prayed diligently, I sang the psalms which I had learned in the monastery. I began to enjoy my captivity, and I was glad of the judgment of God, in that the monastic life which I have been about to lose in my native land I had found again in the desert.

Chapter V

But one is never safe from the devil. O, the multiplicity and unexpectedness of his tricks! A malicious disaster was lying in wait for me. Now I had been following the precepts of the Apostle by faithfully serving my master as I would God (Ephesians 6.5, Colossians 3.22), and when my master saw that

his flock was flourishing and that there was no deceit in me, he decided to reward me by giving me the woman with whom I had been taken captive. Now this woman's husband had also been taken captive, but had been given to a different master. So I refused his gift, telling him that as a Christian it was not lawful for me to have the wife of a man still living. My master changed in an instant from someone magnanimous to someone in a rage, and came at me with drawn sword. If I had not hastily taken the woman's gentle hand, blood would have flowed. A deeper darkness, gloomier than ever, had come upon me.

I was forced to take my new wife into my rough shelter, both of us filled with misery rather than nuptial joy, each of us detesting the other, neither of us speaking. Now I felt the full force of my captivity, and I threw myself on the ground and mourned the monastic life which I had lost.

"How did I get into this miserable plight? Is this what my sins have brought me to, that I, a virgin, should now have my hair grow grey as a husband? If I do that now, what point was there in giving up parents, native land and family life for the sake of the Lord? For I gave those things up for the very purpose of not following that course. Perhaps it is because I gave in to a desire to seek my native land again that I am suffering these things now. What are you going to do, O my soul? Are you going to perish, or conquer? Wait for the hand of the Lord, or dig a grave for yourself with your own sword? Turn the sword against yourself; the death of your soul is more to be feared than the death of your body. Shamefastness has brought its own martyrdom. Let this unsung witness to Christ lie here in the desert. I shall be my own persecutor and martyr."

And then in my darkness I drew a gleaming sword and turned the point against myself.

"Farewell, unhappy woman," I said. "You now have a martyr instead of a husband."

She threw herself at my feet.

"I beg you in the name of Jesus Christ," she said, "There is no need for your blood to be mingled with mine. Better for you to delay a while and turn the sword against me, that we may be united in that way. For even if my own husband is reunited with me I would still preserve the chastity that I have learned about in captivity. I would rather die than perish eternally. Why do you delay being joined to me? Take me as a wife of chastity, joined together in soul but not in body. Our masters can believe we are married, Christ knows

you are my brother. They will easily be convinced that we are married, when they see how much we love each other."

I was absolutely dumbfounded, I can tell you, lost in admiration for the virtue of this woman, whom I have loved even more as wife. I have never seen her naked, I have never laid a finger on her, fearing even in times of peace to lose sight of the goals I have striven after in the time of battle. Many days passed by in this 'marriage', and by our appearing to be married our masters looked upon us with greater favour. There was no question of my trying to escape, though sometimes I would spend as much as a whole month in solitude looking after the sheep.

Chapter VI

After having been alone in the desert for quite some time with nothing to see apart from earth and sky, I began to turn things over in my mind, especially thinking of the monastic community I had left. I envisaged the features of my spiritual father who had instructed me, cherished me, and lost me. As I was thinking, I noticed some ants swarming out of a narrow cleft in the rock, dealing with burdens bigger than their own bodies. Some were dragging grass seeds in their pincers, others digging earth out of their narrow entrance and heaping it up into ramparts intended to keep out water. They were obviously mindful of the coming winter, and were making sure their storehouses would not be damp and encourage seeds to germinate. Others were having a funeral, dragging along an ant's dead body. And what was even more wonderful to me was that those going out did not get in the way of those going in, and if one of them was struggling under the weight of its burden, another would come and lend extra strength. What a beautiful sight that day brought to my eyes! I thought of Solomon, urging us to consider the industry of the ant as an example to stir up sluggish minds (Proverbs 6.6), and I began to feel weary of my captivity, longing for the monastic cell and the sort of care shown for each other by those ants, where all work is undertaken together, no one has any private property, and everything belongs to all.

My wife met me as I returned home, unable to conceal the sadness in my face. She asked why I looked so depressed. When I told her, she did not laugh me to scorn but suggested that we should escape.

"Hush, hush!" I said. "Though I must say I admire your faith." And we whispered together half way between hope and fear.

Chapter VII

There were two wonderfully large he-goats in my flock. I slaughtered them both, made bags out of their skins, and prepared the meat as food for the journey. Early one evening, when our masters thought we had gone to sleep, we began our journey, carrying the bags and some of the meat. When we came to the river, ten miles away, we inflated the bags, grasped hold of them, and entrusted ourselves to the waters, paddling with our feet, so that little by little the stream would carry us to a place on the opposite bank a long way further down than the place where we entered, in the hope that any pursuers would lose the trail. Our meat got thoroughly soaked while we were doing this, besides which we dropped some of it, so that we scarcely had three days food left. Mindful that we might be thirsty later on, we drank till we could drink no more, and fled as fast as we could, constantly looking over our shoulders. We moved mostly at night, not only because of the burning heat of the sun, but also because of the ever-present threat of wandering Saracens. I tremble miserably even to think of it, and even though I am now quite secure, my whole body shudders.

Chapter VIII

On the third day we could just about make out two men on camels, following us quickly in the distance. Night was beginning to fall, we were terrified, we thought it must be our master, we thought we must be near death. Our fear was increasing as we thought of our footprints plainly there in the sand, when we noticed a cave on our right, going back into the cliff. We went inside, in spite of our fears that poisonous beasts might be seeking the shadows there as daylight faded - vipers, spiders, scorpions and such like. Just inside the entrance we took refuge in a side passage on the left. Going in any further would be in vain, for by fleeing from death we could equally easily be running to meet death. With that thought in mind we knew that if the Lord takes pity on miserable wretches we would be safe, though if he condemns the sinner we were in our tomb.

Imagine our state of mind, imagine our terror, when we saw our master and another of his slaves not far away outside the cave, and led by our footprints approaching our hiding place. We knew we could expect a fate far more awful than death. With stammering tongue I breathed a prayer to the Lord in great fear, not daring to move. He sent his slave in to drag us out of the cave, while he held on to the camels with drawn sword, waiting for us to come out. The

servant went in for about three or four cubits. We could see his back as we looked out of our hiding place. He sent his voice echoing down the passage. "Come out, you wretches, come out, you gallows fodder, come out and die! Don't just stand there. What are you waiting for? It is your lord and master who summons you."

He had hardly spoken when suddenly we saw a lioness rush out of the darkness, grip the man by the throat, and drag him back all covered in blood. O good Jesus! What was our terror! And yet what was our joy! We had seen our enemy perish without the master being aware of it. The master began to wonder why the servant was taking so long, and thought that perhaps there was a fight of two against one going on. Unable to restrain his anger any longer he entered the cave, trusting in his drawn sword, berating furiously his servant's stupidity, until he too was laid low by the wild beast, which had evidently been hiding there before us. Who ever would have believed that a beast would have fought for us before our very eyes!

Chapter IX

With a second slaughter having taken place before our eyes we were still very frightened, wondering whether it was really safer to be threatened by a raving lioness than by an angry human. We were inwardly shattered, and dared not move, waiting to see what would happen in the midst of such great danger, but trusting in our own innocence as a wall of defence. In the morning the lioness picked up her cub in her mouth and went out, very cautiously, as if in danger, as if she were being observed. We were left in sole possession of our guesthouse. We could not believe it firmly enough to come out of our hiding place. We hesitated for a long time, wondering whether to go on, imagining that we might still be attacked again.

Chapter X

We spent the whole day in fear before we finally emerged and found the camels outside, chewing the cud. We mounted them, refreshed ourselves by a new supply of food, and on the tenth day of our journey through the desert arrived at a Roman fort. We reported to the tribune, to whom we gave a full account of what had happened to us. He sent us to Sabianus, the duke of Mesopotamia. Here we sold the camels. I found that my old abbot had fallen asleep in the Lord, but I rejoined the monks of his community. I saw my 'wife' safely into a community of virgins, caring for her as I would for a sister,

though I would not have trusted myself to live with her as a sister.

* * * * *

Chapter XI

So that was what Malchus told me when I was young. I am telling you the story now I am old, a celibate man expounding a story of chastity. I urge all virgins to preserve their chastity. And tell those who come after you how modesty was never compromised in the midst of swords and deserts and beasts, and how a man dedicated to Christ can die but can never be overcome.

Life No5

The Life of Saint Onuphrius, Hermit [Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on June 12.]

by Abba Paphnutius

translated anonymously into Latin from the Greek

Prologue

by the anonymous translator.

Quite recently in looking through some Greek writings I came across this Life of Onuphrius. I already knew about it from what I was told by Gregory, that venerable and most prudent man. Having found it, I translated it by the grace of God into Latin, so that his commendable life, as far as my own powers might allow, should be better known, and provide an object of admiration and imitation for the reader. I beg you to overlook my untutored style, and exercise some forbearance as you ponder how great a labour the man of God patiently and generously took upon himself, as he spurned all the glory of worldly vanity, and by the straitness of his living gained for himself the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

The Life

Paphnutius of blessed memory reveals some of his private acts and thoughts as follows:

Chapter I

One day as I, Paphnutius, was meditating in solitude and silence, it came into my mind that I should make a visit to all the places in the desert where there were holy monks, to shed light on how they habitually lived their lives of

devotion, and learn to understand the way in which they served God. So it was that I quietly began my journey, eager to make this pleasurable venture into the desert. I carried some bread and water with me to sustain me in the labour of my journey, but by the end of the fourth day it had all gone. My limbs were beginning to lose their strength for lack of sustenance. However by the light of divine grace my imminent death was staved off, and gathering up my strength I resumed my journey, carrying on for another four days, eating nothing. At the end of this I was completely exhausted, and lay prostrate on the ground as if dead.

And suddenly I was gladdened by help from heaven, for I saw a man in front of me who was unbelievably glorious, splendidly terrifying, impressively beautiful, colossally tall, illustrious of appearance. I was powerfully overcome at the sight, but with untroubled countenance he came close to me, and touched first my hands and then my lips. My strength flowed back strongly into me, and I rose to my feet immediately. By God's good favour I kept on going through the desert for seventeen days, to arrive at whatsoever place the Lord wished to show me, unworthy servant though I am, until such time as I might cease from my labour.

Chapter II

As I was wearily resting, and thinking of how I had struggled to arrive at where I was, I saw in the distance a man terrible to behold. He was covered all over in hair like a wild beast. His hair was so thick that it completely concealed the whole of his body. His only clothing was a loincloth of leaves and grasses. The very sight of him filled me with awe, whether from fear or wonder I was not quite sure. I had never before set eyes on such an extraordinary sight in human shape. I didn't know what to do, but as I valued my life I took refuge

Chapter II (continued), Life of St Onuphrius, Book 1a

in flight, and clambered hastily up a nearby cliff face. In trembling haste I hid myself under some thick leafy plants, breathing heavily. Age and abstinence had nearly become the death of me. The man saw me on the cliff and cried out to me in a loud voice.

"Come down from the mountainside, you man of God. Don't be afraid. I am just a frail mortal man like you."

Reassured by these words I recovered my wits and came down, and going up to the holy man, hesitantly prostrated myself at his feet.

"Get up, get up," he said. "You mustn't kneel before me. You too are a servant of God and your name is Paphnutius, beloved of the Saints."

I got up at once, and although I was very tired it was with great joy that I sat down in front of him, with a keen desire to know who he was, and what sort of a life he lived.

"God who has guided me through the desert has fulfilled my heart's desire," I said. "My limbs and joints which were almost disintegrating already begin to feel refreshed. But my mind still thirsts for enlightenment. Tell me, reverend sir, with a fervent heart I beg you, I appeal to you in the name of him for the sake of whose love you inhabit the lonely wastes of this desert, whence did you come, what is your name, how long have you been here. I beg you, tell me plainly."

He could obviously see how keenly I wanted to know about the purpose of his life, and he gave me his answer.

Chapter III

"I can see how earnestly you wish to know about the tribulations of my long life, beloved brother. Have no fear, I shall tell you everything, right from the beginning. I am called Onuphrius, an unworthy sinner, and I have been living my laborious life in this desert for nearly seventy years. I have the wild beasts for company, my regular food is fruit and herbs, I lay my miserable body down to sleep in mountainsides, in caves, and in valleys. Throughout all these years I have seen no one except you, and I have not been supplied with food by any human being.

"I was brought up in the monastery of Hermopolis in the Thebaid, where there were about a hundred monks. Their life was such that they lived equably with each other in will and in deed. They were of one heart and one spirit, bowing their heads under the yoke and discipline of a holy rule, unworried by the ups and downs of life in the world. What pleased one pleased all. They walked before God with holy minds, pure faith, and perfect charity. Night and day they never ceased serving him with meekness and patience. They had such a love of silence, as part of their abstinence, that no one dared say a word, except by way of asking a necessary question or giving an apposite answer. I

too received there the food of holy doctrine in my youth, there I learned from the brothers the model of a regular life. I was secure in the love they had for me, and they diligently instructed me how I ought to serve the commandments of God.

Chapter IV

"Above all I frequently heard the venerable brothers praising the life of our holy father Elias, who disciplined himself in the desert with such abstinence and prayer that the Lord found him worthy to be given exceedingly great virtues. As he was carried away in a chariot of fire, he imparted his gifts of the holy Spirit to his disciple, and in his old age he did not see death (2 Kings 2.12). Then they would go on to the example of the blessed John Baptist who shines brightly through the pages of the New Testament. Throughout a period of many years he had been called aside for a special divine purpose, disciplining his body until such time as he was counted worthy to baptise the Redeemer of the world, when he pointed up to the heavens and declared him to be the Lamb of God.

Chapter V

"As I listened to them talking of such things, I found I had questions to ask.

"'Why do you stand in such awe of their life and miracles, good sirs,' I asked, 'and why do you rehearse their deeds so zealously? Are you not as strong as they were, living in the desert as you do? Or are you of less account than them?'

"'My son', they replied, 'those who live without the help of any other human being are much stronger than we are. Each one of us is constantly being observed by everyone else, we all share in the celebration of the divine office, our food is ready for us at meal time, if anyone of us is ill or suffers from any other kind of human disability, the brothers are there to care for us with all kindness. We live in spacious buildings which shelter us from the summer heat and from the rain in winter. We are protected from the turbulence of wind and tempest. But the monks in the desert have no comfort except in God. If at any time they are suffering trials and tribulations, or if they begin to wage war with the devil, that ancient enemy of the human race, who is there for them? Who can help them? But when human help is lacking, divine help is always present. And if they are hungry, who will feed them? If thirsty, who will give them water where there is no food or water?

"It is beyond all doubt that desert places demand the maximum amount of labour, for the necessities of life are not readily available. The first essential for anyone deciding to live in solitude, therefore, is to be certain of standing firmly in the fear of God. They crucify their bodies in hunger and thirst, in labour and suffering. They fight manfully against the wiles of the devil, and against the fiery darts of the wicked they conquer with the sword of the spirit. That ancient enemy, the fount of all evil, strives always to bring them to ruin and enrol them in the company of the wicked, by undermining the good will with which they set out, by ensnaring their minds in thoughts of worldly pleasures, and making them weary of persevering in the work they have begun.

"But the Almighty God never abandons those who put their trust in him, for he surrounds them with the armour of his power, and the attacks of Satan have no power against them, for they are protected by divine mercy from on high. They are constantly under the protection of the Angels of God who habitually bring them everything they need. They drink water from the stony rock (Psalms 78.15), which, being interpreted, is Christ. For it is written: "The holy ones who trust in the Lord will be strong, they shall rise up with wings as eagles, they shall fly and shall not fall, they shall run and not be weary" (Isaiah 40.31). And again: "Those who thirst shall be refreshed by heavenly fountains, and green leaves shall melt in their mouths like honey" (cf. Exodus 16.31).

"Whenever the devil gathers his forces against them, they arise and lift up their hands to God, faithfully pouring out their prayers before the divine majesty. Help from heaven is there for them immediately, and the crafty arrows of the enemy are straightway destroyed. Have you not understood, my son, what is written in the Psalms? "He forgets not the suffering of the poor without end; the longsuffering of the poor will not last for ever" (Psalms 9.12). And again: "The Lord will hear them in the time of trouble, and will deliver them in the narrow places" (Psalms 107.19). "Truly each one shall receive his reward according to his labour" (1 Corinthians 3.8). "Blessed is the man who is always fearful" (Proverbs 28.14), who seeks the will of God in this present life, and takes care of the weak. Rest assured, my son, that the Angels of God are always round about the righteous, and are ever enlightening their bodies and souls with power from above.'

"This was the instruction carefully given me in the monastery by the holy Fathers, and I began to picture silently the glorious bliss enjoyed in heaven, by those who for the love of God have endured great trials here on earth. My heart burned within me, my mind began to be set on spurning worldly joys completely, and seeking my heavenly father with all my might, as the psalmist says: 'It is good for me to cleave unto God and put my hope in the Lord my God' (Psalms 73.28)

Chapter VII

As a result of carefully thinking these things over I was moved to get up quietly in the middle of the night, take some bread and enough pulse to last me for a few days, and I set off, trusting in the guidance and goodness of God to show me a place where I might live. As I went from that monastery in the mountains into the desert where I intended to remain, I suddenly saw a shining light in front of me on the way, which filled me with fear to such an extent that I thought I had better go back to the monastery whence I had come. Then suddenly I saw a man of most beautiful appearance come towards me out of that ray of shining light.

"'Fear not,' he said, 'I am your guardian Angel, whom God has assigned to you right from the beginning, to be with you by God's command and to lead you into the desert. Be perfected, walk humbly with God, labour joyfully, keep guard over your heart at all times, live uncomplainingly, persevere in good works. Rest assured I shall never leave you until such time as I shall bear you up into the presence of his Majesty most high.'

"Thus spoke the Angel, who became my companion at the beginning of my journey.

Chapter VIII

"We went on for about six or seven miles until we came to a rather insignificant looking cave. I went closer to see if there were anyone inside, and as is the custom of monks I humbly called out to ask a blessing. I suddenly saw a most holy man emerge, and I prostrated myself on the ground before him. But he stretched out his hands, lifted me up and offered me the kiss of peace.

"'Come inside, my son,' he said. 'You are my brother in the life of the desert. God grant that you remain always in his fear, and that all your doings may be pleasing in his sight.'

"I went in and stayed with him for many days, eager to know what he did, wanting to find out about his solitary life. He knew what it was I wanted to know, and in words of most loving kindness gave me some wonderful advice about how to counter the snares of the devil.

"'Arise, my son,' he urged me, after I had spent some days with him. 'Depart from me now. It is time for you to go into the inner desert, and there dwell alone in some other cave. Fight bravely, and you will overcome all the temptations of the devil. It is God's will that you be tested in this desert, to see whether you can fulfil all his commandments. "For his commandments are faithful and will endure for ever, grounded in truth and justice." (Psalms 111.7-8)'

"Having said this, the holy man arose and came with me, and travelled with me for four days into the inner desert. On the fifth day we came to a place in Calidiomea where there were some palm trees.

"'See, brother,' said the man of God, 'here is the place which God has prepared for you.'

"And he stayed with me for a further thirty days, teaching me how to serve the teachings of God's commandments with watchful diligence. At last he commended me to God in his holy prayers, and went back to his own place. He continued to visit me once a year, and never ceased to admonish me with his godly words about how to live in simplicity and diligence.

Chapter IX

"There came a time when he visited me as usual and fell down to the ground as he greeted me. He had given up his soul to the Lord and had fallen asleep. I was overcome with grief, and flung myself down, weeping floods of tears which rose up from within me. And then I took up his body and committed it to the earth of Calidiomea."

Chapter X

"Holy Father," I said, in reply to all that the most holy Onuphrius had said to me, "I sense that you must have persevered through some rather difficult adversities in this desert in the name of Christ."

"Believe me, beloved brother," the holy man replied, "I have endured such things in this desert that I have often thought I was very near death. There have been so many times in my life when hope has failed me and I have scarcely had any breath left in my body. Scorched by day in the heat and

burning fire of the sun, exposed to dew and hoar frost by night, fainting from hunger and thirst - O how many such things have I suffered! I cannot tell you how many wounds and hard knocks must be suffered by anyone who is willing to die for the love of God, nor would it be right to do so. But the Lord rewards the labours of his Saints (Wisdom 10.17), for his riches are beyond telling, nor can they be diminished. Through all the manifold pains and torments that I have suffered, cold and heat, hunger and thirst, his power has strengthened me with the heavenly riches of the company of Angels. By spurning food for the body I have been found worthy to receive the bread of heaven. My holy Angel has daily brought me bread, and water in due measure, to refresh my body lest it faint, that I might continue in the praise of God.

"The palm trees have this property that the dates ripen twelve times a year. I picked them daily and ate them together with green herbs, and they were in my mouth as the honey and the honeycomb. In the Gospel it is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Matthew 4.4). Brother Paphnutius, if you wish to fulfil the will of God, everything necessary is ready for you. For the Truth himself counsels you, 'Take no thought for what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, or what you shall wear, for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. Wherefore seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you'" (Matthew 6 31-33).

Chapter XI

I was lost in admiration for what this blessed man Onuphrius was telling me about his deeds and labours.

"Tell me, good Father," I asked, "do you receive Communion from anyone on the Sabbath, or Day of the Lord?"

"I find every Sabbath or Day of the Lord that the Angel of the Lord has prepared the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring me. With his own hand he gives me these precious gifts, for the everlasting salvation of my life. Indeed all the monks who lead a spiritual life in the desert share in this joy. If perchance any holy hermit living in solitude has a desire to see another human being he is carried up hence by an Angel into heaven where he can contemplate the vision of the souls of the righteous, shining like the sun in the kingdom of the Father. There, in the company of Angels, they see their own souls joined together with the souls of the blessed. And all who struggle in the battle with their whole mind, their whole heart and all their

strength abound in good works in order that they may be found worthy to share in the glory of that heavenly country with Christ and all his Saints." As I listened to all these things that the venerable Onuphrius was telling me at the top of his little mountain where he met me, I was filled with such great joy that every hardship which I had suffered on my journey was banished into oblivion.

Chapter XII

"Father," I said, "I count myself to be numbered among the blessed for having been found worthy to meet you, and to hear of all your wonderful works. What you have told me is so beautiful, so honey-sweet, and my heart is so pierced to the core, that I can truly say with the Psalmist, 'How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb in my mouth.'" (Psalms 119.103).

"Come with me, my son," he said. "Come and see where I live. No more words for the moment."

He got up immediately, moved away, and I followed him. He led me on for about three miles until we arrived at his spiritual home in Calidiomea, a pleasing spot among the palm trees. We first poured out prayers to God, then sat and conversed together on spiritual themes. At the precise moment of sunset I noticed some bread and a little water. The man of God could see how wearied I was.

"Come now, my son," he said, "I can see that you are almost about to faint unless you take some food. So come and eat."

"As the Lord liveth, (1 Kings 17.12) and as the Lord my God is blessed in whose sight we live," I said, "I will neither eat nor drink unless we both eat together in perfect charity."

I was only just able to persuade him to do as I asked. But when he saw I was serious he broke the bread and shared it with me, and we ate and were satisfied; in fact there were some fragments left over from our meal. We passed almost the whole night without sleep as we offered up divine praise.

Chapter XIII

After we had observed the hours of prayer next morning, I noticed that he had gone very pale.

"Is there something the matter with you?" I asked.

"Don't be over alarmed, brother Paphnutius," he said, "but I think that the

omnipotent God has directed your footsteps into this desert that you may give me an honourable burial, and commit my body to the earth. For this is the hour when my soul is to be released from its earthly chains and carried away to its creator in the kingdom of heaven. I know what you intend to do, my beloved brother, so when you go back to Egypt, tell all your brothers and all the worshippers of Christ about me. I have made a request to God which he has granted me: If anyone offers the holy sacrifice for the love of my name in the sight of our Lord Jesus Christ and gives himself wholly to the praise of God, he will be able to resist all the temptations of the devil and will be freed from all the chains of human wickedness, and will be able to enjoy the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven with the holy Angels for ever.

"And anyone who is not authorised to make the offering or who cannot afford to pay for it, let him give an alms to the poor in the name of the Lord and in his honour, and I will pray for him in the sight of God that he may be found worthy to enjoy the life above in the heavenly realms.

"If there is anyone who cannot offer the sacrifice or give alms, let him offer sweet smelling incense to the Lord our God for love of me, and I will ask that he enjoy perpetual bliss."

"Do not be angry with me, Father," I said, "if I ask you what if there is someone who has no incense, and no money to offer to God. How should he call upon you so that he will not suffer from the lack of your blessing?"

"If there is any poor person in the desert or in any other place who cannot offer the sacrifice, or give alms or incense, let him arise and stretch out his hands before the Lord and say the Paternoster, the Lord's prayer, three times, keeping me firmly in his mind, and let him sing a psalm in the name of the holy Trinity. And I will truly pray for him to the Lord that he may be found worthy to partake in the life of heaven with all the Saints of God."

Chapter XIV

I had a further request to make to him.

"If you think I am worthy, and if you could find it in your heart to make me a gift, let me have this place to live in after your death."

"No, that cannot be granted you," he said. "God did not guide your journey through this desert in order for you to find a place to live in, but that you should enjoy the company of the righteous in the desert, and then take pains to tell the world about what you have learnt in the desert. Go back to Egypt. Live there for the rest of your life. Be perfect in good works, and you will enjoy the

crown of perpetual glory."

Chapter XV

In response to what the man of God was saying I fell down at his feet.

"Beloved Father," I said, "I know that whatever you ask of God, the Lord will grant you because of the immense labour of the long struggle that you have endured by disciplining your body for seventy years in the name of the Lord. Grant me the gift of your holy blessing, that I may be like you in virtue, and that my spirit may always be guided by your intercessions, and that I may be found worthy to share with you in the life to come."

"Paphnutius," he replied, "do not worry. The Lord will grant that your desire will stand firm. Stand in faith, act manfully (1 Corinthians 16.13), keep your eyes and your mind always on God, keep the commandments, do not be weary in well-doing, grasp hold of eternal life. May the Angels of God protect you and keep you from every working of wickedness, that you may be found pure and spotless before God in the day of judgment."

Weeping, he prayed to the Lord, bent his knees and said, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

As he said this, a brilliant light surrounded him, and his holy soul left his body in a flash of blinding light. [Probable date, c.400, according to Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, 6th Edition, A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd. 1989]

Chapter XVI

And I suddenly heard the voice of a multitude of Angels praising God as the most holy soul of Saint Onuphrius departed, and that angelic song resounded with ineffable joy among all the stars of the universe, while the heavenly armies carried the soul of this distinguished warrior up to heaven. I wept profusely, I groaned inwardly, rivers of tears flowed down, I beat my breast over and over again. I complained in sadness that hardly had I met him than I was no longer able to enjoy his company.

Chapter XVI (continued), *Life of St Onuphrius*, Book 1a (Also St Pachomius, further down this page)

I tore my tunic in half, keeping half to cover my body and using half in which to wrap his blessed body. I buried him in the natural tomb of a cave in the solid rock. I was alone, I wept afresh. Still weeping, I made as if to enter the cave where he had lived, but as I stood in front of it, it collapsed with a mighty roar, and the palm trees were torn up by the roots and lay prostrate. And then I knew that it was not God's will that I, Paphnutius, should live in that place. I returned to Egypt, and there I told the Church all that I had seen and heard.

The holy Onuphrius died on the eleventh day of June, that is the third day before the Ides. His blessings are with us to this present day to the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour and power unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 6

The Life of Saint Pachomius, [c.290 - 346. Feast Day May 14.]

Abbot of Tabennisi

by an unknown Greek Author

translated into Latin from the Greek

by Dionysius Exiguus, Abbot of Rome. [A Scythian monk who lived in Rome c.500 - 550. 'Exiguus' was the name he gave himself. It carries the meaning of 'small, poor, unimportant']

Prologue by Dionysius

Dionysius Exiguus to my revered Lady, the glorious handmaid of Christ:
[Rosweyde conjectures that this was a Roman widow called Galla, who according to Gregory the Great lived the life of a recluse on the Vatican Hill. She died in 550, and is celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on October 5.]

I reply to your respected request, and the valued opportunity it offers, by offering you the Life of Saint Pachomius, faithfully translated into Latin from its Greek source. Your initiative has long been reproaching me for my delay in fulfilling the promise I had made, so it would not be right for me to delay any longer, especially when you are someone who is accustomed to expect a solemn promise rather than a mere good intention. You have eagerly desired to learn more about the disciplines of the blessed Fathers, and by the grace of Christ there is a great number of stories which are there to be read and imitated. Because of the great interest you have shown in gathering together the deeds of each one of them, the credit for this document as a divine gift for

future ages is yours.

You have said that you pay a great deal of attention to the virtues you admire so much in the lives of the Saints. Indeed, you have become one with them by the illustrious quality of your own deeds. For it is no use admiring virtue unless you aspire to it yourself. It is by living like the Saints that you show your union with them, just as on the contrary a life at odds with the Saints is like a great family disruption. It frequently gives rise to terrible family hatreds, senseless disputes, blind and stupid malice which can lead even to the shedding of blood, with the wicked at odds with the good, the avaricious with the generous, the turbulent with the peaceful, the lazy with the industrious, the angry with the placid, the rough with the gentle, the brazen with the modest, the stupid with the wise, the crafty with the simple, the overbearing with the meek. But the Apostle of the Gentiles sounds a trumpet call even more effectively about the nature of these people when he inveighs against the dangers of these present times in the following words: 'For these men are lovers of self, greedy, puffed up, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, impious, without affection, without peacefulness, wrongdoers, incontinent, ungentle, unkind, betrayers, violent, arrogant, who love pleasure more than they love God' (2 Timothy 3.2-3).

Here the most blessed Paul sums up in a few wonderful words what I was saying earlier in a great many words, for he shows how those who love pleasure become captive to the most vicious desires. All sorts of evils arise when God is despised and pleasures are loved. Through a love of pleasure the devil entices and deceives, he titillates in order to bring about ruin, he flatters in order to destroy. To prevent future joy being preferred to the present, heavenly things to earthly, eternal things to transitory, he says, 'Those who love pleasures more than God, although they may have the appearance of piety, deny the power of all virtue' (Ibid. 5). In other words they are Christians in name but not in deed, and do more damage as enemies in our midst than enemies from outside; as part of the Church they disfigure the members of the Church. The Apostle gives us a forthright warning that we should avoid their company, and be separated from them not just by physical space but by our different standards of behaviour. Nor should anyone be surprised that these vermin are the enemies of the righteous when miserably and deceitfully they don't even spare each other, but quarrel fiercely among themselves. Your holy and glorious father, whose servant I am, has not only proved worthy to endure their attacks patiently and bravely but by his blessed death has triumphed over

the whole world for the sake of the Truth who is Christ. He followed in almost every point the perfect rule of life of the Saints, and I earnestly desire to write learnedly and fluently about those rules so that it may be known in every place how your father came to be so famous and glorious, and how the human virtues of someone of this present day are to be admired. By the grace of Christ you stand in his inheritance, and may bequeath it to posterity in the shape of a book.

The Prologue of the Author

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the fount of wisdom and light of true knowledge, the true Word of God the father, by whom all things were made, is aware of our weakness and how prone we are to fall headlong into sin, but of his goodness he has offered us many remedies. Abraham our father was obedient to the commands of God, and in offering his own son as a sacrifice was found pleasing to God. And God swore by himself: 'In blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply you, as many as the stars of heaven in number, and numberless as the sands of the seashore. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (Genesis 22.17-18). And the Apostle has lessons for us concerning this seed, for he says, 'I don't say seeds, in the plural, but seed, in the singular. And this seed is Christ' (Galatians 3.16).

And all the holy Prophets foresaw by the inspiration of the holy Spirit the hidden things of our salvation. Knowing that God cannot lie, they announced beforehand the heavenly medicines that would be available for our illnesses, and prayed continuously that he might look favourably on the human race. And the merciful Lord, who always anticipates our godly desires, never deserts those who seek him with their whole heart, but has fulfilled those promises in these last days by sending his only Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4.4), who suffered in the likeness of our mortal flesh, and by his death destroyed him who had the power of death (Hebrews 2.14). And while in his divinity it remained impossible for him to suffer, he redeemed us from corruption and destruction. He completed the work of redemption for all people by washing us in the forgiveness of sins and giving us life, drawing every one towards the true faith by means of the teaching of the Apostles. As it says in the Gospel, 'Go and teach all nations and baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28.19), so he has enfolded us into the bosom of his infinite love.

But as the proclamation of the Gospel has shone forth in all lands, and many

by the grace of Christ have been adopted as sons, so the enemy of the human race has burned with rage, and waged much more severe and testing battles against the servants of God than he used to. Accursed and faithless, he has striven to do everything he can to obstruct the peacefulness of our journey to the heavenly realms. But his intentions have been foiled and brought to naught, as by the help of the gifts of God his own crafty tricks have been turned against him, bringing confusion to himself and eternal glory to the servants of Christ. For when by the Lord's permission, the pagan Emperors rose up and brought savage and stormy persecutions against Christians everywhere who were battling faithfully and patiently in spiritual warfare, many in Egypt became holy Martyrs, through all kinds of tortures enduring unto death in the name of Christ, and along with Peter the bishop of Alexandria, [Martyred in 311. Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on November 26.] gained an eternal crown and obtained the reward of immortality.

And the multitude of the faithful began to increase daily, growing wonderfully in every place. Many churches flourished in zealous memory of the Martyrs, and monasteries most often among that number, practising abstinence as they renounced the world and adorned the secret places of solitude. People from all nations who had begun to believe in Christ were inspired by the sufferings of the Martyrs who had not wavered in their confession of Christ, and by the grace of the Lord they began to imitate the Saints in their life and discipline. They took to themselves this saying of the Apostle, 'They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, needy, straitened, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering alone among the mountains, in caves and holes in the earth' (Hebrews 11.37-38). They sought the quietness of solitude, and by looking for the joyous divine gift of their own salvation through faith, they have furnished an example to others of a more sublime and sacred life. Freed from all earthly cares, they emulated the holiness of the Angels while still living in this mortal flesh. They scaled the heights of virtue, their brilliance was beyond belief, they were manifestly in no way inferior to the Fathers of antiquity, and their merits were the equal of those who have striven even unto death in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For they have undermined all the powers of those invisible enemies of whom the Apostle speaks, 'For we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places' (Ephesians 6.12). By forestalling the multiform

attacks of the ancient serpent they trod his head underfoot, and obtained those eternal rewards of which it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of humankind, what God has prepared for those who love him' (Isaiah 64.4 & 1 Corinthians 2.9).

The Life

Chapter I

Throughout the whole of that time the outstanding life of blessed Antony was held up as an example for all to follow. He stood out as emulating the examples of Elijah and Elisha and the holy John Baptist, seeking with single-minded zeal the hidden places of the inner desert, where in his love for virtue he lived the life of heaven. The holy Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, bore witness to him with his own pen. He was a worthy and perceptive interpreter of Antony's way of life. At the request of his brothers in Christ he wrote the Life of Antony for the edification of many, and as a model for spiritual men. In the course of that work he also makes mention of Ammon [Vita Antonii cap.xxxii] who by the grace of God laid the foundations of the life now lived by those brothers in Mount Nitria. He also told us something of how that holy man Theodore, [ibid] when he was with Antony, overcame the multifarious deceits of the devil with single-minded purpose and faith unfeigned before God. And thus in the overflowing grace of God he openly proclaimed what is celebrated in the Psalms, 'You have visited the earth and watered it, you have multiplied its riches' (Psalms 65.10). For joy and gladness has arisen in place of sadness and groaning, happiness and security in place of anxiety and misery.

Hence it is that those wonderful men, our monastic Fathers, have emerged in almost every region. Their names are written in the book of life. At that time there were very few monks in Egypt and the Thebaid, but after the persecutions of those cruel princes Diocletian and Maximian, a multitude of the Gentiles came in, as God had fore-ordained (Romans 11.25). The fertility of the Church was shown forth by its abundant fruitfulness, as the holy bishops with their Apostolic teachings led the way in the journey of faith by the integrity of their own lives.

Chapter II

And it was at this time that Pachomius, who lived in the Thebaid, by the grace of God became a Christian. He came of pagan parents and religion, and is said

to have sought after virtue even as an adolescent by means of rigorous fasting. I mention this fact for the glory of Christ who has called us out of darkness into light, and for the benefit of those who may be reading this. For his beginnings in a strict way of life as a young person go a long way towards explaining his later perfection.

Chapter III

While he was still a boy he went with his parents to offer a sacrifice to an idol on the banks of the river Nile. But when the filthy pagan priest tried to perform his usual sacrilegious rites, the presence of Pachomius prevented the usual manifestations of the demon from happening. The priest stood as motionless as the idol he was worshipping, unable to understand why the demons were not giving their usual response, until at last an evil spirit revealed to him that it was because of Pachomius that the demons had been unusually silent.

"Why has this enemy of the gods come here?" he shouted frantically. "Drive him out! Get rid of him!"

When his parents heard this, they realised that he was parting company with them, and they were grievously upset, not least because he had been declared so forcefully an enemy of the gods. They were at their wits' end to know what to do with him, because he had spat out the wine of the demons' sacrifice before he had even tasted it. They knew that they could not understand it at all, but they just kept quiet. They saw to it that he was instructed in Egyptian learning and moulded in the study of the ancients.

Chapter IV

It was at this time, after the persecutions, that Constantine won supreme command [312 AD] and carried out a campaign against the tyranny of Maxentius. He issued a royal decree that selected youths should be conscripted into military service, among whom was Pachomius, then aged twenty, as he himself later confirmed. As he was being carried off with others on board ship to foreign parts, they docked one evening in a certain port where the citizens, on seeing how strictly the raw recruits were being guarded, enquired what their situation was, and motivated by the commandments of Christ, took great pity on their miserable plight and brought them some refreshments. Pachomius was very surprised at what they were doing and asked who these men were who were so eager and willing to perform such

humble acts of mercy.

He was told they were Christians, who were in the habit of doing acts of kindness to everyone, but especially towards travellers. He learned also what it meant to be called a Christian. For he was told that they were godly people, followers of a genuine religion, who believed in the name of Jesus Christ the only begotten son of God, who were well disposed to all people, and hoped that God would reward them for all their good works in the life to come.

Pachomius' heart was stirred on hearing this, and, illumined by the light of God, he felt a great attraction towards the Christian faith. The fear of God was ignited in him, and drawing aside a little from his companions he lifted up his hands to the heavens.

"O Almighty God who made heaven and earth," he said, "if you will hearken to my prayer and show me how to order my life according to your holy name, and free me from my oppressive shackles, then I pledge myself to your service all the days of my life. I will turn my back on the world and cleave only to you."

He returned to his companions and the next day they set sail from that country. As they sailed about from place to place, Pachomius never succumbed to any of the illicit pleasures of the body or the world which might have tempted him. He was ever mindful of his promise and vow to serve God. By the help of divine grace he had been a lover of chastity from his earliest days.

Chapter V

Once the Emperor Constantine by his godliness and faith in Christ had won the victory over his enemies, he ordered the raw recruits to be released. So Pachomius obtained the freedom he longed for and returning straight away to the lower Thebaid he went to the church in the village of Chinoboscium, where he became a catechumen, and not long after received the grace of being bathed in the life-giving water. On the very night when he was initiated into the sacred mysteries he saw in his dreams a heavenly dew falling on to his right hand and turning into the thickness of honey. And he heard a voice saying to him. 'Take thought, Pachomius, for what this means. It is a sign of grace given to you by Christ.'

From then on he was inflamed with desire for God and grievously pierced by the saving dart of divine love, which impelled him to give himself entirely to the disciplines and precepts of God.

Chapter VI

He came to hear about a certain anchorite called Palaemon serving the Lord in a remote part of the desert. He sought him out in the hope of being able to live with him. He knocked on his door, asking to be let in. After a while the old man opened up to him.

"What do you want? Who are you looking for?" he asked. He was of a rather intimidating appearance because of the life of strict solitude he had been living for such a long time.

"God has sent me to you," replied Pachomius, "so that I may become a monk."

"You would not be able to become a monk here. It is no light matter to entertain the idea of the chaste life of the true monk. There are many who have come in the past and have soon got wearied, strangers to the virtue of perseverance."

"Not everybody is like that", said Pachomius. "So I beg you, take me in, and in the course of time make trial of my will, and see what I shall be capable of."

"I have already told you, you can't become a monk here. Go rather to another monastery, and when you have learnt enough about how to live a life of abstinence come back, and then I might take you in. Listen carefully to what I am saying. I live an exceedingly abstemious life, my son. I punish my body with a most severe and difficult discipline. I eat nothing but bread and salt. I abstain from oil and wine completely. I keep vigil for half the night, spending some of that time in formal prayer and some in reading and meditating on the Scriptures. Sometimes, indeed, I keep vigil the whole night through."

This filled Pachomius with the sort of fear a small boy has in the presence of his teacher, but strengthened by the grace of the Lord he was determined to submit himself to hard work.

"If I have the aid of your prayers," said Pachomius, "I trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has given me an example of fortitude and patience, that I shall be made worthy of persevering in your holy way of life for all the rest of my days on this earth."

Chapter VII

With spiritual insight Palaemon then discerned the depth of Pachomius' faith, and at last opened the door to him, took him in, and clothed him in the monastic habit. And so they lived together in the observance of abstinence and

prayer. They also wove baskets and worked with their hands as the Apostle instructed (Ephesians 4.28), not only to earn their own living but so that they might have something to give to those in need. When they were keeping vigil and offering their nightly prayers, if the old man saw Pachomius about to be overcome by sleep, he would take him outside and make him carry loads of sand from one place to another, and by this exercise deliver his mind from the danger of being oppressed by the burden of sleep. He would instruct him as he did this, teaching him how to be diligent in prayer.

"Work hard, Pachomius," he would say. "Watch and pray lest the tempter draw us aside (which God forbid) from this work to which we have put our hand and cause all our work to be in vain."

Pachomius obediently and diligently submitted to all this, daily increasing more and more in the practice of holy abstinence, and giving the keenest joy to the old man, who never ceased to give thanks to God for the way Pachomius was living his life.

Chapter VIII

In due course the most holy day of Easter arrived.

"This feast is celebrated by all Christians," the old man said to Pachomius.

"Let us get ready for it ourselves, according to our custom."

Always prompt to obey, Pachomius did what he was asked and contrary to their usual custom took some oil and mixed it with some crushed salt. As well as the oil he prepared lapsanum, that is, wild olives and herbs.

"I have done what your asked, father," said Pachomius, when all was ready. After the usual prayers, the blessed Palaemon came to the table, but when he saw the oil mixed with the salt, he clapped his hands to his head and wept copiously.

"My Lord has been crucified, and am I now to eat olive oil?" he said.

"Can you not just eat a little bit of it?" asked Pachomius

"I can in no way do that," he replied.

So bread and salt was brought for the meal and they sat down together. The old man blessed the food with the sign of the Cross of Christ, and they both humbly gave thanks to God for the food they ate.

Chapter IX (continued), Life of St Pachomius, Book 1a

One day, as Palaemon and Pachomius were about to light the fire before the vigil, a brother arrived wanting to stay with them. After they had received him they conversed for a while as usual, when he suddenly stood up and said, "If you have any faith at all, let fire fall upon this charcoal!" And he began to recite the Lord's Prayer slowly, a bit at a time.

"Stop this madness, brother!" cried Palaemon, who had sensed that the brother was deceived and puffed up by pride. "Do not say anything more!"

But the brother took no notice of the old man's reproof. Carried away even more by his own pomposity, he became quite out of control and brazenly stood on the fire. The fire affected him not one bit, and it was obvious that with the Lord's permission, he was under the influence of the enemy of the human race. What he was thus doing with impunity served only to make his madness worse. As the Scripture says, 'The Lord has sent them into the paths of iniquity' (Proverbs 28.10 & Ecclesiastes 2.16). Next morning he departed quite early, not without giving them a parting reproof.

"Where is your faith?" he cried.

But not long after this the devil saw that this brother had given himself into his hands, and that it would be easy to drive him into whatever evil deeds he wished. So he changed himself into the appearance of a beautiful woman clothed in the most beautiful garments, and knocked vigorously on the door of the brother's cell. The brother opened the door.

"I beg you for help," said the devil disguised as a woman. "I am being pursued by my creditors, and I am afraid they will do me great harm. Please take me into your cell, for I am not able to pay my debts. How grateful I shall be if you let me hide here, for it is the Lord who has guided me to you."

Darkened and mentally blind, totally unable to discern who it was who was saying these things to him, he took the devil inside. The enemy of our existence could see that he was susceptible to all kinds of depravity, and began to put lustful thoughts into his mind. Before very long he gave in to them, and begged her for her womanly embraces, whereupon the unclean spirit flooded into him and dashed him savagely to the floor. He rolled about there for a while, then lay there as if dead. It was several days before he came to himself, feeling frantically sorry for his acts of madness. He came back immediately to the holy Palaemon and with floods of tears told him what had happened.

"I know, Father," he cried, "I know that I am the cause of my own perdition. You did well to reprove me, and I am cursed for not listening to you. But I

pray you, give me the help of your holy prayers, and prevent the enemy from driving me completely to ruin, placed as I am in such great danger."

As he thus poured out his laments and tears, both the holy Palaemon and the blessed Pachomius wept in sympathy, but he was suddenly convulsed by the evil spirit, fled from their presence and rushed out headlong through the desert. When he came to a town called Panos, in his madness he threw himself into the furnace of a bath-house and so came to a miserable end in the flames.

Chapter X

When Pachomius heard about this, he set himself to hold on even more closely to the practice of abstinence, and to remain vigilant in everything that he did, but especially in his prayers, in accordance with what is written, 'Keep custody of your heart with all diligence' (Proverbs 4.23). The old man was amazed that he not only kept outwardly to his accustomed rule of abstinence, but that he strove inwardly to purify his mind into a heavenly pattern, as the blessed Apostle says, 'Our glory is the testimony of a good conscience' (2 Corinthians 1.12), sure that in this a reward was being prepared for him in heaven. In reading Scripture he endeavoured to commit it to memory, but not indiscriminately. He would dwell on some particular precept, turning it over devoutly in his mind, and then would endeavour to put into practice day by day what his memory had retained.

Above all he strove to excel in the gifts of patience and humility, and most of all in purest love towards God. We learned about these things, and many others, from holy men of God who dwelt with him at many different times. He provided them with an example of godly life, and after reading the divine scriptures he would diligently point out to them the pieces which were relevant to the edification of their souls. There are so many examples of this that it is beyond my powers to describe them, so that I will write no more about them in these present writings. I have not sufficient eloquence to do justice to the merits of such a man.

Chapter XI

Near the mountain where these holy men dwelt there was a desert place where many thornbushes grew. Pachomius often went there to gather firewood, treading on the thorns with his bare feet. But he rejoiced that his feet were pierced with thorns, remembering how graciously our Lord was fixed to the cross with nails. He was greatly attracted to solitude, and would frequently

spend long hours by himself in prayer, beseeching God to deliver him from any suspicion of self-deception.

Chapter XII

It chanced one day that Pachomius wandered a long way off from his cell and came to a hamlet called Tabennisi, where hardly anybody lived. After he had spent a long time in prayer in that place, according to his usual custom, he heard a voice from heaven:

"Stay here, Pachomius, and build a monastery. For many will come to you seeking to profit from your instruction. You shall guide them in accordance with a rule with which I will provide you."

And an Angel of the Lord appeared to him, with tablets in his hand, in which were laid down all the details of the sort of life which he was to teach to those who came to submit themselves to his direction. Tabennisi still keeps to this same rule today, using the same diet and wearing the same habit, and observing carefully the same discipline. The monks who live there come from many different places, and differ greatly in stature and culture; it follows then that they need a Rule different from what they have been used to.

Divine grace and the integrity of his own life had together brought this voice to him, and Pachomius listened to it with sincerity of heart, in the sure knowledge that it came from God. He eagerly accepted the divine Rule.

Returning to the venerable old man, Palaemon, he recounted what he had been charged to do by the divine voice, and begged him to come back with him to that place, where they might fulfil the commandments of the Lord together.

Not willing to disappoint a beloved son in anything he might be asked to do, Palaemon yielded to his prayers, and they both went back to that hamlet where they built a cell, rejoicing in the Lord and waiting for the fulfilment of his promises.

After some time, Palaemon made a proposition to Pachomius:

"I am very much aware that the grace of God has been conferred upon you, and that you will always order your life accordingly; let us then make a pact between us that we should never leave each other, so that for as long as we still live in the light of day we should be able to encourage each other with tireless mutual support."

They were both pleased with this idea, and for as long as they lived the blessed old man and Pachomius together took care to abide by this agreement.

Chapter XIII

Soon after this the venerable Palaemon began to suffer from kidney trouble, brought on by his practices of abstinence, and his whole body began to suffer with a most debilitating illness. For sometimes he had been eating while abstaining from drinking anything, and at others he would drink without eating anything. There were some other brothers with them who had come on a visit, and they advised him to cease from the daily offices, in order to give his body some rest, and that he should take up a more suitable diet to build up his wasted limbs and prevent his body from being totally ruined. But he would not agree to this regime for very long. His illness became even worse, and feeling that this new diet was an extravagance, he reverted to his old ways without any relaxation.

"The Martyrs of Christ," he said, "were some of them torn to pieces, some decapitated, some burnt in the fire, but endured bravely to the end for the sake of their faith, and should I, then, impatiently scorn what rewards might come to me through suffering, and give in to these insignificant discomforts, by becoming attached to this present life and frightened of a few momentary pains? I agreed to your persuasion and adopted a diet which I was not used to, and it made my illness even worse than it was before, rather than giving me any relief. So I go back to my former regime, and I will not give up my battle for continence, in which I am certain lies all peace and true joy, except for the peace and joy we will find in God. I have not taken up arms in this battle to please human beings; I have set myself to strive for the love of Christ"

So he carried on manfully, but within a month he became exceedingly weak. Pachomius attended him, caring for him as a father, kissing his feet and embracing him, in the knowledge that he was in the process of saying farewell. And the venerable old man, laden with every virtue, gently rested in peace. Holy Pachomius buried his body, and choirs of Angels lifted his soul and carried it up to heaven. Pachomius carried on with his own path of pilgrimage.

Chapter XIV

Not long after this his own brother, John, came to join him, having heard about everything he was doing. This gave Pachomius the greatest possible joy, for out of all those baptised Christians who had chosen the solitary life, he had up till then not found anyone from his own family. So John, Pachomius' true

brother, followed in his footsteps and stayed with him, following the same rule, united with him in the same love for God. They meditated on the law of God day and night (Psalms 1.2), their minds undistracted by any worldly cares. Whatever was left over from what they produced by their manual work they gave to the poor and gave no thought to the morrow, in obedience to the precepts of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 6.34). They kept to the use of only one lebiton [sleeveless tunic] until it got to be so dirty that it had to be washed. This lebiton was a linen garment, similar to the colobium [long tunic] and is still worn today by the monks of the Thebaid and Egypt. But the blessed Pachomius preferred to mortify his own body and generally wore only a cilicium. [Shirt of goat's hair.] He lived for fifteen years like this, in laborious toil and sweat, in vigils and abstinence. He did not lie down to sleep at night, but sat in the middle of his cell without even leaning against the wall for support. He did not find that an easy practice, but bore it quite cheerfully, in anticipation of the eternal rest being prepared for him in heaven. He studied the injunctions of many of the fathers, endeavouring always, with his brother, to rise to the very heights of virtue. They worked hard at it, and each of them lived to the utmost of their ability in the greatest humility and patience and in faith unfeigned (1 Timothy 1.5).

Chapter XV

During this time Pachomius was given more divine guidance about the Rule which was to be observed by those who because of him would put their trust in the Lord. He began to make additions to the building in which he and his brother lived, and he constructed other buildings as well in order to accommodate all those who would undoubtedly be renouncing the world and coming to serve Christ. He constructed enough accommodation for a great number of people.

But while the holy Pachomius had been widening the area over which the monastery extended, as we have said, and increasing the number of buildings, his brother had been thinking about solitude and the life of an anchorite. He loved the smallness of his dwelling place. He was the elder of the two, and had no hesitation in making his views known to Pachomius.

"You should give up this idea," he said. "Why are you doing all this unnecessary work? It's stupid to extend yourself like this."

Pachomius took this reproach hard; he wasn't used to being criticised, but nevertheless said nothing in reply, kept calm and continued with what he was

doing. But next night he went into the smallest room of a house that he had built himself, prostrated himself in prayer and wept bitterly.

"Woe is me!" he cried. "For fleshly prudence has bought itself a foothold in me! I am still walking according to the flesh, as I have just discovered. For I have taken on all this activity, and it is not right that sometimes it makes me impatient, sometimes gloomy, sometimes furious, even though I might have cause to be angry. Have mercy on me, O Lord, lest I perish, lest I succumb to the deceits of the devil. For if your grace has deserted me, and the enemy has discovered in me some share in his own evil deeds, then I must have become a slave to his own demands, as it is written, 'You are designated a slave of whomsoever it is that overpowers you' (2 Peter 2.19). And again it is written, 'If someone who is bound to fulfil the whole law offends in only one particular he is guilty of the whole' (James 2.10).

"I believe, O Lord, that your mercies are without number. They support me and help me for no merit of mine. Enlightened by you I shall walk in the way of your saints, and 'looking towards what is before I shall forget what is behind' (Philippians 3.13). It is thus that the company of your servants who have pleased you from the beginning, protected by your help, have evaded the attacks of the devil and have shone resplendent far and wide for the salvation of the many. But how should I, O Lord, presume to train in the monastic life others whom you might send to me, when I have not yet conquered the passions of the flesh myself, nor kept your commandments with a spotless mind? And yet I put my trust in you, O Christ, that your power may come to my aid in everything that happens, so that what I do may be pleasing in your sight. O most merciful God, forgive, forgive I pray, all my sins, and purify my heart by your visitation."

He persevered all night with tears and weeping in this prayer to the Lord. He poured out so many tears and so much sweat (for it was summer time) that the floor on which he was praying became so wet that you would think it had had water poured out all over it. When he stood in prayer he was accustomed to stretching out his hands for several hours without lowering them while keeping his body still as if fixed to the cross, and by keeping this up for long periods at a time he spurred on his soul to be vigilant in prayer. And although he was powerfully endowed with all kinds of virtue, he showed incredible humility and the greatest gentleness in the way he lived with his brother, whom he supported always without fail.

Not long after this his brother came to the end of his earthly life, and

Pachomius celebrated his funerary rites with due honour. He spent a whole night keeping vigil by his body with psalms and hymns, commended his soul to the God in whom they had both put their trust, and reverently gave him burial.

Chapter XVI

Unwearyingly, he continued to discipline himself in his strait and narrow way of life, striving for integrity and purity in all things. When illicit thoughts assailed him he straightaway put them to flight with the help of God, and kept on going, rooted in the fear of the Lord. He was ever mindful of eternal punishment and never ending grief, where the worm does not die and the fire is unquenchable (Mark 9.44). While Pachomius was thus abstaining from forbidden practices and progressing onwards to better things, he was all the time taking great pains in extending his monastery in preparation for receiving many others. And the devil began to obstruct him fiercely, gnashing his teeth at him like a wild beast, stirring him up with all kinds of temptations in the hope of finding some opening for his deceits to enter. But protected by the shield of faith he vigilantly warded off the attacks of the enemy, and sang the holy Scriptures which he had committed to memory.

Chapter XVII

One day when Pachomius was beseeching the Lord and bending his knee in prayer, a great pit appeared in front of him by means of the devil's tricks. The enemy of the human race showed him a crowd of strange and meaningless shapes tumbling about in it, trying by stealth and deception to distract the mind at prayer from its proper intention, so that it was no longer able to offer prayer to the Lord in purity. By the revelation of Christ Pachomius recognised the stratagems of the demons and held them in contempt, gaining a great increase in faith thereby. In this kind of conflict he was constantly giving thanks and blessing the Lord.

One of his customs was to go off to places some distance from the monastery to pray. On his way back the unclean spirits would often amuse themselves by forming into a troupe and disporting themselves in front of him, urging each other on as if they were clearing a path for some great official, by shouting out, "Make way for the man of God!" But Pachomius, armed with the hope of Christ our Redeemer, poured scorn on their ridiculous playacting, and held them to be as futile as barking dogs.

They soon found that the great constancy of this man prevented them from being able to break down his defences by any number of these games, so they formed themselves into a great phalanx and rushed in upon him to surround his house and shake the foundations to such an extent that the holy man thought the whole place was about to fall in. But he remained undaunted, and as usual plucked the strings of his spiritual harp, by declaiming in a loud voice, "God is our refuge and strength, our help in the troubles which come upon us. Therefore we shall not fear though the earth be shaken" (Psalms 46.1-2). His psalmody brought immediate peace, and the attacks of the enemy vanished like smoke.

But they only retreated for a little while, just like dogs who will leave off what they are doing when they get tired of it, but come back more aggressively than ever later on. For when the holy man after his prayers sat down to his work as usual, the enemy appeared in the shape of an enormous cock in the midst of his hens, crowing repeatedly, and making other unusual noises, before jumping on him and tearing him grievously with its claws. He made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and blew at the cock, putting it to flight. He became familiar with all the shapes which the enemy could take, but forearmed with the fear of God he made sure their deceits were of no effect. Frequently attacked, he never wearied, but like an impregnable fortress endured every struggle with the greatest patience.

On some occasions the demonic army busied themselves by tempting the holy servant of God with what are called phantasms. Many of them would gather themselves together into a massed attack, seemingly as many as the leaves on a tree, and drag him into a mighty struggle, with their cohorts arrayed on the right hand and on the left. They would urge each other on, and strenuously oppress him so that he felt as if the weight of an enormous stone was moving against him. The wicked spirits carried on like this in the hope that they could so unnerve him that his mind would relax into some kind of mockery, through which they might find some way of giving him a mortal wound. But Pachomius discerned their impudence, and had recourse to the Lord as usual in prayer. By the power of Christ their attack was brought to naught.

When he sat down to eat giving thanks to God, the demons would frequently appear in front of him looking like beautiful women of various shapes and sizes, decked out in scandalously shameless scanty clothing, seeming to sit down next to him and come close to him and touch him. Our strong and sturdy athlete was much troubled by this, but nevertheless closed his outward eyes

and turned his inward eye upon the Lord, whereby he was able to trample their best endeavours underfoot. For the mercy of the Lord was with him, deigning always to come to the aid of those with an upright and contrite heart, according to his promise, 'Fear not, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28.20).

Chapter XVIII

On another occasion the devil began a most severe campaign against him, and attacked him so fiercely that from evening to morning his whole body was lacerated with many stripes. But although he was being crucified in immense pain, he never gave way to despair, but was mindful of the Lord who never deserts his servants in the time of trial. It was at this time that a monk called Apollo came to visit him. As Pachomius was conversing with him on the subject of salvation and recounting the manifold ways in which the devil attacks, he began to tell Apollo about all the ways in which he himself had been attacked, and in particular how bitter had been the beating that he had suffered.

"Keep on fighting manfully," said Apollo, "and be strong in heart, venerable Father. For the devil knows that if you fall victim to his devices, he will also be easily able to overcome us as well. We rely for strength on living under the shadow of your contests, and we look to you as the greatest possible example of virtue. So don't cease from fighting vigorously. You are strong in the protection of the Lord; be strong in his power, lest you are called to account for us as well, which God forbid. For if you, who stand out among us all, grow slack in any way, you will become a cause and occasion of ruin for many."

To hear this gave Pachomius great encouragement in his battle with the demons. He glorified God for the company of this brother, and begged him not to desert him. Apollo kept that in mind and often thereafter came to visit the old man.

Shortly afterwards, however, when paying a visit to Pachomius for a few days, he was struck with an illness which put him beyond any human help, and to Pachomius' dismay completed the course of his life. He buried him with his own holy hands, singing the usual psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Chapter XIX (continued), Life of Pachomius, Book 1a

After this the blessed Pachomius grew so much in confidence before God, and flourished so magnificently in divine hope, that time beyond number he would tread upon serpents and scorpions without coming to the slightest harm (cf. Luke 10.19). Even crocodiles would most meekly submit to him, and transport him across the river when he had need, and take him to wherever he wanted on the other side. For all these things he constantly gave thanks to God who had protected him from all the wiles of the enemy.

"Blessed are you, Lord God of our fathers," he prayed, "for you have not despised my humble estate, nor allowed me to be deceived in my great weakness by the deceitful frauds of the devil. You have mercifully dispersed the darkness of my ignorance and taught me how to do your will. For whereas I was weak and puny, and hardly aware of what my life should be, you have enlarged me with a sense of awe in your sight, so that I am saved from outer darkness and eternal punishment, and have been brought to a knowledge that you are the true light and eternal joy."

Chapter XX (This chapter also in III.35)

Seeing that he seemed to be pursued so assiduously by the demon, our bold athlete strove even more vigorously for a holy life by asking God that if it were possible he might be allowed to exceed the normal limits of human endurance and overcome the necessity of having to waste time in sleeping. So he kept vigil day and night until he had cast down the attacks of the devil, as it is written, 'I shall afflict them till they cannot stand. They shall fall under my feet, for you have girded me with power for the battle' (Psalms 18. 38-39) This petition was granted, to the limit of what the human condition would allow, and he endured against the enemy as if he were actually visible, and persevered in driving himself in eloquent outpourings to heaven. His prayers were unceasing that the will of God should be done in all things.

Chapter XXI

And as Pachomius was thus watching in prayer, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him

"The will of the Lord, Pachomius," said the Angel, "is that you serve him with a pure mind, and gather together a great number of monks, who may strive to serve God by keeping all the rules in the book which has been shown to you".

[See Chapter XII.] For he had already recently been given tablets on which the following words were inscribed:

Chapter XXII

Let each one eat and drink according to their strength, and let them work according to what they eat. Don't forbid them either to fast or to eat in moderation, but give harder work to those who are strong and eat more, lighter work to the weak and those who fast.

Build a number of different cells, and put them three to a cell. Let all the food be prepared and eaten in the one place.

At night let them wear linen lebitons [see Chapter XIV), girded about the loins, and let them each have a melote, that is a goat skin dyed white, without which they should neither eat nor sleep.

When they come to the Communion of the Sacraments of Christ let them loosen their belts and take off their melotes, and wear only their cowls. It was also decreed that the monks should be divided up into twenty-four groups according to the letters of the Greek alphabet, that is from α through to Ω. So that when the archimandrite [This word was used in the Eastern Church from the 4th century for the head of a monastery, and is thus the equivalent of an "abbot". Later it was used to designate a ruler over several monasteries. It is still used in the Eastern Church today.] is asked about any particular person he can be given an easy one word answer about what he is like by saying α. or Ω. and again α. or Ω. or Ω., so that whatever letter you give to a group signifies its grading. You could give the single-minded and innocent the letter α. or the difficult and complex ones the letter Ω. so that each letter would indicate each group according to its behaviour and serious intent. Only the spiritual leaders would know what each letter meant.

It was also written down in the tablets that if a pilgrim from another monastery should come wearing a different habit no one should eat with him, unless he were on a journey, in which case this rule should be waived.

Anyone coming to the monastery with the intention of staying permanently should be trained in his holy duties for three years and given the more straightforward tasks, before letting him enter into the field of battle.

At mealtimes let them conceal their faces in their cowls so that a brother cannot see any other brother eating. And let them stay silent and not let their eyes wander about.

The Angel who spoke with Pachomius also laid down that there should be

twelve prayers for the daytime, twelve for the evening and twelve for the night.

When Pachomius remarked at how few that was, the Angel replied:

"It has been set at that number so that the weaker won't find the task too difficult. But the perfect need not feel deprived by this rule, for in the privacy of their own cells they can go on praying if they are being nourished by divine contemplation in purity of mind."

After saying all this the heavenly messenger departed, and Pachomius gave thanks to God, for it was now by a threefold revelation that his vision was confirmed. He began to receive all who offered themselves to the mercy of God through penitence, and after a long trial of the life, they were enrolled into the family of monks. He urged them to flee from the immorality of the world, and to cleave always to the holy rules. He warned them that the overall rule according to the Gospel was that the monk renounces first the whole world, then his family, and lastly denies himself, so that he may take up his cross and follow in the footsteps of Christ (Luke 14.26-7).

Instructed in that sort of teaching by the blessed old man, they soon brought forth most worthy fruits of penitence. Although he was now of advanced age he pursued the purpose of the spiritual life with undiminished zeal. He not only committed himself to a stricter rule but took upon himself the control and care of the whole monastery, aiming to be a servant of all even if it were beyond his strength. He punctually prepared the common meal for the brothers and performed the usual offices. He gathered the vegetables from the garden which he had watered with his own hands. When anyone knocked at the monastery door he would be the one who went to open it and give a ready response. He nursed the sick day and night. In all these things he gave a most excellent example to his disciples. Newcomers to the service of the Lord were thus more readily drawn into the duties of devotion. Not yet able to enjoy the gift of matching his standard of care, but free from all distraction, they were gently admonished by the old man:

"In so far as you are called 'brothers', take your cue from that. Say the psalms and other books, and especially commit the holy Gospel to memory. Thus, serving the Lord, and binding to yourselves each one of the commandments, you will become perfect, you will imbue all things with my own spirit, especially if you take care to observe all the heavenly precepts."

The first three men to join up with Pachomius were Psenthessus, Suris and Obsis. Pachomius constantly reminded them of the word of God as he gave them instruction and encouraged them to grow in the work of the spirit. For their part, as they contemplated the old man's life as a specimen of virtue, they were filled with admiration.

"It is a big mistake," they said, "to think that human beings may live a life of blessedness because of some kind of privilege of birth, as if there were no such thing as free will. It is just as much a mistake to think that sinners cannot through penitence develop in virtue. Just look at how the Lord has manifestly enlarged this venerable father Pachomius, whose parents were pagan outsiders, and who has stretched himself to such an extent in the worship of God that he carries out all the commandments of God.

"So then, we can be sure that any one of us who really wishes to, can by the help of God's grace follow the model of this holy man, and attain to the perfect life and holiness of the fathers. It is written in the Scriptures that Christ says, 'Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11.28). What does this mean except that we should cast off the heavy burdens which oppress the human race, and adhere to an unchanging good which does not perish? Let us persevere to the end with this old man, that we may be found worthy to be glorified with him in eternal bliss. For everything he teaches us is right, not only by his words but what is more effective still, by his own marvellous example."

They went then to Pachomius and said to him, "Why is it, venerable father, that you take the whole responsibility of the monastery upon yourself?"

"No one harnesses up beasts of burden," he replied, "and suddenly compels them to work with such a heavy load that they collapse under the strain, but he trains them little by little, getting them used to lighter loads until they are capable of taking on heavier. In the same way it is right that we should deal with you as Christ has dealt with us, and lead you on so that we may rejoice in your constancy in all things. May the most merciful God, who never despises the prayers of the humble, confirm his teaching in your heart, that you may carry out every good work with patience and longsuffering, following in the footsteps of the holy fathers, so that others may see how the integrity of your life is pleasing to God, and will come to the service of Christ and all take an equal share with the father in seeing to the needs of the monastery."

They accepted the regime he gave them, that is, that they should be sparing in what they ate, that their clothing should be of the cheapest, and that their sleep should be no more than adequate. And it came about that according to the will of the Lord, who wills the salvation of all human beings, and who blesses all their good works with increase, that many men came to join the old man and stay with him, among whom were Pecusius and Cornelius, Paul, and another Pachomius, and John, who freely embraced the spotless faith and saving teaching of the blessed father. He then decided that those with any competence should share in the duties of the monastery, and in a very short time the numbers of monks were multiplied.

When a feast day required that they should participate in the holy mysteries, they asked presbyters from neighbouring villages to come and celebrate the feast of spiritual joy for them. For the old man would not allow any of their own number to perform the duties of the clergy. He maintained that it was much more fitting that monks should not seek for pre-eminent honour and glory, and that opportunities of that sort should be rooted out of coenobia, for they are often sources of futile strife and jealousy among the brothers. Just as a whole year's harvest can be destroyed if a spark falling into the fields is not quickly extinguished, so a deadly thought in the mind of a monk, ambitiously desiring leadership as a cleric, can destroy the modesty he has acquired so laboriously, if he does not forthrightly drive from his heart the incendiary nature of such a suggestion. So the communicants of Christ should respect the clerics in the church with all meekness and sincerity; it is not right that they should wish for any religious preferments themselves.

"But if anyone among the monks has been previously ordained by a bishop," said Pachomius, "let us welcome his ministry. We find in the old Testament that not everyone was allowed to take clerical office; only those born among the tribe of Levi were allowed to offer the sacrifices. So if a brother of undisputed priestly status comes in from elsewhere, let us not denigrate him as if he were trespassing into sacred areas and had no right to exercise his ministry. How could we possibly think that about him, when at the same time we earnestly request him to celebrate the heavenly Sacraments for us? It is much more fitting that we respect him as a father following the footsteps of the Saviour, and who is doing what we have requested him to do, and that he should not cease from offering the sacrificial gifts to God, especially if his character is known and approved by all.

"If he is thought to have been guilty of some offence, which God forbid, it is

not for us to judge him. For God the just judge has set bishops to be the judges over such people. As successors and imitators of the blessed Apostles they have the power to examine the particulars of each single case, and give just judgment upon them. Let us concur with their judgments from the bottom of our hearts, for the Lord warns us to be merciful, and that we ought always to pray that we be not led into temptation" (Matthew 6.13).

This renowned father spoke these words quite forcefully, but yet with a caring concern. And thus when any cleric came to him wanting to live under his Rule, he accorded him the honour which the church expects for one of that rank, but expected him to submit to the monastic rules with all humility.

Chapter XXV

The blessed Pachomius loved all the servants of Christ, watching over them always with a father's care. He performed the works of mercy with his own hands for the old and for the sick, and even for the very young. Among other things he would always train their minds to be ready for spiritual warfare. Since many of them were making progress in their faith and in their work, and since their numbers were increasing, they were all becoming rather stretched in their pursuit of virtue. So he chose prefects (*praepositi*) from among them, who stood out as being able to assist in the development of the souls who daily came crowding in.

There were so many coming in and increasing in the work of the spirit, that a great diversity was seen in their various spiritual states. So in accordance with the Rule given him by God, the old man, with the grace of Christ guiding him in everything, issued guidelines and schedules of work for all of them according to the strength and ability of each one. Some he set to grow food by manual labour, others were occupied in various common tasks, not that anyone was tied to any task at all times, for each one retained a certain amount of control over his own discipline according to his zeal and the sort of work he did. The general oversight of both brothers and visitors he committed to those who followed him in seniority.

He urged all the monks, however, to be prompt in obedience, as a direct and easy path towards aspiring after the heights of perfection and diligently cultivating the fear of God in their hearts. For in humbly bringing forth the fruits of obedience they would be living their lives for God rather than self. This venerable father was mainly concerned with spiritual direction, but he was always ready to undertake any particular task if it so happened that for

any reason the person to whom he had committed responsibility was not available. He truly regarded himself as the servant of all. And he did this quite unobtrusively and without any of the bluster which sometimes spoils the virtues of spiritual men. His manner of great humility infused everything that he did and built up everyone in the Lord. He visited each of the cells (monasteria) in turn, until his paternal affection led his footsteps back to those of his sons he had started with. He loved to find them earnestly vigilant in the work of God, and rejoiced greatly at the progress they were making.

Chapter XXVI

It happened once that he became concerned that the neighbouring peasantry in caring for their flocks did not receive the communion of Christ's Sacraments nor hear the solemn reading of the divine books which solemnly took place everywhere on Saturdays and Sundays. So he consulted with the holy Aprius, bishop of Tentyri, with a view to building a church in what passed for their village centre to which they could all come and participate in the divine mysteries. This was done, but since there were no ordained clerics to celebrate the solemnities for the people, he would go there with some monks at the usual hour for churchgoing, and read some pages to the people with their messages of saving grace. As he said, no readers had as yet been appointed, nor any other clerics to celebrate the sacred mysteries. So for as long as there was no presbyter there, or any of the other members of the clerical order, Pachomius would come and carry out the duties of reader with such unashamed eagerness and with his mind and body so focussed, that when the people attended to him they might have thought they were looking not at a man but an Angel. As a result of this programme many were converted from error and became Christians. His love of neighbour was so advanced, and his compassion so great, that when he saw anyone deceived by the devil, worshipping not the true God but vain idols, he would groan loudly because they were lost, and pour forth floods of tears that they might be saved.

Chapter XXVII

The holy Athanasius was bishop of Alexandria at that time, [He became bishop in 328.] a man outstanding in every virtue. He had been making a solemn visitation of all the churches in the upper Thebaid, building up the people's faith in Christ by his wholesome teachings, when his journeyings brought him to Tabennisi. As soon as Pachomius knew about it he went out to

meet him with all his monks, leaping for joy in great happiness. They greeted this great pontiff of Christ with psalms and hymns, a vast multitude of brothers rejoicing in the Lord for his coming. But Pachomius did not introduce himself to this famous leader, but deliberately drew back and hid himself among the throng of monks. His reason for that was that the aforesaid bishop of Tentyri had often spoken about him to the holy Athanasius, suggesting that he was a marvellous man and a true servant of God worthy of being promoted to the honour of the priesthood. It was the knowledge of this that led Pachomius to make himself inconspicuous and hide himself away among the ranks of the monks until the bishop had gone.

Pachomius respected Athanasius as being someone than whom there was no one more outstanding at that time. He had heard about his holy life and the persecutions he had suffered from the Arians because of his confession of Christ. He admired unreservedly the love which he showed to all but especially to monks, and respected him with his whole heart. But he accorded the greatest respect not only to Athanasius but to all men of true faith. He detested heretics completely, and had a particular horror of Origen as a blasphemous traitor and a precursor of Arius and Meletius. Arius had been expelled from the church by the venerable Heraclas, former bishop of Alexandria, because he had added many hateful and detestable things to the teachings of holy Scripture and thereby subverted quite a few souls. Just as poisoners disguise a bitter taste with honey, so did Origen bedaub the poison of his erroneous opinions with a most heavenly ability to write well, and so disseminated his pernicious doctrines among those who did not know any better. So Heraclas was careful to warn all the brothers not merely to refrain from reading any of Origen's commentaries, but also to pay no heed to anyone who had read them. It is said that on one occasion he picked up a volume of Origen's and threw it into the sea.

"If it weren't for the fact that I know that it contains the holy Name of God," he said as he did so, "I would have consigned all those outpourings of blasphemy to the flames!"

Thus he loved the true faith and always sought for the truth. Just as he opposed the enemies of the church with unremitting detestation, so he acclaimed joyfully the increasing numbers of Catholics, and declared that he could discern Christ the redeemer of all speaking through the bishops (sacerdotes) in the royal power of the Church.

If ever he heard of a brother slandering anyone on any matter, he not only

stopped trusting him but avoided him as if he were a serpent, citing the Psalmist who said 'I will cut off him who secretly slanders his neighbour' (Psalms 101. 5).

"No good person," he said, "allows evil to come out of his mouth and insult the holy fathers with venomous tongue. There are many places in the Scriptures showing how God is angry at such offences. Think of the example of Miriam who poured out disparaging remarks about Moses and became infected with leprosy (Numbers 12.10). She had no chance of avoiding the judgment of God."

By this teaching he conferred great benefits upon his listeners.

Chapter XXVIII [This story of Pachomius' meeting with his sister is ascribed to Theodore in Book III, chapter 34.]

His sister had heard of the old man's deservedly famous institution, and journeyed to the monastery in order to see him. When Pachomius knew she was there he sent her this message by the doorkeeper:

"Look, sister, you have heard that I am alive and well, so therefore depart in peace. Don't be sad that you have not been able to see me with your bodily eyes. But if you desire to follow the same sort of life as I am leading, so that you may find mercy from God, take diligent thought about it, and if you can assure me that this purpose has taken root in your heart I will bid my brothers to build you a house at some distance from here where you can live a disciplined and modest life. And I don't doubt that by your example God will call many to live with you and be counted worthy through you to gain the reward of everlasting salvation. For it is not possible for human beings to get any rest in this mortal flesh unless they please God by their dedication to a good life."

His sister wept bitterly on hearing this, her conscience pricked by godly compunction, but she took his wholesome exhortations to heart and determined to set herself to follow Christ. When Pachomius realised his sister's intentions, he gave thanks to God who had so quickly strengthened her will, and gave orders to the more responsible of his brothers that they should build a cell for her at some distance. This was done, and she began to live the life in the fear of God. It was not long before many others gathered around her and she had become the mother of a great multitude. In her teaching she provided them with a means of openly renouncing all carnal desires in order

to attain to heaven which perishes not, and she led the way on that journey as much by her living as by her teaching.

Chapter XXVIII (continued), Life of Pachomius, Book 1a

Pachomius appointed Peter, an outstanding monk of a venerable old age, to visit these sisters from time to time, so that he might support them with his holy instructions. He was a man who had mortified all his passions, and whose speech was well seasoned with salt, as the Apostle said (Colossians 4.6), and was most chaste in mind and body. Again and again he spoke to the virgins of Christ on the holy Scriptures, pointing out to them what was necessary for salvation. And Pachomius wrote Rules for them whereby they might together guide the direction of their lives. Except for the sheepskin cloak which women did not wear, the shape of their rules was exactly the same as for the monks.

If one of the monks wanted to visit a sister or some other close relation in the women's monastery, an older monk of proven integrity was appointed to go with him. This man would first of all approach the woman in charge, after which, in the presence of them and other older women, the monk could then see his sister or relation in all propriety and holiness. They were not allowed to give each other anything, for neither of them had anything of their own to give. It was sufficient for them that they were able to visit each other and bear in mind the hope of future everlasting bliss. If the women needed any building work done by the monks, the work was entrusted to men of proven character who would oversee the brothers' work as they laboured in the fear of God. They would not be given anything to eat or drink by the women, but would return to their monastery when it was time to eat.

There was only one Rule observed daily by both women and men, except for the sheepskin, as we have said. When any of the virgins died, the others carried out the necessary burial rites and carried the body down to the river which separated the two monasteries, singing the customary psalms. The monks then would cross the river bearing branches of palm and olive, and singing the psalms would carry her back to bury her with joy in their own cemetery.

Chapter XXIX

This way of life began to be noised abroad far and wide, and the name of Pachomius became well known everywhere, giving rise to universal thanksgiving towards God. Numbers of people were renouncing the affairs of the world and turning to this extraordinary monastic way of life and its spiritual search. Theodore was numbered among them, and this is the story of his conversion. He was a young man of nearly fourteen years of age, of Christian parents, highly respected in the world. On the eleventh day of the Egyptian month Tybi, that is, the eighth day before the Ides of January, [Jan 6, at that time the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, sometimes associated with the Nativity. Today, the Feast of the Epiphany.] a certain Egyptian festival was being celebrated as usual. He was giving thanks to God, aware that he had a large and splendid house and an abundance of possessions of all kinds, when he suddenly felt compunction in his heart.

"What will it profit you, O Theodore," he began to wonder, "if you gain the whole world (Mark 8.36) and enjoy all its worldly delights, at the price of being excluded from the good things of eternal and immortal life? No one who lives only for present pleasure can expect the reward of unending glory." In a great turmoil over these thoughts he went into an inner chamber of his house and fell weeping on his face.

"Almighty God, who know the secrets of our hearts," he prayed, "you know that there is nothing in this world that is more important to me than your love. So I beg you in your mercy to guide me in your will and enlighten my miserable soul lest in the darkness of my sins I fall into eternal death. Grant that by the gift of your redemption I may praise and glorify you for ever. "

As he was praying thus his mother came in and saw his eyes were full of tears.

"Why are you so sad, my beloved son?" she asked. "And why are you hiding away from us? We have been worried and upset, looking for you everywhere so that you can share our festival banquet."

"Go and have your banquet, mother," he said. "For my part I could not eat a thing."

She continued to beg him, but in vain. He would not come and join them in the feast. Daily while going to school to learn his letters he began to fast at least until vespers, though he would often fast for two days at a time. He abstained from all rich and fancy foods for a period of two years, striving to attain to perfect continence, in so far as his young age would allow. He began to wonder whether he should seek out a monastery and bind himself to a holy Rule. He gave up all that he had and sought out some religious men living a

godly life together, and went to live with them, progressing daily in the fear of God.

Chapter XXX

These monks had a holy custom of gathering together after the evening prayers to meditate on the divine wisdom, and it so happened one evening that Theodore heard one of them talking of what the tabernacle of the old Testament and the holy of holies signified for people of the present day.

"As regards those whose foreskins were circumcised," he said, "the outer court of the temple signified the early Jewish people, but the inner court, the holy of holies, prefigured the vocation of all the gentiles, that is, a vocation to be found worthy of entering into the more sacred place in order to participate in the greater mysteries. Instead of the animal sacrifices, the manna in the ark, the flowering rod of Aaron and the tables of the Law, the thurible, the table, and the propitiatory candelabra, God himself has mercifully made himself known to us in the person of his incarnate Word, and enlightened us with the light of his presence, and has become himself the propitiation for our sins. Instead of manna he has given us his own body for food.

"This teaching I learned from our holy father Pachomius," this same brother went on to say. "He has begun to gather monks together in his monastery of Tabennisi, and by God's help I made great progress while I was among them. And I bear in mind that through this great man all my sins were forgiven." Theodore found his heart burning as he listened to this, and he prayed silently. "O Lord God, if this is what a righteous man on earth should be like, grant that I may see him and follow in his footsteps in obedience to all his commands, that so I may be found worthy to enjoy all those good things which you have promised to those who love you."

And he wept freely, overcome by the wound of divine love.

A few days later the venerable Pecusius, a man of a distinguished old age, came to visit them, desirous of knowing how they did. Theodore earnestly begged him to take him as his companion and guide him to the holy Pachomius. Without any argument he freely agreed to do so, and when they arrived there Theodore worshipped the Lord.

"Blessed are you, O Lord," he said, "for answering so quickly the prayers of sinners. You have deigned to grant me what I asked."

And as soon as he entered the monastery and saw Pachomius he wept for joy.

"Don't weep, my son," the venerable father said, "for I am only a sinful human

being, trying to do the work of God."

Having said that, he introduced him into the monastery. Theodore's mind lit up when he saw how many brothers there were, and he flung himself with great zeal into the round of daily worship. In the course of time he made great strides in virtue. God showered great gifts upon him; he became practised both in good works and good words, with a wonderful humility and heartfelt contrition, meticulous in his fasting, wide awake in his vigils, earnest in prayer, losing no opportunity to seek after ever greater gifts of spiritual grace. He was able to give great comfort to those who were in some distress, and knew how to correct with humility and good will those who had strayed into some misdemeanour. Pachomius could see what a brilliant and shining example he was, and took him to his heart and loved him deeply.

Chapter XXXI

As soon as his mother heard that he was with Pachomius, she got the bishops to write a letter requesting that she should be reunited with her son, and armed with this she hurried to visit him. She lodged with the virgins in the monastery which, as we have said, was at some distance from the men, and sent the bishops' letter to the holy Pachomius, with an earnest request that he would allow her to see her son. Pachomius summoned Theodore to him.

"I have to tell you, my son," he said, "that your mother is here and wants to see you. She has even brought letters to us from the bishops. So make haste and satisfy your mother, especially seeing that she brings a letter which the holy bishops have written."

"Venerable father," he replied, "I have gained some knowledge of spiritual things. Before I do as you ask please first assure me that if I do see her I will not have to answer for it in the day of judgment. Like anyone else in the world I have given her due respect according to the commandments of Christ. But in the times before the manifestation of Christ's grace, the sons of Levi turned their backs upon their own parents in order to fulfil the righteousness of the law (Exodus 32.26-28, Leviticus 21.11, Deuteronomy 33. 8-9). Is it not even more incumbent upon me, who have been made partaker of such great gifts, to put the love of God before love of parents? The Lord says in the Gospel, 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10.37) ".

"If you have decided it would not be right to see her," Pachomius replied, "I will not bring any pressure to bear on you. Those who utterly renounce this

world do need to deny themselves completely. Monks especially ought to flee from all idle and worldly meetings and meaningless conversations, and associate seriously only with those who are members of Christ. For if anyone governed by some worldly passion says, 'My parents are my flesh. Therefore I ought to love them', he should pay attention to what the blessed Peter the Apostle says, 'A man is in bondage to anyone who overcomes him' (2 Peter 2. 19)."

When Theodore's mother realised that he was not going to meet her, she decided to stay permanently in the monastery with the virgins of Christ, saying to herself, "If the Lord wills, I may at least catch sight of him among the other monks, and I shall also bring benefits to my own soul for as long as I persevere in this way of life. It is certain that those who maintain a strict discipline for Christ's sake and not for the sake of vainglory will acquire virtue upon virtue, and in a short space of time will give offence to none."

Chapter XXXII

We have shown his zeal in encouraging those who had a desire to seek after better things; so now we think it is right to describe those who were negligent, by way of a warning to our readers. For there were some monks living after the flesh and making no attempt to put off the old man (Colossians 3.9), about whom Pachomius was very worried. He frequently spoke to them with words of salutary advice, but could never see any signs of improvement in them. Worried and sad, he besought the Lord ever more earnestly.

"O Lord, Ruler of all," he prayed, "You have commanded us that we love our neighbour as ourselves (Leviticus 19.18, Matthew 19.19). You know the secrets of our hearts. Turn not your face away from me as I cry out to you for their salvation. Have mercy on them, fill them with the fear of God, that knowing your power they may serve you truly, strengthened in all they do by hoping in your promises; for my soul is greatly troubled because of them, and my whole being is in distress."

After a few days he could see that they had not improved a bit as a result of his prayers. Once more he stood in prayer, praying for them to the Lord, and he also gave them some private and personal rules of prayer and behaviour, in the hope that by applying themselves to obey rules like slaves they might little by little aspire to the gift of loving him as sons. They found that they were not going to be able to follow their own desires and went in mortal dread of Pachomius, inspired by fear of him rather than moved by his purity. They fell

utterly into error and departed from the monastery, following Satan and rejecting the wonderful way of life followed by Pachomius.

But once they had gone, the whole flock was restored to a state of integrity, increasing more and more in virtues, just as the good grain is able to flourish in the field when the weeds have been rooted out. I have told you all this to show you that although there is nothing against worldly people embracing a monastic life, nevertheless their venerable profession will be of no use to the monks if they persist in being negligent, for neither paternal prayer nor understanding will be able to help the idle.

Chapter XXXIII

The sometime confessor Dionysus, presbyter and oeconomus (that is, steward) of the Church of Tentyri, was someone whom the holy Pachomius loved dearly. Learning from somebody that Pachomius would not allow people coming from another monastery to eat with his own brothers, but kept them separate in another place outside the monastery, he came to see Pachomius in some agitation.

"It is not right, abba," he said, more in anger than in gentle admonition, "that you don't treat everyone with the impartial charity that brothers deserve."

Pachomius took this reproof with great patience and resignation.

"The Lord knows what my purpose is in doing this," he replied, "and your fatherly nature must also accept that I don't want to upset anybody, much less despise them. Why should I do that, provoking my Lord into being angry with me, when he has clearly said in the Gospel that 'what you do unto the least of these my brothers you do unto me' (Matthew 25.40)? So listen to my explanation, venerable father. It is not that I wish to shun or despise anyone who comes to me that I do what you say I do. My own flock are gathered together in the coenobium. I am aware that many of them are so far unlearned in the monastic way of life that they have not yet even received the monastic habit. Some of them are quite young, and so ignorant that they hardly know their right hand from their left. So I thought it better that brothers from another monastery should be received with all honour and respect in a different place. I hardly think that this constitutes any insult to fathers and brothers who change over to us. On the contrary they are received with more than due reverence, especially seeing that they come together with us at the regular hours to worship God, after which they each go to the place allotted to them, where they work in silence. I am careful before God to supply them

with everything they need."

Having listened to all this, Dionysius the presbyter agreed that Pachomius was worthy of great praise, and said that he was sure that everything was being done according to the will of God. Much enlightened by the explanation that the holy Pachomius had given him, he went back to his own place.

Chapter XXXIV

There was a woman in the city of Tentyri who suffered from an issue of blood and had struggled with this disability for many years. She had heard that Pachomius worshipped God in a most marvellous and holy way, and was moreover aware that Dionysius the presbyter was a dearly beloved friend of his. She begged him to have pity on her and ask Pachomius to come and visit him on some business or other. He was moved by the woman's prayers and acted without delay. When Pachomius came to the church and greeted Dionysius after the prayers, she was seated nearby. As they were talking to each other, she summoned up her faith, believing she could hear Christ saying, 'Be of good comfort, my daughter. Your faith has made you whole' (Matthew 9.22). She came up quietly behind him and touched the cowl with which he covered his head. Immediately she was cured. She fell face down and worshipped the Lord, glorifying his mercy that through his servants he bestowed such great benefits on those who believe in him. The holy Dionysius realised what had happened and gave a blessing to the woman, who forthwith went back to her home.

Chapter XXXV

It was decided once that the monastery should be protected by being enclosed with a palisade and ditch, and Pachomius himself cheerfully played a great part in the work which the brothers undertook.

A little later, a presbyter-monk who was the father of many brothers paid one of his frequent visits to the holy Pachomius, this time bringing with him a brother who was the cause of some dissension in their monastery. For this brother, since the time when he had arrived, had greatly pestered him to be given the dignity of being ordained but the presbyter judged him to be unworthy of such a gift, and had been putting him off with various excuses. It got to the point where he could no longer abide his importunity, and came to the holy Pachomius to lay the whole matter before him, confident that he was the only one who could settle such disputes. Once Pachomius had fully

grasped what it was all about, he gave the presbyter his opinion.

"Now you have come to me to discover what is the will of God, haven't you? My opinion is that you should give him what he asks and don't worry about it. It is quite probable that by exercising this office his soul will be freed from the power of the devil, for it often happens that when a bad man is given great blessings he amends his life. A desire for betterment is often the occasion for the growth of a genuine devotion and it becomes possible for at least some souls to cultivate the virtues which they have hitherto neglected through laziness. So I think it is right for the brother to do this, and it will be pleasing to God."

The presbyter accepted this opinion and acted upon it. And the brother who had had his wish granted came to the blessed Pachomius in a most tranquil and self-effacing frame of mind and fell on his face before him.

"O man of God," he said, "you stand most high in God's favour. For you have discerned what is necessary for salvation and turned evil into good. For if you had not been kind and understanding towards me but treated me sternly I might have discarded my habit and been lost to God for ever. But now, blessed are you in the Lord, for you have saved my soul."

The old man lifted him up from the ground and earnestly entreated him to live worthy of the dignity which would be conferred upon him, lest being negligent he suffer the pains of future torment. He embraced him and went with him as far as the monastery gates before sending him on his way in peace

Chapter XXXVI

While Pachomius was still standing there, a man who had come from some distance away ran towards him and followed after him, begging him for the love of Christ to cure his daughter who was possessed of a demon. Pachomius left him outside and sent back a message to him through the gatekeeper.

"It is not our custom to speak with women," he said, "but if you have got any of her clothing with you, send it in to us and we will bless it in the name of the Lord and give it back to you straight away. We trust in Christ that by this means your daughter will be freed from the attacks of the enemy."

A tunic belonging to the girl was brought to the holy man, which he examined very gravely.

"This is not hers," he said.

"Yes it is," said the father. "Truly it is."

"Yes, I know it is really hers," said Pachomius. "But although she is a virgin

dedicated to God, she has not maintained her holy purity. It was for this reason that having inspected her tunic, and sensing that she had been neglectful of her holy chastity, I declared that it was not hers. Let her promise to you in the sight of God that from now on she will be continent and Christ will have mercy on her and restore her to health."

Grieving and angry, the father interrogated his daughter, and she at last confessed to him that it was even as the holy Pachomius had said. She swore with an oath that she would not ever behave like that again, and the blessed man prayed for her to the Lord and sent her some blessed oil. Anointing with the oil immediately effected a cure, and she glorified God anew for delivering her not only from the demon but also from a repugnant practice. And for the rest of her life by Christ's help she was liberated to practise continence.

Chapter XXXVII

The reputation of this holy man was spreading everywhere so rapidly that it is not surprising that another man who had a son possessed by a demon should with great lamentation have begged Pachomius on bended knee to pray for his son to the almighty power of Christ. He was not able to bring his son to the monastery, but Pachomius prayed for him and gave him some blessed bread, with exact instructions that his son should take a little bit of this medicine before a meal.

When it was time for his son to eat he gave him some of this bread, but the unclean spirit would not at all allow him to eat it, though he picked up other bread which was put in front of him and ate that. So the father broke the bread into smaller bits, took the stones out of some dates and put pieces of the bread inside them. He placed nothing else besides the dates in front of him, hoping that all unwittingly his son might receive a blessing. But he opened the dates up, pulled out the pieces of bread, cursed the dates and refused to eat anything at all. So the father kept him entirely without any food for several days, until at last, faint with hunger, he did eat some of the blessed bread. He immediately fell into a deep sleep, and was liberated from the evil spirit. And the father took the son with him to Pachomius, praising and glorifying God, who through his servants does such great and glorious things without number. This most blessed man did many other healings in the power of the holy Spirit, but never got conceited or took any credit to himself, for he had this gift from God that he always treated everyone the same, and never let his mind stray away from the discipline of Christ. And if he ever asked anything

from God and his petition was not granted he was never in the least cast down but bore it patiently, knowing that whatever the divine mercy prescribed was right for him as well as for everybody else. Sometimes, with the best of intentions we ask for the wrong things, which are not granted because the goodness of God sees fit to overrule them. It is a great mercy of God not to grant our petitions when they are veiled in the night of our own ignorance.

Life of Pachomius, Book 1a (continued)

Chapter XXXVIII

A certain young man named Silvanus gave up his life on the stage to live in the monastery with Pachomius. But after being received he continued living in the same disreputable worldly way, ignoring the disciplines of the Rule and neglectful of his own salvation. He spent his days in the ridiculous empty pastimes of his former life, and even achieved some following among the brothers persuading them to imitate him. Most of the brothers objected to this and urged the holy Pachomius to expel him from the monastery. But he would not agree to that, but bore it all with equanimity. He spoke to the brother, urging him to amend his ways and give up his former lifestyle. He prayed constantly to God for him, that out of the accustomed abundance of his mercy he might fill the young man's heart with compunction. But the youth persisted in his dissolute ways, an example of a lost soul if ever there was one, until at last everyone agreed that he should be cut off from the congregation as being completely unworthy.

But Pachomius still begged to differ. He plied him with the most wise and gentle warnings, and gave him instructions in the wisdom of heaven, with the result that he began to burn so fiercely with the fear of God, and was filled with such trepidation about his future fate, that from then on he was completely unable to refrain from tears. Completely reformed, he became like a book in which everyone else could read what conversion really was. He wept continually wherever he was and whatever he was doing. Even when the brothers were eating he could not cease from lamentation. This annoyed many of the monks.

"Stop your everlasting weeping," they said. "Please, just throw off these expressions of grief."

"However much I try," he replied, "I simply cannot stop crying, as you ask. For my breast burns as if it is on fire, and gives me no peace."

"Well weep privately, then, or if you must, during the prayers, but at least when we gather for a meal you ought to stop weeping and eat. For it is perfectly possible to maintain compunction in your soul without all these exterior manifestations of grief. Many of the brothers are quite put off their food when they see you weeping so freely. Tell us now, why is it that you can't moderate your tears?"

"Would you not have me weep, when I am aware of how much I am supported by you holy brothers? I worship the dust under your feet and don't consider myself at all worthy of being part of your company. Should I not weep, when a man of the stage, guilty of many sins, receives such kindnesses? I go in constant fear lest like Dathan and Abiron I should be swallowed up in my wickedness by a hole in the earth (Numbers 16.32). Those men of unclean hands and deeds had attempted to take over power; and I who am so much aware of the gifts of God have likewise scorned my own salvation by reason of my disgraceful deeds. With this constantly in mind I am not ashamed to weep in front of you all. For I know what sins I am capable of, and I must needs expiate them by my constant fountains of tears. So if I pour out my soul in lamentations it is not really any great thing I am doing. Indeed, at this time I cannot think of any punishment adequate for my sins."

This brother progressed to better things day by day and outstripped all his brothers in humility. So much so that the holy Pachomius had this to say about him in the presence of all the brothers:

"I tell you my brothers and sons, before God and the holy Angels by whom this coenobium was founded, there is only one person that I know of who has followed my teachings on humility."

Some of the brothers thought he was talking of Theodore, others of Petronius, others yet again of Orsesius. Theodore begged him to tell whom he was talking about, the holy man demurred, and Theodore asked him again more urgently. The greater part of the brothers also strongly urged him to say who it was who merited such praise.

"Well, I wouldn't tell you," said Pachomius, "if I thought that the person of whom I have been speaking would succumb to vainglory, but I have not the slightest doubt that by the grace of Christ he would increase in humility however much he might be praised, so I need have no fear in openly singing his blessed praises."

"Now you, Theodore, and others like you, have trapped the devil like a sparrow in a cage, and by the grace of God you have trampled him under your feet and crushed him to dust. But if, which God forbid, you are neglectful in anything he who is under your feet will rise up and rave against you with a terrible fury. But this young Silvanus, whom not long ago you wanted to drive out of the monastery, has put to death his own desires and laid the enemy so low that no one can compare with him. His humility is greater than anyone's. Indeed, whereas you, my brothers, derive satisfaction from the works of righteousness that you do, this young man judges himself to be lower than everyone, however hard he fights himself. With complete conviction he judges himself to be useless and lacking in every kind of virtue. That is why he cries so readily, because he lowers himself and humiliates himself, and does not reckon anything that he does to be important. There is nothing like the humility of a pure heart, together with amendment of life, to destroy the power of the devil."

Silvanus valiantly fought under the banner of Christ for another eight years before coming to the end of his life in peace. The blessed Pachomius testified of his going that a host of holy Angels carried off his soul with great rejoicing, offering him up as a chosen vessel in the sight of Christ.

Chapter XXXIX

At this time, the way in which Pachomius was presiding over such a remarkable way of life came to the attention of Varus, the bishop of the city of Panos. He was a man highly respected in all his doings, devoted to God, standing out as one who fervently loved the true faith. He sent letters to Pachomius, telling him at great length of his desire that Pachomius should come and build monastic cells (monasteria) near his city. For a number of reasons he agreed to the bishop's request, and as he set out on his journey he decided it would be right to visit on the way the monasteries under the bishop's pastoral care. As he approached one of these monasteries he met the funeral procession of one of the brothers who had recklessly taken his own life. The brothers of the monastery were conducting the funeral with all ceremony, singing the usual psalms, with the friends and relations of the dead person all present. When they saw Pachomius they set down the bier and asked him to pray for the dead man as well as for themselves. Having finished the required prayer he turned to the brothers.

"Stop singing psalms," he said. "Take off those splendid vestments you have

clothed him with, burn the lot of them, and take the corpse to be buried without any further psalm-singing."

The parents of the dead man, the brothers, and everyone else that was there were thus suddenly confronted in utter astonishment with this unheard of situation. They begged the old man that at least they should be permitted to sing the usual psalms over him, but he wouldn't agree.

"What is the idea of this new procedure?" the parents asked accusingly. "Who would not pay their respects to the dead, even if they are in disgrace? The tragedy of his death in itself is quite enough to bear. What you are doing is worse than behaving like a wild beast and does not say much for your reputation of holiness. Besides, our own reputation will become completely dishonoured, and we shall be suspected of all sorts of other hidden wickednesses. If only we had never come to this place; if only he had never become a monk! Don't inflict on us a grief which will never go away. We beg that you will restore the singing of the usual psalms for the dead."

"Truly, my brothers and children," said Pachomius in reply, "I grieve for you in the presence of this dead person inasmuch as you are thinking only of what is visible and temporal. My concern is for his present state which we cannot see, which is why I have made these decisions. And you would be bringing even more grief upon him by these so-called honours. I want him to expiate his evil deed, in the hope that he might gain some small measure of eternal rest. I am not thinking of his bodily life. What I have decided is for the benefit of his immortal soul, which will be given back his flesh incorrupt and whole in the day of resurrection. If I were to agree to what you want I would be thought of as one who bowed to human judgment, but I scorn to be seen as one who seeks only to satisfy your wishes for this present moment, rather than seek the best interests of this man in the world to come.

"Our God is the fountain of all goodness, and he seeks opportunities to pour out upon us the overflowing gifts of his own beneficence and to forgive us our sins, not only in this world but in the world to come. It says in the Gospel, 'Whoever blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this world or in the world to come' (Matthew 12.32), which means that there are some sins which undoubtedly can be forgiven if penance is done for them. We have been considered worthy by the power of Christ to administer the medicine prescribed by his godhead, and if we do not pronounce judgments appropriate for each particular case we shall fall into disrepute as despisers, as Scripture says, 'Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish' (Habakkuk 1.5

& Acts 13.41). So, therefore, I beg you to allow this dead person to be humiliated because of his sins, if only so that he may be found worthy of obtaining some measure of rest in the day of judgement. Bury him without the psalms, as I have said. Our kind and clement and most merciful God is well able to grant him eternal rest in response to our unadorned prayers." When he had finished, they all went on their way and did as the venerable father had said, burying him on the mountainside where his tomb had been prepared.

Chapter XL

The holy man stayed with the monks for several days, and taught them first of all how each one should live in the fear of God, and then how they should fight against the devil, and by the grace of Christ turn away from his attacks. Messengers then came to tell him that a brother of the monastery of Chinobosci was seriously ill, and begged the blessing of a final prayer from Pachomius. The man of God immediately set off in all haste with the messengers, and as they were hurrying along about two or three miles from the monastery they were going to, he heard the most beautiful voice sounding in the air, and looking up saw that brother's soul being swiftly carried up to the blessed realms of everlasting life by Angels praising the Lord. Pachomius' companions neither heard nor felt anything at all, but only saw him gazing steadily towards the East.

"Why are you just standing there, father?" they asked him. "We need to hurry if we are to get there in time."

"There is no point in hurrying," he said. "What I have been gazing at for so long is the brother being taken up into the joys of eternity."

They asked him to explain how he had seen the soul, and he told them what he had seen in as far as they could understand it. When they arrived at the monastery they asked what time the brother had fallen asleep, and found that everything they had learned from the holy man was true.

I have told you about this for two reasons. Firstly, to show that this blessed old man had supersensitive sight and possessed the gift of prophecy, being able to see things at a distance by intellectual vision, and secondly, that we who follow in the footsteps of such men should carefully avoid the company of the wicked. And I think that I have now said enough about such things.

Chapter XLI

When the holy Pachomius and the monks came at last to the bishop of Chinobosci, he was welcomed with the greatest of respect, and a great celebration was held because of his arrival. He was told the places where it was hoped that monastic cells would be built, as was stated in the letters some time before, and the venerable man set about building them immediately. In the process of building surrounding walls to prevent break-ins, some detestable people, blinded with envy by the devil, came by night and destroyed what had been built so far. The punishment for their wrongdoing was not long delayed. For while the old man was urging his disciples to put up with all this patiently, those wicked people came intending to finish the destruction which they had begun. But the Angel of the Lord immediately consumed them by fire, and they were reduced to nothing, like wax cast into the flames.

The brothers then quickly finished the whole building, where Pachomius installed religious men as monks, and put Samuel in charge of them. He was a very pleasant man, endowed with a great gift of self-denial. Once the monastic cells had been built, the holy man decided to stay there for some time, until those whom he had brought together should become established in the gifts of Christ.

Chapter XLII

During this time a philosopher of that same city came to visit them, having heard of their reputation as servants of God, wanting to know what they were like and what they thought they were doing. Seeing some of the monks he asked them to call the father, as he had several things he would like to discuss with him. When Pachomius knew it was a philosopher, he sent Cornelius and Theodore to him, telling them to answer his questions as prudently as they could.

"We have heard many accounts," said the philosopher when they met, "of how you give yourselves to the study of wisdom, and that you are known to be able to give wise answers to anyone who enquires about your religion, for which you have a great love. I would like to ask you about what you have gathered in to your store of wisdom."

"Ask what you like," said Theodore.

"Would you settle the question for me about anything I might ask you?"

"Tell me what you have in mind."

"Who died without being born? Who was born but never died? Who died but

did not suffer corruption?"

"There is nothing very difficult about your questions, O philosopher. They can easily be answered. He who died without being born was Adam, the first man. He who was born but never died was Enoch, who pleased God and was translated (Genesis 5.24). The one who died but did not suffer corruption was Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt, and remains there to this day as an example to all who do not believe (Genesis 19.26). And my advice to you, O philosopher, is that you give up your inept propositions and empty questions and turn without delay to the true God whom we worship, and receive remission of your sins to your eternal salvation."

Quite confounded, the philosopher went away without asking any more questions, overcome with admiration at the sharpness of the reply which he got so quickly.

Chapter XLIII

Pachomius spent several more days in these newly constructed cells before going on to another monastery under his control. As all the brothers hurried out to meet him with a great welcome, a little child from the congregation, running about among them, shouted out to Pachomius.

"Truly, father, since the last time you were here there have not been any vegetables or pulses cooked for us."

"Don't worry, my son," Pachomius replied kindly, "I will cook you some."

He went into the monastery and after the prayers went to the kitchen where he found the brother in charge making psiathoi (that is, rush mats), known in the vernacular as mattae.

"Tell me, brother," asked Pachomius, "how long is it since you cooked any vegetables or pulses for the brothers?"

"Almost two months."

"Why have you been acting like this against the Rule and depriving the brothers of this benefit?"

"I had been trying daily, venerable father," he replied, making his humble excuses, "to carry out my duty, but whatever it was that I cooked did not get eaten because they were all fasting. The boys were the only ones who ate anything cooked. So in order not to waste this food prepared with so much labour and expense I just stopped cooking it. And to keep myself from idleness I have chosen to weave psiathoi with the brothers. Only one of my assistants is needed for preparing what little food the brothers want for their

meals, that is olives and herbs."

"And how many psiathoi do you reckon you have you made?"

"Fifty."

"Bring them out for me to see."

And when they had been laid out in front of him, he immediately ordered them to be thrown into the fire!

"Since you have despised the Rule given you of looking after the brothers, then I condemn your labours to be consumed by fire. For you must know how pernicious it is to break the rules set out by the fathers that provide for the salvation of souls. And are you not aware of what a glorious thing it always is to fast in this present life? The Lord greatly rewards anyone who, as far as he is able, fasts out of consideration for the love of God. But when he has no choice in the matter but is compelled to it by necessity, his forced abstinence is useless, and he can expect a reward in vain. But when there is a variety of dishes placed in front of them, by partaking sparingly of them they demonstrate that their whole hope is in God. If they don't see the food, if they are never given any chance of seeing it, how can they expect a reward from God for their abstinence? For the sake of a petty concern for cost the brothers ought not to be deprived of this opportunity."

Chapter XLIV

As soon as he had finished speaking and correcting their errors the gatekeeper came to him in some haste, saying that certain highly respected anchorites had arrived wanting to see him. He said they were to be brought in, and after greeting them with due reverence and saying a prayer he showed them round the brothers' cells and all the other parts of the monastery. They then asked the old man if they could discuss certain matters with him, so he took them to his own cell and sat down with them. As they began a heated discussion about certain abstruse and arcane subjects Pachomius began to notice a terrible smell. It was so bad that he couldn't think, much less contribute to the discussion. When the time for the evening meal at the ninth hour drew near they stood up and said they must go. The holy man strongly invited them to stay for a meal, but they would not, saying that they had to return to their own place before sunset. They bade farewell and set out without delay.

The holy Pachomius, wanting to know the cause of the smell, then prostrated himself in prayer, begging the Lord to reveal to him what kind of people these were. It was made known to him then that it was the impiety of the opinions

which they held that had sent out such a stench from their hearts. Without delay he followed them and caught them up.

"I would just like to ask you something," he said.

"Ask, by all means."

"You have been reading the Commentaries of Origen, haven't you."

Of course, they denied it.

"Before God I say to you that anyone who reads Origen and agrees with his depraved opinions will be sent to the lowest parts of Hell, where his inheritance will be worms and outer darkness, where the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment. See now, I have taken care to pronounce to you what has been revealed to me by God, so I am in the clear. You will know if you have spurned what is right. If you would agree with me and please God in all things, drown all the books of Origen in the river lest you be also drowned with them."

Upon which he left them and went back to resume his accustomed life of virtue, where he found the brothers standing in prayer, and joined with them in singing the hymns and spiritual canticles.

Chapter XLV

As the monks went to their meal Pachomius betook himself to his own cell where he was accustomed to pray to the Lord. Shutting the door he fell to earnest prayer as he thought of the vision which he had just seen. He begged the Lord to reveal to him what would be the future state of his monks and what would happen to his congregation after he was dead. He prayed from the ninth hour up to the time when the brother in charge of the night prayers called him to the usual offices, thus extending the time of his own supplications.

As he persevered in prayer, suddenly about midnight he saw a vision in answer to his prayer, which enlightened him a great deal about the state of those who were to come after him. As his monastery grew in size he saw there would be many living devoutly and chastely, but also a great number living negligently who would completely lose their chance of salvation. He saw, so he told me, a crowd of monks in a deep and dark valley, with some of them trying to climb out of it but not being able to. They could not make each other out and so were running about bumping into each other, completely unable to find the way out of that deep and dark place. Some tried in vain because they became overcome with weariness and sank down to lower places still. Others

were lying about, weeping with tearful voices. But there were others climbing up with an infinite labour, and as they climbed they were suddenly bathed in light, and gave thanks to God that they were able to escape.

Chapter XLV (continued) Life of Pachomius Book 1a

So Pachomius was given to understand what was to happen in the last days. He grieved for the blinded minds of some who were to come after him, and their erroneous beliefs and falling away from goodness. He grieved especially that the leaders among them (*praepositi*) would become negligent and idle, wearing the monastic habit but bringing forth no good works. For once the worst kind of people hold the leadership, ignorant of what holy living should be like, strifes and envyings must needs arise, and evil men will be preferred above good men; leaders will be chosen not because of their integrity of life but merely for their seniority, whence good men will have no confidence in speaking up for the good of the community but will be forced to keep silent, lest for their outspoken honesty they suffer great persecution. But what need to go into details of what might happen when everything covered by the holy rules is subverted by human wickedness? Pachomius tearfully cried out to the Lord:

"Almighty God, if this is what is going to happen, why did you allow this coenobium to be founded? For if the leaders will be corrupt in those last times, what will they be like who are under their rule? 'If the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the ditch' (Matthew 15.14). Woe is me! I have laboured uselessly and in vain! Lord, be mindful of the zeal with which your gifts have enabled me to work. Be mindful of your servants who have served you with their whole heart. Be mindful of your promise that your testament will be observed till the end of the world by those who worship you (Matthew 15.20). You know, O Lord, that since the time when I took the monastic habit I have humbled myself exceedingly in your sight, nor have I ever indulged to excess in partaking of bread or water or any creature that you have made."

And even as he spoke a voice came to him from heaven:

"Don't boast, Pachomius. You are only a human being in need of mercy. Everything that I have created continues to exist only through my mercy." Pachomius immediately threw himself on the ground, seeking forgiveness:

"Almighty God, let your mercy come upon me that I may live (Psalm 119.77). Take not your mercy from me, for your mercy and truth have sustained me. For I know, O Lord, that all things fall into nothingness without the protection of your help."

Angels of light stood about him as he spoke, and a young man was in the midst of them who shone with an indescribable beauty and brilliance, sending forth rays of splendour like the sun, and wearing a crown of thorns upon his head

"Pray tell me, O Lord," cried Pachomius, "was it I who crucified you?"

"It wasn't you who crucified me," the Lord gently said, "but your parents. But be of good cheer and comfort your heart, for your posterity shall stand for ever, and shall not fail until the end of the world. Those who come after you shall be freed from deep darkness insofar as they have lived in abstinence and taken care for their own salvation. Only those who hold with you at this present time, following the example of your virtues, shine with a great light of grace. But those who after you become embroiled in the darkness of this world will climb out of that great darkness, serving justice and loving eternal life with all their heart, insofar as they shall prudently understand what is to be sought after and what is to be avoided, and are not willingly swayed by merely human considerations. Amen I say to you, they shall be granted the same salvation and eternal rest as those who are with you now in continence and radiant sanctity."

Having spoken thus, the Lord ascended into heaven, as the sky was illuminated with such a splendour of light as no human tongue could possibly describe.

Chapter XLVI

Pachomius, lost in wonder at what he had been shown, then went to the night office with all the brothers. And when the holy office was complete, the brothers according to their custom gathered round the old man to hear the word of God. And he opened his mouth and taught them:

"My little children, with all the power of which you are capable strive bravely after your own salvation, and fight valiantly against the armed might of the enemy, before the time comes when we ourselves shall cry out in misery and lamentation as we grow weak and incapable. Let us not fritter away the days which the Lord has bestowed upon us, but let us develop our virtues with all zeal. For I say to you, if you knew the good things prepared for the saints in

heaven, and the torments remaining for those who fall from virtue having known the truth and not embraced it, you would with all your strength flee from that eternal punishment and hasten to obtain that blessed inheritance which has been promised to the servants of God. It is only the evil and abandoned who shun and spurn such blessings, for they know not what they might be losing. It behoves them even now to cast off their worldly desires, weep constantly for their past offences, and seek for the mercy of God that they may turn to better things, and so direct their pathways that they may depart happy from this life and come rejoicing to the heavenly kingdom.

"Having cast off its earthly tabernacle, the soul expands in the knowledge of its own inner existence (*ad cognitionem suae substantiae properat*), and accompanied by the celestial powers hastens to the presence of the Father of lights. Why do human beings exalt themselves in vainglory? Why should a creature of dust be raised up? What have earth and ashes to be proud about? Let us weep while we have time, so that when our long-delayed end comes upon each one of us, we may not then be found begging for a time of repentance when we no longer deserve to be given it. It is in this life that we are given to weep for our sins; as we learn from the holy prophet David: 'Who shall be able to cry to the Lord in hell' (Psalms 6.5)? Unhappy the soul, to be mourned with floods of tears, that having once renounced the world returns to the deeds of the world, that having but now been freed from worldly care returns once more to the service of slavery. So then, my beloved brothers, as the time is short before we are to pass from this fleeting world, let us not allow the perpetual life of blessedness to be taken away from us.

"Our earthly parents, immersed as they are in the affairs of the world, and occupied with the business of this present life, are under the impression that we who have fled from the evils of the world already enjoy everlasting life. I tremble in great fear lest they condemn us under those very terms, saying to us, 'Why have you grown weary in your ways, beset with such misery as you are (Wisdom 5.7)? Your sad state is a great grief to us, your destructiveness only adds to our burdens. Our offspring have become quite useless, they do not produce the fruits of which their early flowering gave promise.' I greatly fear lest this prophecy becomes true for us, 'Our loved ones have fallen into disgrace, they have become abominable, the crown has been torn from their brows (Jeremiah 13.18). The cities of the south are closed to us, and there is no one who may open them up. Let the wicked perish and not see the glory of God' (Isaiah 26, according to Septuagint). Let us think on these things, my

brothers, and strive with all our strength lest we be overcome by the enemy. For as he is ever on the alert to destroy us, so we must keep careful vigil that we be not destroyed by his deceits, which God forbid.

"Above all, let us keep the last day before our eyes, and stand in dread each moment before the punishments of eternal pain. This will encourage the soul to grow in self-knowledge, and keep under the body by vigils and fasts. Persevere in grief and mourning, until you are set alight by the fire of the holy Spirit and are found worthy of the gift of heavenly contemplation, when freed from the contagion of earth you may be filled to overflowing with the words of God. He who at all times meditates upon these things obtains purity of mind and a humble heart; he rejects vainglory and turns his back on the wisdom of the world.

"Let our spiritual souls, my brothers, reason daily against the crass matter of the flesh. Deal with it so thoroughly that it may cooperate in aspiring to better things. And when at night you seek your pillow, say to your bodily members, 'As long as we are together, obey me when I tell you what is best for you, and come along with me to serve the Lord with eagerness'. Say to your hands, 'The time will come when your expansive gestures will cease, when your angry pugilistic skills will no longer be, when your palms can no longer be thrust out to steal'. Say to your feet, 'The time will come when you will no longer have the strength to rush headlong into iniquity, when you will not be able to travel in the paths of depravity'. Speak also to all your members at once, and say to them, 'Before we are parted from each other by death, undergoing the punishment which fell upon us by the sin of the first human being, let us do battle bravely, stand unflinchingly, struggle boldly, serve the Lord without fear or hesitation, until he comes again to put an end to our earthly labour and lead us to the kingdom of immortality. Eyes, pour forth tears; flesh, show your nobility by being obedient, and work with me in prayer to my God, lest by preferring rest and sleep you procure for us eternal torment. Be watchful always in everything you do, for it is as you act in sobriety that you will receive an abundant reward of good things.'

"But if you are neglectful, swarms of pitiable torments will come upon you, and then you will hear the moans of the soul complaining to the body, 'Woe is me that I am bound to you, undergoing the punishment of eternal condemnation because of you'.

"Now, if we reason within ourselves like this, we shall become temples of the Lord, and the holy Spirit will dwell within us, nor shall any craft of Satan be

able to encompass us round about. By means of meditations of this sort, the fear of the Lord can teach us more than the doctrines of ten thousand pedagogues and scholars, and the holy Spirit himself will breathe into us whatever we are unable to grasp by human perception. For we know not how to pray as we ought, as the blessed Apostle says, but the Spirit himself prays for us with groans which cannot be uttered (Romans 8.26).

"There are many more things I might say to you, but lest I overburden you I will bring an end to my sermon here. Brothers, may the God of peace and grace give you strength and establish you in his fear. Amen"

He finished speaking and straightway rose, commended us to God and departed.

Chapter XLVII

As he was going back to the monastery of Tabennisi with Theodore and Cornelius and a number of the other brothers, he suddenly stood completely still for a little while in the course of the journey, as if he was having a secret conversation with somebody. He was being made spiritually aware that one of the rules he had made for the monastery was being neglected. For he had decreed that the brothers working in the bakehouse should not indulge in empty chatter when preparing the oblations [i.e. bread for the Eucharist.] but should limit the conversation to edifying topics. He summoned Theodore who was in charge of the monastery.

"Make a few judicious and unobtrusive enquiries about any rude conversations the brothers might be indulging in when preparing the oblations," he said, "and make sure you tell me whatever it is that you find." He went away and made diligent enquires, reporting back to the holy Pachomius what he had discovered.

"Now wouldn't you think," said Pachomius, "that the rules I gave them to keep were eminently sensible? Don't they realise that neglect of even the least important of rules lays them open to great danger? Didn't the Israelites gladly keep silence for seven days before the city of Jericho, until at the appointed time they all gave a great shout and the city was taken (Joshua 6.10)? Did any of them deceitfully disobey what was really a commandment from God, even though conveyed to them only by a human voice? The monks from now on must observe our rules, if their previous sins of negligence are to be forgiven. After all, we ourselves strictly observe the rules which we prescribe for others." He rejoined the monastery, and after the prayers he visited the

brothers who were making psiathoi. [See Chapter XLIII, above.] He sat down with them and began to do some weaving himself. Now, there was a young lad watching him who had been appointed as his assistant for the week.

"You are not doing it right, father," he said. "Abba Theodore told us a quite different method."

"Show me how I ought to do it, then," said Pachomius.

He submitted to the lad's teaching, and sat down again to his work with a perfectly cheerful mind, having banished the spirit of pride by what he had done. For if he had been wise according to the flesh to only the smallest degree, he would not have paid any attention to the instructions of a small boy, but rebuked him for presuming to speak out of turn.

Chapter XLVIII

On one occasion when he shut himself away from everyone in solitude, the devil appeared and contended with him in a false guise.

"Greetings, Pachomius," he said. "I am Christ paying you a visit, my faithful friend."

But guided by the holy Spirit, he thought for a while, then spurned this vision of the enemy.

"The coming of Christ always bring peace, and to see him is to be free from all fear and full of joy. Human reason is banished afar and gives way to a longing for heaven. But at this moment I am in a turmoil, gripped by a tumult of confusing thoughts."

He rose up and signed himself with the cross, and stretching out his hands as if to seize him, he breathed upon him.

"Devil, depart from me," he cried. "Cursed are you and your visions and your insidious arts. You have no place among the servants of God."

He was turned to dust, filling the cell with a most foul smell, and Pachomius heard a loud voice shattering the silence:

"I would have rewarded you greatly if I had persuaded you into my power. But the power of Christ is supreme, and I am always beaten by you. But make no mistake, I shall always continue to attack you. I am bound to carry out my task without ceasing."

So Pachomius was strengthened by the holy Spirit, and put his trust in the Lord, giving thanks for the great gifts and blessings showered upon him.

Chapter XLIX

While walking through the monastery one night with Theodore, he was suddenly aware of a great phantasm in the distance, of an immensely seductive appearance. It was dressed as a woman so much more beautiful than any human being could possibly be that it is impossible to portray what it looked like or describe the impression it made. As Theodore looked at it he became exceedingly agitated and the look on his face showed it. The venerable old man could see that Theodore was desperately anxious.

"Put your trust in the Lord, Theodore," he said, "and don't be afraid."

And he stood in prayer, beseeching the Lord that the presence of his divine majesty might put to flight this stupendous phantasm. As soon as he began to pray, this vision began to dissolve into what it had been before, that is, a multitude of demons. As Pachomius finished his prayers they came towards him and spoke.

"Why do you labour in vain when you cannot do anything to harm me? For the Lord has given me power to put to the test anyone I like."

"What are you after?" asked Pachomius. "Where do you come from, and who is it you are seeking to put to the test?"

"I am the power of the devil," it replied, "and a horde of demons are mine to command. I am the one to cast a holy light upon the earth, disguising the darkness of a death-dealing voluptuousness. I was the one who deceived Judas, and deprived him of the dignity of being an Apostle. Therefore, O Pachomius, I have sought from the Lord that I might wage war against you without ceasing, for I cannot bear the reproaches of the demons any longer that you have shown yourself more powerful than all my stratagems and attacks. There is no one like you for making me powerless. For young men and old and even young boys subvert me by your teaching. They almost tread me underfoot. They are so much part of a monastic army gathered against me, surrounded by the indestructible wall of the fear of God, that my servants have no power to seduce by their multiple deceits anyone of your people at all. This is what is happening to us because the word of God was made man, who gave power to you to drive our power far off."

"What then?" said Pachomius. "Am I the only one you have come to tempt, or are there others?"

"You and everyone like you."

"Theodore too?"

"I have sought after Theodore also, and power has been given me to put you both to the test, but the trouble is that I can't get anywhere near you!"

"Oh, why not?"

"In fighting against you both it would seem that I am doing you a favour, but especially you, Pachomius, because you have attained to such heavenly heights that you have been held worthy to see the glory of the Lord with your bodily eyes. But you won't always be with your monks, will you, protecting them with your prayers, and stiffening their resolve by your exhortations. The time will come after your death when I shall rave wildly among them as much as I like, and do with them whatever I please. For it is all your doing that at present I am trodden underfoot by your great congregation of monks."

"You miserable idiot, don't you realise that it could well be that better people will come after me, serving Christ with a steadfast will, who will imbue with spiritual knowledge those who take refuge in the discipline of the Lord, and build them up by their godly examples."

"My certainty is that you are simply lying, speaking against the mind of God."

"No, it is you who are the father of lies, for there is no way that you are able to tell the future. Only God knows the future; it is for his power and majesty to have foreknowledge of all things."

"As far as foreknowledge goes, I admit I don't know much but by means of divination I know a great deal."

"What do you mean? Divination?"

"I deduce the future from what has gone before."

"How can you do that! Tell me!"

"Every project in the beginning tends as time goes on to prosper, until eventually its impetus weakens. And so I discern that this divine vocation of yours has been strengthened in its beginnings by counsel from heaven, by signs and prodigies, full to overflowing with all kinds of powers. But when it gets a bit older, it will grow less quickly, it will get weary as time stretches out, it will begin to fail through laziness and negligence, and in this situation I shall begin to make some headway. But for the present my task is to overcome whomsoever I can, and I shall not cease to put you great men to the test."

"If, as you say, you will not cease from putting great men to the test, and if you claim that your main task is the perdition of souls, and that your malice is greater than all the demons put together, tell me, why is it that at this time you cannot prevail against the servants of God?"

"I have already told you. Because of the marvellous incarnation of Christ on earth, we are having to carry on with greatly curtailed powers. Because of those who believe in his name we have become as insignificant as sparrows."

Nevertheless, although we are weakened, we have not yet been so completely put out of action that we are prevented from deceiving where we can. For we never rest from sniping at your people. We insinuate evil thoughts into the minds of those who set themselves up against us, and when we sense that they are giving some measure of assent to our titillations we slip in a few thoughts even more disgusting still, and stir up the fires of various kinds of voluptuous excitement. By our subtle undermining tactics we can penetrate their defences and bring them more fully under our power.

"On the other hand, if they reject what we suggest to them and pay no attention to us, and if they seriously and vigilantly build up their defences by means of their faith in Christ, we are scattered like a smoke, driven from their hearts and put to flight. We are not allowed to lay siege to all and sundry, because there are some that would not be able to resist our attacks. If we were allowed to deploy all our forces indiscriminately against everyone, we would be able to deceive many who are now protected by your endeavours. But what's the point? They are protected by your virtue and the power of the Crucified."

"O how wicked," cried the holy Pachomius with a great groan, "are the unsleeping attacks which you will never cease levelling against the human race, until the power of God shall come again in the person of his Son and consume and destroy you for ever!"

And he cursed the horde of demons in the name of Christ, whereupon they were scattered and brought to naught.

Next morning Pachomius called together all the brothers who had seniority either by reason of the sanctity of their lives or by the length of their service. He told them all that he had seen and heard from the evil spirits. And he sent warnings by letter to those elsewhere, to strengthen them in the discipline and fear of the Lord, telling them to be on the alert and give no ground at all to demonic phantasms, but to have no fear of the demons' multiform displays. They all heard and understood what had been miraculously revealed to him by the grace of God and continued to endure with all eagerness the burden of labouring after purity of heart.

Chapter L

Meanwhile one of the brothers, who zealously imitated the patience shown by the old man, was bitten in the foot by a scorpion while he was standing at prayer. The poison injected into him almost travelled as far as his heart, so that

he was almost on his last breath, but although he was in extreme pain he did not move from the spot until he had finished his prayer, whereupon Pachomius immediately poured out prayers to Christ and restored him to his former health.

Life of Pachomius (continued), Book 1a (Also St Abraham, further down this page)

Chapter LI

Theodore also suffered terribly once from severe headaches, and he asked Pachomius to pray that he might gain some relief.

"Do you think, my son," said Pachomius, "that any griefs or pains or anything else like that can happen to anyone unless God allows it? Therefore, put up with your aches humbly and patiently, and God will give you relief when he wills. And if you seem to be tested in this way for an over long time, be grateful. Job was perfectly patient, and blessed the Lord after suffering many trials and excruciating torments. Do as he did, and you also will receive an even greater reward from Christ. Abstinence and persevering prayer are good things, but the rewards are even greater when infirmity is endured with patience and longsuffering. Now this teaching has come down to us from men of great heart, and I too judge it necessary that for the benefit of many one man should show tolerance beyond human praise."

Chapter LII

There was a monk call Zachaeus who suffered from jaundice as a result of his abstinence over a long period, for he had been content with bread and salt, and lived alone in a cell quite separate from the brothers. He was always weaving rush mats, and for the sake of the Lord his hands suffered such injury through winding thin strands of rope together that they were covered in drops of blood. But in spite of these bodily ills he was never absent when the brothers met together, but roamed about watchfully during the offices to make sure that none of the brothers went to sleep. Every night before going to sleep it was his

custom to meditate on something from the holy Scriptures, sign himself with the cross, give praise to the Lord, and only then snatch a little rest. He would get up again in the middle of the night and keep vigil till the time of the morning prayers.

A brother was one day looking at those hands covered in blood, damaged so severely by the vigorous way he worked, and spoke to him about them.

"Why do you torture yourself so much by the way you work father," he asked, "and let yourself get so wounded? Is it perhaps because you are afraid that God will be angry with you and accuse you of idleness if you don't work as hard as that? God knows you are suffering, and no work is worth the great trouble you are causing for yourself, especially when it is all quite unnecessary. For if we give bountifully, first to God, then to pilgrims and poor people, how much more should we not care for you, when we all serve with the greatest devotion such a great and good father."

"Impossible for me not to work!" he replied.

"Please, at least put some oil into your hands, lest the streams of blood coming from them stain your work."

He took that advice and did what he was urged to do, but it only made his wounded hands so much worse that he could hardly bear the pain of it. The blessed Pachomius passed by and saw what was happening and why.

"Did you really think, brother," he said, "that oil would be able to cure you? Was anybody compelling you to keep at your work so vigorously that you felt it necessary to use that as an excuse to put your trust in oil rather than putting your hope in God? Do you think it is impossible for God to heal you, or that he is ignorant of each person's illnesses? Do you imagine that he needs us to advise him? He is merciful by nature; how can he possibly despise us? He takes into consideration the welfare of the souls of us all, and allows us to suffer some temporary pains in order to pour out upon us the eternal rewards due to tolerance. Let us then be sure that we cast all our care upon him, and let him in his mercy bring an end to our griefs when he wills and as he wills."

"Forgive me, venerable father," said Zachaeus, "and pray for me to the Lord that in his goodness he may see fit to put my fault behind me."

Many people related of this old man that for the space of a whole year his eyes were full of tears, and that he took food only once every two days. The holy Pachomius held him up as an example of good works and a stronghold of virtues. He would send anyone weighed down with worry to him, for he said there was no one like him for being able to give a word of comfort. He fought

bravely to the end of a holy old age, till he passed over to the heavenly kingdom to receive eternal consolation for all his pains.

Chapter LIII

Pachomius certainly never hid the talents entrusted to him (Matthew 25.18), but used them for the benefit of all, and sent Zachaeus and many others like him, who had become perfect in their lives, to the presence of Christ before him. One feast day he celebrated by giving thanks to God for all those many great blessings granted to him that this long drawn out account of ours has described. For on the most blessed feast of Easter, after many of his brothers had gone to the Lord before him, he at last fell ill himself and was nursed by Theodore, whom we have often mentioned. His whole body was weak and debilitated, but his face was shining and cheerful, proof to those who saw him of his godly mind and pure conscience. Two days before he died a holy death he called all the brothers to him.

"Beloved brothers," he said, "I am about to enter into the path the fathers have trodden before me, for I hear the Lord calling me hence. But you, remember all the teachings you have heard from me again and again. Be watchful in prayer and sober in all you do. Have nothing to do with the sects of Meletius, Arius, Origen, or any others who set themselves up against the precepts of Christ. Keep to the company of those who fear the Lord and are able to assist you in pursuit of a holy life and provide your souls with spiritual comfort. I am now ready to be delivered, and the time of my departure is at hand (2 Timothy 4.6). Therefore, while I am still here, choose one among you who under God will be senior to all and will undertake the cure of your souls. As far as my own judgement is worth anything I would choose Petronius as being suitable for this task, but it is up to you to choose whom you will."

In this they accepted their father's advice as obedient sons. Petronius was a man of great faith, humble in bearing, prudent in his thinking, of good habits and discernment. The holy Pachomius poured out prayer to the Lord for him, for he was known to be suffering from illness in the monastery of Chinobosci. But Pachomius commended the whole brotherhood to his care, even though he was absent, and had a message sent to him that he should come immediately. He signed himself with the cross, and gazing with a joyful countenance on the Angel of Light sent to him, he gave up his holy spirit in the tenth day of the month Pachon, according to the Egyptians, which is the seventh day before the Ides of May according to the Romans. [May 9]

His disciples revered his dear and venerable body in a fitting manner according to the customs, and kept vigil over it the whole night through with the singing of psalms and hymns. And the next day they buried him in the mountain where he had begun. The brothers who had been sent to fetch the holy Petronius brought him back still suffering from his illness. He only ruled over the brothers for a few days before coming to a peaceful end himself, leaving behind him Orsesius, a just man acceptable to God.

Chapter LIV

We have described only a few of their many merits, and set out only a small number of their great deeds, not that their honour will be any the less for that. Indeed they have no need of lavish commendation, for it is enough for them to enjoy the eternal praise and unending glory which they have been granted in the presence of Christ and all his holy Angels. They shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of God (Matthew 13.43), who has borne witness that he glorifies those who glorify him. We try to follow in their footsteps with all our strength. Aware of the brilliance of their lives we try to imitate them with the help of Christ, aided always by the prayers of the blessed fathers, Patriarchs and Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs and all the Saints, who ever give glory and praise to our almighty and merciful God, the blessed and co-eternal and consubstantial and indivisible Trinity, Father, Son and holy Spirit, to whom be given all praise and glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 7

The Life of Saint Abraham, Hermit, [Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on March 16]

by S. Ephraem the Deacon

translated into Latin from the Greek

by an anonymous author.

Prologue by S Ephraem

My brothers, I wish to tell you about the way of life of that wonderfully perfect man Abraham, who began his life and continued to the end in such a way that he has earned perpetual glory. But when I think of his great virtue I am very hesitant about trying to put together a worthwhile and enlightening

tale. For he was an outstanding man who had achieved perfection, whereas I am but weak and unpolished. But although unskilled, I will do the best I can to write as much as possible about this man, although I cannot claim to have a perfect understanding of him. Anyone, indeed, who is deservedly called a second Abraham cannot be easily described by human tongue.

He was a man of our own time, living an Angelic life while still on earth. He developed as much endurance as the hardest of adamantine rock, which earned him celestial glory. From his early youth he preserved the most spotless chastity, which made him a holy vessel, fit to be a temple of the holy Spirit, and thus he opened himself up to the God who came to dwell in the guesthouse of his mind.

The Life

Chapter I

This blessed Abraham had wealthy parents who loved him tenderly beyond measure. They had such care for him, beyond the usual limits of human affection, that they betrothed him to a girl while he was still a child, hoping with a great longing that he would make progress in some secular walk of life. But he had long thought otherwise, for from the beginnings of his adolescence he began to frequent the regular gatherings at the church, eagerly listening with enjoyment to whatever was read from the holy Scriptures, which he would commit to memory and afterwards mull them over intently in his heart. But then his parents set a date for the approaching marriage ceremonies, which would oblige him to be bound by nuptial vows. He had objected to this at first, but they berated him and brought such pressure to bear on him that after a while he could no longer stand against them and felt so ashamed that he was persuaded to agree. So the nuptials were celebrated, but during the seven days of festivity divine grace suddenly illuminated him like a lamp shining in his heart. He welcomed it as guiding him to the fulfilment of his own desire. He leapt for joy and followed it as it led him out of the city.

Chapter II

About two miles from his home he found an empty cell which he occupied and made his home, glorifying God with immense happiness. But it was a crushing blow to his parents and friends, who went out searching everywhere for this man of God. He had been seventeen days in his cell when they finally found him there praying, and the blessed man then saw how distressed they

were.

"Why should you be so upset at seeing me in this situation?" he asked.

"Rather give glory to the most merciful God, who has rescued me from feasting at the table of my own sins, and pray for me that I may in all things shape my life as may be most pleasing to his will, and that I may be able to bear unto the end this most gentle yoke which the Lord has laid upon me, unworthy though I am."

All who heard him could not but say Amen, and he asked them not to disturb him by dragging out this meeting any longer. After they had gone he blocked up the entrance to his cell and shut himself up inside, constructing a small window to the outside world through which he might receive his usual daily bread.

Divine grace began to light up his mind, freed as it was from all turbulent distractions, and he advanced daily in the way he governed his life. The foundation of his life was continence, upon which he built his vigils and prayers, which he poured out with humble tears and love. Gradually his reputation for holiness spread everywhere around, and as people heard about him they hoped for inspiration from him and came from all directions to visit him. God abundantly bestowed upon him words of wisdom and knowledge and comfort, which lit up the minds of his hearers as if by the most brilliant of lamps.

Chapter III

When he had been living this life for twelve years, his parents died leaving him a great deal of money and property. Lest this should distract him from his own prayers he asked a close friend to take upon himself the godly task of overseeing the distribution of it all to the poor and to orphans. His own soul and mind continued securely in quietness, for it was the greatest wish of this good man to be completely free from all earthly cares. He possessed nothing on this earth except a mantle and a coarse tunic. He also had a little bowl from which he ate and drank, and a rush mat on which he slept.

Above all he had true humility, and showed the same charitable respect to all. He did not put the rich before the poor, the prince before the subject, or the aristocrats before the common people, but gave the same consideration and honour to all, without any respect of persons. He never scolded people rudely; his speech was always rooted in love and gentleness. How could anyone possibly get too much of his eloquence, offered as it was with such sweetness?

Or how could anyone gazing at his face, the image of holiness, fail to be filled with a desire to see him over and over again. Once he had taken up his rules of abstinence he never relaxed them at any time. He completed with all diligence fifty years of this chosen way of life, and for the great love and longing he had for Christ, he reckoned that long stretch of time as but a few days, and he thought of all the austerity of his rule as nothing at all.

Chapter IV

There was quite a large and important village not far from the city, where everyone from the greatest to the least lived in a state of the most crude paganism. Nobody had succeeded in converting them from the worship of idols. A number of presbyters and deacons had been ordained by the bishop and sent there for that very purpose, but had to withdraw without converting anyone. They laboured there in vain; the people would not be persuaded. They were fierce in temperament and quite inflexible about keeping to their own opinions. Not only that, but they also stirred up anger and the most intense resentment against the preachers. There were even a number of monks who had tried to approach them time and again, but had not had the least success in converting any of them.

Then, one day, as the bishop was having a meeting with his clergy, he began to talk about this most blessed man.

"In all my days I have never seen anyone like him," he said. "He is perfect in every good work, adorned with all the virtues. God is with him, which is why he is known as Abraham the most holy."

"It is perfectly true," came the reply from the clergy. "This servant of God is the most perfect of monks."

"I would like to ordain him presbyter," said the bishop, "and send him into that village of pagans. With his patience and love he would be able to convert them to God."

And he got up straight away and went to the holy man's cell along with his clergy. After greeting him he immediately suggested that Abraham should go to that village for the sake of their salvation.

"I beg you, most holy father," said Abraham, unhappy and agitated, "Let me just go on weeping for my sins without placing this sort of burden on my weak and insignificant existence."

"But by the grace of God you can do it. Surely you don't want to be found lacking in obedience in this matter."

"I beseech you, your holiness, let me just mourn my misdeeds."

"Look, you have renounced the world and everything in it, you have embraced the life of the cross, and yet having done all that, you should know that you have no idea of what obedience is, which is the greatest of all virtues."

"What am I but a dead dog (1 Samuel 24.14), and what is my life that you have passed such a sentence on me, most holy father!"

"Look, you are just sitting here taking thought for your own salvation. There are multitudes more whom by the help of God's grace you could save by turning them towards the Lord God. Just ask yourself which will bring the greater reward, saving your own soul, or leading many others to salvation with you.."

"Then the Lord's will be done," the blessed man of God said in floods of tears.

"In truth, obedience demands that I do whatever you wish."

Chapter V

So he was taken from his cell into the city, ordained presbyter by the laying of hands, and sent without delay to that pagan village, praying as he went on his journey.

"O God most clement, most bounteous," he prayed, "look upon my infirmity, and send your heavenly grace down on my new status (praesidium) that your holy name may be glorified."

When he got to the village and saw how deeply they were all immersed in the madness of idolatry, he groaned from the bottom of his heart and wept in grief.

"You alone are without sin, O God," he cried, lifting up his eyes to heaven.

"Despise not the works of your own hands."

And he hastily arranged for a messenger to be sent to his dear friend in the city, asking him to bring him what money was left of his inheritance. Once he had got it, before long he had built a church and decorated it with many wonderful ornaments as if it were a most beloved bride. While it was being built, however, the man of God walked daily past the pagan statues, saying nothing, but praying secretly in his heart, and sending up his tears and sighs to the Lord. When the church was finished he offered it up with many tears as a gift to God and on his knees poured forth prayer to God.

"Almighty Son of the living God, you have trodden the whole world of error underfoot, and led it by your presence into the knowledge of your light.

Gather this scattered people also into the bosom of your church, and enlighten

the eyes of their minds, that they may cast off the worship of idols and know you the only kind God and lover of humankind."

The prayer over, he went straight out of the church to the pagan temple, overturned the altar and images and destroyed them with his own hands. When the pagans realised what he had done an angry crowd of them gathered around like a herd of wild beasts and beat him with many rods, making him run for his life. At night time he came quietly back to his church, taking no thought for his lacerations and wounds, but praying to the Lord with tears and groans that they should be saved. In the morning the pagans came to the church and found him praying, and they stood stock still in amazement. And they came to the church for several days, not in order to pray, but to feast their eyes on the beauty and ornaments of the church. A few days later the blessed man Abraham began to urge them to know God. But this made them very angry, and they fell upon him with clubs as if he were some lifeless stone, bound his feet with ropes, dragged him out of the village, and stoned him till they thought he was dead, although in fact he was still only half dead. In the middle of the night he regained consciousness and began to weep bitterly.

"O Lord," he prayed, "why have you despised my lowliness and turned your face away from me? And why do you cast down my soul, and despise, O Lord, the work of your own hands? Now, O Lord, look upon your servant and hear my prayer and give me strength. Loosen your children from the chains of the devil, and enlighten them that they may know you, for you alone are God, and beside you there is no other."

Rising from his prayer, he returned to the village and went in to the church, singing psalms to the Lord. When it began to get light the villagers came and were astonished to see him. Infuriated and maddened, they again tormented him cruelly without mercy, bound him and carried him out of the village.

Chapter VI

He went on suffering like this for three years, but he endured as if he were an adamant rock, and he suffered a great many abusive torments without ceasing. But when he was knocked over, when he was dragged about, persecuted and stoned, suffering from hunger and thirst, no matter what happened he was never provoked to anger, never moved by indignation, never fainthearted, never worn out and weary. The more he suffered from them the more his love and charity increased towards them. He warned, he cajoled, he

showered them with entreaties of gentlest eloquence. He addressed the older men as fathers, the younger as brothers, the youths as sons, but when he was ridiculed by them in return he just laughed as he suffered a thousand insults.

Life of St Abraham (continued), Book 1a (Also St Basil, further down this page)

Chapter VII

There came a day when the inhabitants of that village got together and began to talk to each other in some fear and amazement.

"Just look at the enormous patience that man has!" they said. "The extraordinary charity that he shows towards us! We have given him so much trouble, but he has not gone away, he has not said an unkind word to anyone of us, he has not spurned any of us, but has put with everything completely cheerfully! Surely he would not have been able to do that unless this God that he talks about really is the true God, as he says, and the kingdom, and paradise, and the punishment of the wicked are all true. We have to realise that all by himself he has overcome our gods and has not come to any harm. This man truly is a servant of God and everything we have heard about him is true. Come on then, let us also believe in this God whom he preaches about." And as result of these conversations they all came together to the church shouting and crying; "Glory be to the God of heaven who has sent his servant to us to save us from error!"

Chapter VIII

What an enormous joy filled the heart of the man of God at this sight! His face glistened like the dew of the morning and he opened his mouth to greet them. "Come fathers, brothers, sons, let us give glory to God who has stooped down to enlighten the eyes of your minds, that you may come to know him and receive the life giving sign which will purge you from the uncleanness of idolatry. Believe with all your heart and mind that there is one God of heaven and earth and all that is in it, beyond understanding, giver of light, lover and redeemer of humankind, terrible and gentle. And believe in the only begotten Son who is the wisdom of God, and in the holy Spirit who gives life to all, so

that you may be lifted up from earth to heaven and enjoy the life of heaven."
"You are our father," they said. "You are our guide through life. Whatever you tell us and teach us that we will believe and do."

Without delay the holy Abraham performed the rite of Baptism, and baptised them all from the greatest to the least, about a thousand souls in all. Day by day he read the holy Scriptures to them, and taught them about the kingdom of God, the delights of paradise, the hell of punishment, about justice, faith and charity. They were like good earth receiving good seed, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirty, and as they progressed in the fear of God so did their fruits increase. In their sight he seemed like an Angel of God, holding the household together. His gentle teachings aroused such love towards him that that alone was enough to make them believe in God.

Chapter IX

For the space of a year the blessed man Abraham did not cease to teach them day by day about the word of God, until he could see that their faith and their zeal for God had become strong. But he also saw that their love for him was excessive, and that they were paying him too much honour. He feared that their attachment to him was undermining his rule of abstinence and that his mind to a certain degree was being drawn away into earthly cares. He rose in the middle of the night and poured out a prayer to God.

"You alone, O God, are without sin for you alone are holy, and abide in the holy places. You alone are the merciful Lord and lover of humankind, who have opened the eyes of this multitude and freed them from the chains of the adversary, and rescued them from the toils of idolatrous error, and taught them how to know you. I beseech you, O Lord, to guide them and keep them to the end. In your mercy ever provide a generous measure of your help to this most wonderful flock, which you have possessed as your own. Surround them by the grace of your goodness as if with a strong wall, and ever illuminate their hearts that they may always do what is pleasing to you and earn the life everlasting. You have allowed me, weak as I am, to have been their prop and stay, but now hold it not against me as a sin if I do now speedily depart. You know the thoughts of all. You know that I desire only you, and I know that you are my Lord."

He began his journey as he spoke, signing the village of Christ three times with the Cross, and went away to another place where nobody was able to find

him.

Chapter X

A crowd of people arrived next morning at the church as usual. When he was not be found they were totally bewildered and ran about like lost sheep seeking everywhere for their shepherd, tearfully weeping and wailing. They searched about for a long time without being able to find him, and at last, overcome with grief they went to tell the bishop what had happened. He also was very worried at the news, and immediately sent off several people to search for him. He was anxious to do everything he could for the people, for he could see how deeply concerned they were. When they had searched everywhere as if they were looking for some precious stone but still could not find him, the bishop took counsel with his clergy and they all went to the village. He offered the villagers words of comfort and tried with his gentle coaxing to soften the blow which Abraham's departure had given them. He discerned that they were very strong in the faith, so he chose likely men from among them to be ordained as presbyters, deacons and readers.

The most holy Abraham eventually got to hear about this, and he was overjoyed.

"What return can I make unto you, O Lord my God, most compassionate Father, most gentle lover of mankind, for all the benefits you have given unto me? I give honour and glory to you for everything you have done."

And he went back immediately to his former cell, where he built an extension in front of it and enclosed himself joyfully in the inner part.

O what a miracle was this, my beloved brothers! Worthy of praise and eternal glory! Throughout all those terrible troubles that he suffered in that village he never broke his rule of abstinence, and turned not either to the right hand or the left. Glory and splendour to God who granted him the forbearance which led to the conversion of others, and who gave him the grace to hold to his original purpose!

Chapter XI

The devil, ever malicious towards good people, had not succeeded in turning the mind of the man of God, or separating him from the Lord, in spite of all the troubles he had stirred up against him. Worse, like gold tried in the furnace, he had emerged purified from the fire, and had grown into a greater patience and a keener love. The devil was so exceedingly annoyed and bitterly

infuriated that he sent enormous phantasms against him, in the hope that by filling him with fear he might succeed in deceiving him and getting him to fall.

Chapter XII

So while he was standing to sing psalms in the middle of the night a light as brilliant as the sun suddenly shone in the midst of his cell and he heard the voices of a great multitude.

"Blessed are you, Abraham, truly blessed and faithful, there is no one to be found like you in all the world, for you have done everything according to my will."

The holy man immediately experienced an exceeding great grief, and he lifted up his voice and cried:

"May you be lost in eternal obscurity, you receptacle of grief and deception, for I am a sinful human being, albeit fortified by hope, and by the grace of God I am in no way intimidated by your tricks. No matter how many phantasms you send against me I shall not be afraid. For the name of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whom I love and serve, is to me as a strong wall of defence. In his name I curse you, you unclean, thrice accursed dog."

At these words the vision vanished as a smoke before his eyes, and the holy servant of God blessed the Lord with such eagerness and peace of mind as if he had never seen any phantasms at all.

Chapter XIII

A few days later while he was praying at night, the devil wielded a hatchet and tried to destroy his cell. When he had almost succeeded, he cried out with a loud voice:

"Hurry, my friends, come quickly! Let us go in and bring him to a violent death!"

But blessed Abraham stood up against him.

"All the nations surrounded me," he said, "but in the name of the Lord I will be avenged on them" (Psalms 118.10).

And the devil vanished immediately when he heard that voice, and the blessed man's cell remained whole and unharmed.

Chapter XIV

Again, a few days later when he was singing psalms in the middle of the

night, his mat burst suddenly into flames. Completely unafraid, he stamped on the flames.

"I shall walk upon the asp and basilisk, the lion and the dragon I shall trample under my feet Psalms 91.13), and I shall overcome all the power of the enemy in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ who comes to my aid."

Satan was put to flight, crying out with a loud voice:

"I will bring you to an unpleasant death! You may now hold me in despite, but I shall find a way to conquer you."

Chapter XV

On another day while he was taking food, the devil transformed himself into a young man who came into his cell and tried to overturn his bowl. But the man of God held on to it firmly and continued boldly with his meal. The devil jumped up and suddenly created another phantasm. It was as if there was a candelabra standing in front of him, and light shining above it, and psalms being sung from a polluted and ugly mouth.

"Blessed are they who are undefiled in the way," it sang, "and who walk in the law of the Lord" (Psalms 119.1).

More verses from this psalm followed, but the holy man said nothing until he had finished his meal.

"Unclean and thrice accursed dog," he said firmly as he rose from the table, "most pathetic liar of liars, if you are so sure that we are blessed, why are you molesting us? In any case, blessed are all they who love God with their whole heart."

"It is they who irritate me above all," the devil replied. "It is they whom I would conquer, bring all their good works to naught, and make them acquiesce in all kinds of evil."

"No good will come to you from that, accursed one. You will never succeed in overcoming or even hindering anyone who fears God, only those who like you have departed from God of their own free will. You conquer and deceive them because God is not in them. But those who love God can make you evaporate and dissipate like smoke in the wind. One prayer from such as they can so prick and disturb you that you become like bits of dust in the breeze. For God is a living God, blessed for ever, who will glorify me, so that I shall not be afraid though you never left my side. I despise you as a nothing, the runt of the litter reviled by all."

At these words the devil abruptly vanished, as usual.

Chapter XVI

Five days later, after his night psalms were finished, another powerful phantasm was constructed by the enemy. It was as if the holy man could see a great horde approaching him, all linked together, urging each other on with great shouts that they might cast the man of God into the pit. But the blessed man just looked at them surrounding him.

"They surrounded me like a swarm of bees," he said, "and burned like fire among the thorns, but in the name of the Lord I am avenged on them" (Psalms 118.12).

"Alas, alas!" cried Satan. "I don't know what else I can do! Look! He has beaten me and overcome me in everything I do. He has been defeated by none of my powers, and trampled me everywhere underfoot. Nevertheless I shall not leave you alone until I have overcome you, and humbled you and brought you into subjection."

"May you and all your powers be anathema, you most foul of demons!" said the man of God. "And glory and honour be unto the Lord, the only wise and holy God who gives you to be trampled underfoot by us who love him. Therefore we have no respect for your craftiness but only contempt. Know then, you frail and unhappy demon, that we have no fear either for you or your phantasms."

Chapter XVII

Time after time the devil assaulted this strongest of men with all sorts of arguments and tricks, but never was he able to make any impression on the fortress of his mind or even to make him feel afraid. The more he was attacked, the greater grew his zeal and love towards God. For because he loved God with all his heart, and arranged his life according to God's will, so he earned an overflowing measure of God's grace, and the devil was not able to harm him. He was forever knocking on the door, seeking for the treasures of God's grace to be opened up to him. And when the door was opened up to him he found there the three precious stones of faith, hope and charity, powerful adornments bringing all the other virtues to perfection. And with these he wove a crown of good works which he offered back to his Lord, the King of kings, from whom all his gifts did proceed.

Who has ever with his whole heart loved God and his neighbour as himself like this man (Luke 10.27)? Or who has ever endured such labours, or shown

such compassion? Whenever he heard of any monk who had the reputation of a holy life, did he ever fail to pray for him to the Lord that he might be kept safe from all the snares of the devil, and maintain the blameless course of his life? Whenever he heard of any sinner or godless person, did he ever fail to pray to the Lord with tears day and night that he might be saved? In all the days of his religious life he did not pass one day without tears. Nor did laughter easily escape his lips. He never anointed his body with oil, and from the day of his conversion he never washed either his feet or his face. He always lived as one with the thought of his death always before him.

Chapter XVIII

Truly, my brothers, what a glorious miracle he was! Constant vigils washed with tears, disciplined in body by sleeping on the ground, never weary, never weakened or dulled by lethargy, never prone to apathy, but always like someone hungering and thirsting, he gladly endured all things, never allowing his mind to be deflected from its purpose by any relaxation. He appeared as a flower forever in bloom, his face mirrored the purity of his soul. There was nothing lacking in his whole body, which always seemed healthy and strong, enjoying divine grace in all its parts and enlivened with spiritual joy. In the hour of his death his face shone with such splendour that it seemed impossible that his whole life had been spent in abstinence. And there was another miracle in the way he managed things; he never once changed the tunic in which he was originally clothed.

For other things in the Life of Abraham and his niece, see the Lives of the Women (Book 1d, Life No 20).

Life No 8

The Life of Saint Basil, [c.330 - 379]

Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on Jan 2. Regarded as one of the great Doctors of the Church]

Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia

by Bishop Amphilochius Iconius,

[c.340 - 395. Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on November 23]

translated into Latin from the Greek

by Ursus, subdeacon.

[Sometime around the year 860, according to Rosweyde]

Preface by Ursus

It is to comply with your request that I have translated into the Latin tongue the Life of the blessed Basil, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. It is right that I should accede to your request. I am indebted to all my brothers and neighbours, and I certainly ought not to be disobedient to you. I could wish that this work had been done as well and promptly, and as usefully and felicitously as you have asked it to be, especially as you have emphasised how necessary it is for this great man to be celebrated as much among the Latins as he is among the Greeks. So let the Latin language have these salutary writings, for it is not yet known there how admirable the life of this man was. It is certainly not right that what he taught and did should not be more widely known, for this holy man not only taught human beings the words of God, but first of all performed them, as a great man called into the kingdom of heaven. He was an imitator of him whom Luke wrote about, who described what Jesus began both to do and to preach (Acts 1.1). So then, enjoy these teachings to your soul's health, and lest you should think that this man taught but did not do, you shall know now that what he taught that did he also do, and what is more, you will have a model to imitate.

I have not up to now presumed to approach this work, as you know, because I thought it had been translated by someone else whose merits might have put me to shame. Nevertheless, although some people had already translated the holy Scriptures, was that any reason why there should not be other translators later on? If that were the case, the Latin race would never have been able to drink deep from the holy Scriptures translated into Latin from the original Hebrew by the blessed Jerome, Presbyter of the Roman Church and champion of the holy Bible.

But when I had made enquiries, I found nothing in Latin about the life of this Saint except two of his miracles: the liberating of the boy who denied Christ, and the woman rescued from a life of sin, which however I found to have been so badly done that I could see that it was preferable to translate them afresh rather than try to amend them.

It should also be noted that if any reader asserts that what the holy Amphilochius writes is different from what S Gregory Nazienzus [An associate of St Basil in monastic life. A great Doctor of the Church] wrote in his elegy on this great man, let him remember that what one person might mention another might well omit, which is what we find in reading the Gospels. Amphilochius has written the lives of many great men. Let it be known that he is a most suitable person for this task.

Author's Prologue

Beloved, it is right and proper that devout sons should grieve over the death of a father, and offer the gift of tears. That we have compassionately done. Now, having set aside the turmoil of grief, we have been moved to respond to the grace-giving prayers that all have offered to our Lord Jesus Christ, by producing a Life, and indeed an account of the true miracles, of Basil, our pastor and master, which have been crying out to be preserved in writing lest in the passage of time they be lost in the deepest oblivion.

It might seem that I am wasting my time when there are three most sacred and outstanding men, and others elsewhere as well, who have already produced memoirs of this great and dazzling man. I refer to Gregory of Nazianzus, the memorable Gregory, [died.c. 395. A younger brother of St Basil]. bishop of the city of Nyssa, and the blessed Ephraem, [See chapter XI, below] from whose hands I have received the stories which each of them has gathered together. But I have added things which they have omitted, in the manner of a devoted son repaying a debt to his father. It may be thought that I am deliberately aware that I am conniving at theft, but just as clouds hide the sun, so do fractious criticisms of good stories make one forget how good the stories are.

Basil, our father, was among the greatest, famous throughout the world, expounder of heavenly virtues, a fellow-servant among the order of Angels, a preacher and Doctor of the Church, a monument of incorrupt orthodox dogma, who used simple language to explain the nature of things, discredited Julian [332 - 363. Roman Emperor who promoted paganism].who denied the Trinity, closed the blaspheming mouth of Valens, [Emperor after Julian exposed the wicked error of the Arians, and strengthened unceasingly the beliefs of true Christians. He was a Pastor cherished by the people of the Church, a co-inheritor of a royal priesthood, clothed about in the truth of Christ, the ram of the flock, an outstanding teacher of divine faith, who after his death as in his life shines with great miracles, who by his oratory brought about, as we have said, the downfall of the hateful Julian who lifted up his horn on high and spoke evilly against God. After Julian, Valens accepted the Imperial purple in this illustrious city of ours, Caesarea. He favoured the teaching of the Arians who, as it were, killed off the Father, but it is not our intention in this present narrative to go into the reasons for that. We simply hold to our purpose of celebrating his virtues, from the womb to the end of his life.

Life of S Basil (continued), Book 1a

The Life

Chapter I

Basil, more than anyone else on earth, led a life of perfect balance. For not only was he adorned with good works, but he was furnished with divine wisdom and he offered it all up to Christ, with all his body and soul. His writings, especially, destroyed the erroneous spider webs of the pagans. His parents began his education at the age of seven. He studied Mathematics for five years, and being of a teachable nature he derived great profit from this philosophical discipline. After that he left his native land of Cappadocia and went to Athens, the mother of literature, where he lived chastely and developed many other habits of temperance and continence. He sat at the feet of a teacher of Greek wisdom called Eubulus, and applied his disciplines to himself so well that he became a model not only for his fellow students but also for his teachers. Gregory the future great bishop of Nazianzus, who ruled an Apostolic throne for twelve years, was one of his contemporaries, as were Libanius and Julian, at that time a Christian.

Basil had decided not to take part in holy Communion, but there came a time when divine providence ensured that he would penetrate into those secrets of wisdom. For having studied the whole range of pagan philosophy for fifteen years, Astronomy and Geometry and everything that was best, he found that he had not succeeded in discovering in any of them the foundation underlying everything else. But one night as he was keeping vigil, a divine splendour enfolded him, urging him to study the scriptures of our religion.

So he hurried off to Egypt, where he visited a certain Archimandrite named Porphyrius and asked to be given access to the holy books in order to gain a grounding in religious doctrines. As he read he continuously meditated on divine wisdom, while learning to survive on water and a vegetarian diet. He stayed there for a whole year, seeking the truth in faith by examining the word of truth. He then asked to be allowed to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to see the holy places. Permission was granted and he went.

Chapter II

He came back from there to the place where he had been instructed in Greek philosophy, [i.e. Athens] and began to preach Christ to many of the philosophers and other pagans, urging that therein lay the way of salvation. In particular he began to seek out Eubulus among the various schools of study that he had set up, in the hope that by his own pure faith he might lead Eubulus towards the faith. For Eubulus was a great teacher of all who were learning philosophy. Searching for him throughout all the schools he found him at last in the outskirts of the city among a group of philosophers, none of whom were either hearing or speaking anything new. As the dispute went on, Basil stood up and argued against Eubulus.

"Who is this that is arguing with you, O philosopher?" asked one of those present.

"Well, if it isn't God it's Basil," he replied. And he took his leave of the company, and for three days he and Basil fasted and put questions to each other.

"How do you define philosophy, Basil?"

"The first requirement of philosophy is to meditate on death."

"Who then is pure" (mundus)?

"He who is above the world" (mundum). For the wisdom of the world is very seductive, but this same world becomes very bitter to anyone who shamefully follows it. Bodily pleasure is one thing and pleasure of the spirit is quite another, and there cannot be any equality of commerce between them. For no man can serve two masters (Matthew 6.24). Virtue enables us to break the bread of wisdom with those who thirst for it, and through virtue we restore those who have been cast out by the wickedness of others. If we see the naked we cover him with a cloak and we do not despise those of our own family."

From there he went on by way of a parable to paint a picture of the mercifulness of our Saviour, which he brings us through our penitence.

"Little by little he sets up three warning signs on the outskirts of our minds.

The first one is over the gate and carries the virtues, Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance and Justice. On the left hand side sits Seduction, from whence arise Intemperance, Profanity, Argumentativeness and Deceit and a swarm of other like evils. Penitence however stands graciously nearby, fearless, joyful, gentle, brooking no denial, source of every blessing for people, and next to her Abstinence, Sagacity, Clemency, Shamefastness, Modesty, Humanity, and a host of other good things. The meaning of this catalogue to those who see it is that it serves as a warning, and to those who have ears to hear an invitation to

a stronger zeal. Eubulus, I was filled with delight when I saw it, and was captivated by it, for they are not imaginary things of uncertain meaning for us, but plain truths guiding us to salvation.

"For we shall all rise again, some to eternal life, some to condemnation and perpetual distress. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5.10) as the prophets in their magnificent eloquence have taught, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, David the king, and that surpassingly excellent Paul, not to mention the Lord himself, who calls for penitence and bestows its reward, who seeks out the lost sheep (Matthew 18.12), who welcomes back the son who left his father's house with a rich portion which he wantonly squandered, leaving him perishing with hunger. His father embraces him, clothes him in a brilliant robe and other precious garments, gives him a ring, and urges the good brother not to be angry but to forgive (Luke 14.11-32). This is the Lord who without distinction of persons gives an equal reward to those who come at the eleventh hour (Matthew 20.1-16). To those of us who come to our senses and repent he gives new birth by water and the holy Spirit. Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what the Lord has prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2.9).

"O Basil," cried Eubulus, who had thoroughly understood what Basil was saying, "you bear witness to the Trinity in heaven. Because of you I believe in one God the Father almighty and all the rest of it, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, amen. And I will demonstrate my faith by what I shall do. Everything I have I place in your hands, and when I have received new birth by the holy water of the Spirit, I shall stay with you for the rest of my life, if that prove pleasing to God."

"Eubulus, blessed be the Lord our God, now and for ever," said Basil, "for he has illuminated your mind with the true light, and brought you from the error of many gods into acknowledging his mercy. Now, if you wish to stay with me, as you say you do, I will show you how to work for our salvation and our liberation from this world. Let us sell everything we have and give to the poor, then go to the holy city to see for ourselves the places where the life-giving miracles were performed, and so increase our faithfulness towards God."

Both of them gave away all their goods, keeping back only enough to buy those things necessary in preparation for holy Baptism, and set out for Jerusalem. And they converted not a few pagans to the Lord on the way.

Chapter III

When they arrived at the city of Antioch, they stopped at a certain guesthouse, where the landlord's son, Philoxenus, was sitting outside, lost in deep thought. He was a disciple of Libanius the sophist, who had given him some verses of Homer to explain in accordance with Rhetoric philosophy. He was sitting there in a state of great mental upheaval, and Basil could see that the strain of it was making him feel quite weak.

"Why are you looking so worried, young man?" Basil asked.

"Would it do me any good if I were to tell you?" he replied.

"I may be able to help you."

"Well, I am struggling with these verses in terms of sophistry."

Basil picked up the verses and began to explain them. The youth was amazed and delighted, and begged Basil to put it all down in writing. Basil wrote out three separate ways of interpreting the verses, which the youth was delighted to receive, and at dawn next day took these explanations of the verses to Libanius. After reading them, Libanius was very surprised.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "There is no wise man of my acquaintance who could have explained them like this. Who is this new person?"

"It is a traveller staying at our guesthouse who has the skill to have provided these explanations."

Libanius lost no time in going to the guesthouse where he was astonished to recognise the unhopd for presence of Basil and Eubulus. He immediately took them back to his own house where he asked them if they would partake of a generous and well prepared meal. But according to their beliefs they would accept only a due measure of bread and water, for which they gave thanks to God the giver of all good things. Libanius began to expound most skilfully the wordy teachings of the Rhetoricians. Basil and Eubulus in return spoke about the faith, and Libanius understood what they were talking about.

"It is not yet the right time for me to act on what you have said," he mused, "but when divine providence speaks to me, who should then be able to resist? However, you have been such a great help to me, Basil, that I would like you to put your arguments to my students as well."

It did not take long for the students to assemble, and Basil spoke to them on cleanliness of soul, bodily endurance, a gentle manner, mild voice, measured speech, disciplined diet, silence in the presence of elders, obedience to superiors, charity unfeigned towards both equals and juniors, saying little but understanding much, not to be offended when rebuked, to be sparing in small

talk, not prompt to laughter, practised in modesty, having no converse with shameless women, eyes cast down but soul lifted up, keeping out of quarrels, not seeking after a reputation for learning, nor forever wondering about who would be likely to be of benefit to you, and if you are able to be of benefit to others to look for your reward from God and the enjoyment of the good things of eternity from Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus spoke Basil to the disciples of Libanius, who all heaped admiring praises upon him. And so with Eubulus he continued his journey.

Chapter IV

When they arrived at Jerusalem they made a pilgrimage to all the holy places with faith and love, in each of which they worshipped God who is over all.

They then made themselves known to Maximinus, the bishop of the city, and asked to be given new birth in the waters of the river Jordan. The holy man of God looked upon them and gave thanks, and hastened to fulfil their request.

Along with some of the faithful they all approached the river Jordan, where Basil threw himself on the ground and with tears and a loud cry begged to be given the sign of faith. In fear and trembling he rose and put off his garments, and without doubt the old man along with them, before going down into the river. He prayed, and the priest [[sacerdos i.e the bishop] baptised him. And behold, a shining light surrounded him, and a dove flew out of it into the water. It stirred up the water and flew back to heaven. And those who were present trembled with fear and glorified God as the newly baptised Basil came up out of the water. Maximinus was overawed by the love which Basil was showing towards God, and poured out prayer over him as he clothed him in the robes symbolising the resurrection of Christ.

He also baptised Eubulus and anointed them both with the holy chrism. He administered the lifegiving Communion to them. And as the priest of God prayed and offered this food to Basil he took it and said; "Lord Jesus Christ, our God, I believe in what you say in the Gospel, and put my hope in your goodwill towards us, that through this food and this drink I shall overcome our adversary the devil by the help of your holy Spirit."

Overawed by the faith of this man, the priest of God went back with them into the holy city.

They stayed there for a year and then agreed to go to Antioch, where Basil was ordained deacon by Meletius, the bishop of that city. It was here that he wrote his treatise on Proverbs, which was received with much acclaim.

Chapter V

Not very long after this, he went with Eubulus to Cappadocia, and when he was about to enter Caesarea, bishop Eusebius of that city was told of his imminent arrival in a vision of the night, and that Basil was to be his future successor. Without delay he summoned his chief ecclesiastical administrator, and several others of the venerable clergy, told them of his vision and sent them to the East gate of the city to meet the visitors as they entered, and invite them to visit the bishop immediately. As soon as they came in that most holy bishop was amazed to recognise them as being the very people he had seen in his vision, and gave thanks to God. He asked them what they were and where they were from, and where had they just come from, and having satisfied his curiosity he bade his deacons see to their needs. They took them to a very pleasant little cottage and did everything they could to see to their comfort. In the meantime that most holy bishop called a meeting of the leaders both of clergy and of state, and told them all that had been revealed to him by God. "In truth it is a tribute to the purity of your life", they unanimously agreed, "that you have been found worthy of a divine revelation as to who shall occupy the pontifical throne after you. So, therefore, don't hesitate. Do what you think best."

The bishop called Basil and Eubulus and questioned them on their knowledge of the sacred Scriptures. He soon realised in wonder that fountains of wisdom flowed from them. He set them up in a suitable establishment, and not long after, he died. The bishops gathered together in Synod, and by the guidance of the holy Spirit they chose Basil for the episcopal throne. He was duly consecrated, and became governor of the Church by the providence of God.

Chapter VI

Shortly afterwards he asked God to give him such a gift of wisdom and knowledge that he might be able to offer the bloodless sacrifice to God in his own words and to come into the presence of the holy Spirit. For six days the holy Spirit kept his mind in a state of trance, until on the seventh day he began making the offering to God daily, and after some time spent in much faithful prayer he began to write down the mysteries of the Mass. At nighttime the Lord appeared to him along with the Apostles. Placing the bread upon the holy altar, he raised Basil up and said, "Let your mouth be filled with praise, even as you have asked, and let your

offering of the bloodless sacrifice be made in your own words."

Almost blinded by this vision, in fear and trembling he went up to the holy altar and began to speak aloud the following words, writing them down as he did so.

"Fill my mouth with your praise that I may praise your glory, O Lord God, who have created us and given us life..." and the rest of the prayers of the holy Mass.

At the end of the prayers he lifted up the bread, praying freely and saying, "Look down upon us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God from your holy habitation where you sit on high with the Father, and come and make us holy. Be present with us, though hid from our eyes, and by the power of your hand grant to us, and through us to all the people, holy things for the holy."

"One alone is holy," responded the people, "the one Lord Jesus Christ with the holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen."

He divided the bread into three portions; one portion he consumed, one portion he set aside to be buried with him [An early practice which was discontinued by the Third General Council of Constantinople, 680.] and the third portion he placed on the golden dove suspended above the altar.

Eubulus and the chief cleric were standing outside the church and they saw a light shining out of it, and people clothed in shining white garments, and heard the voice of the people glorifying God as Basil stood at the altar. They fell in fear on their faces, glorifying God in tears. And when Basil came out of the church, they fell at his feet.

"What are you doing here?" asked Basil, "and why are you worshipping me?"

"We have seen the miracle of glory enfolding the church."

Basil gave profuse thanks to God and told them the details of the glorious miracle. He called for a goldsmith and instructed him to make a dove of the purest gold, in which he placed the third portion, and hung it over the holy table. It commemorated the holy dove which appeared when the Lord was baptised in Jordan. When this had been done he decided to preach a celebratory sermon to the people, and gathered a great crowd of them into the church. Among them was Ephraem, a worshipper of God who also had seen the divine vision, which we shall say more about later on [see Chapter XI, below].

Chapter VII

Once while he was celebrating divine service a certain Jew, wanting to find

out what the service and gift of Communion was all about, joined in the congregation as if he were a Christian, and saw a little infant being torn limb from limb in Basil's hands. He went up with everyone else to communicate and was given real flesh, and when he came to the chalice it was full of blood and he partook of it. He managed to conceal a part of it and took it home to show it to his wife, telling her that he had seen with his own eyes what he had been told by others, and so believed that the Christian mysteries were truly tremendous and glorious. Next morning he went to Basil and asked that he be signed without delay with the cross of Christ. Basil was nothing loth, and giving thanks to him who wills all people to be saved, baptised him and all his household into the household of the Lord.

Chapter VIII

Helladius of holy memory was another who witnessed and shared in the miracles brought about by Basil. It was he who was found worthy after Basil's death to occupy the see of that memorable Apostle. He was a marvellous, brilliant man, adorned with all the virtues, and he told me about a certain faithful senator called Proterius, who took his daughter to a holy and much cherished place, intending she should be tonsured and given over to one of the venerable monasteries, as a sacrifice offered to God. The devil, who has been a murderer from the beginning, was annoyed by her religious purpose, and inspired a slave of Proterius to fall in love with the girl. He had scant respect for her intentions, but since he did not dare himself to put her off from her intentions, he approached one of those repulsive magicians, and promised him a great quantity of gold if he were able to subvert her.

"I don't have that power, my friend," he replied, "but if you like I will put you in touch with my power supply, the devil, and he will do what you want, as long as you promise to obey him."

"I will do whatever he says."

"Would you renounce Christ, and put it into writing?"

"Yes, I would."

"If you are ready then, I will help you."

"I am quite ready, if only I can get what I want."

And that evil-doing servant of the devil wrote out something to send to his master, as follows:

"Whereas it behoves me to further the purposes of my lord and master in taking care that those who forsake the Christian religion are effectively joined

to your company, that your portion may be filled, I send to you the bearer of this letter who is wounded by love for a girl. And I pray that you will fulfil his desires, and give me due credit for my overflowing desire to gather all your lovers together."

"Take this letter," he said, "and go at midnight to stand upon some pagan statue. Throw this writing into the air, and someone will appear who will lead you to the devil."

He did this with all eagerness, lifting up his miserable voice and calling on the devil to help him. Immediately he was surrounded by the princes of the power of darkness, spirits of wickedness, who with great rejoicing led this deceived wretch away and showed him the devil sitting on a high throne. The devil took those poisonous writings into his hands and spoke thus to that unfortunate person;

"Do you believe in me?"

"I do believe."

"You Christians are liars. You only come to me when you want something, and when you have got it you deny me and go back to your Christ, who forgives you because he is good and merciful. So let me see you put into writing that you renounce of your own free will both your Christ and your Baptism, and give yourself into my power for ever, and that you will stay with me till the day of judgement, when together we will enjoy the eternal punishments which are being prepared for me."

And he wrote this all out in his own hand as asked. At once he sent out the demons of fornication, who made the girl burn with desire for the slave. With a great cry she threw herself on the floor in front of her father.

"Have mercy on me!" she cried. "I am suffering desperate torture for the love of our slave. Find some compassion in your heart. Show some pity for your only daughter, and marry me to this slave. He it is that I choose. If you don't, you will see me die a painful death in a few days, and it will be you who have to account for it before God in the day of judgement."

Chapter VIII (continued). Life of S Basil, Book 1a

"God have mercy on me, a sinner! " he cried. "What has got into my miserable wretch of a daughter! Who has stolen my treasure? Who has led my daughter astray? Who has extinguished the sweet light of my eyes? It has always been

my intention to marry you to the heavenly bridegroom, to see you safely into the company of Angels, and I was ready to praise God in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. But you have lost your senses in some sort of insane frenzy. Let me betroth you to God, which is what I wish, or else you will bring down my grey hairs in misery to the grave, and bring disrepute on to the good reputation of your parents."

She reckoned nothing to all that her father had said to her.

"Father, if you don't give me what I want," she said, "it won't be long before you see me dead."

Her father's mind was in a whirl, not only because of the depth of his grief, but also because his friends advised that it were better that he should give way to his daughter rather than have her commit suicide. He agreed at last, and gave orders that her desires should be fulfilled, rather than hand her over to dreadful death. He gave her the husband she wanted, and handed over to him his own daughter and all his goods.

"Here you are, my ungrateful daughter," he said. "But you will greatly regret it, for it will not profit you in the day of judgement."

Sometime after this infamous marriage ceremony, when the work of the devil was complete, some people noticed that the husband was no longer going to church to receive the immortal and life-giving Sacrament and went to this pitiable newly-wed and said to her,

"You must have known that this husband you have chosen is not a Christian. He has left the faith, he is as good as cast into outer darkness."

She was at once plunged into deepest darkness and agony, threw herself on the floor, raked her face with her nails and beat her breast.

"No one can be saved who disobeys their parents," she cried. "Who will tell my father of my downfall? Alas, I am destroyed! I have gone down to the depths of hell. Why was I ever born? And since I was born, why was I so easily corrupted?"

The rejected husband heard her complaining, came in to her and protested that what she was complaining about was not true.

"That gives me some comfort," she said, "but to satisfy me completely, and make me sure in my own confused mind, let's you and I go together to the church tomorrow and let me see you receive the inviolate mysteries. That will really put my fears to rest. "

Thus cornered, he was compelled to admit the covenant he had signed. In revulsion against such ungodliness, she immediately cast off her feminine

misgivings, came to a good decision, and ran to Basil, the pastor and disciple of Christ.

"O saint of God," she cried, "take pity on my misery. Have mercy on me, O disciple of Christ, for I have been party to an agreement with the devil. Have mercy on me for being disobedient to my father."

And she told him everything she knew about what had happened.

The saint of God asked the slave to come and see him and asked him if it really was as his wife had said.

"Yes," he said. "I cannot deny it, for what I have done has been shouted to the skies."

He told Basil the evil work the devil had done and all the details of it from start to finish.

"Do you wish to turn back to the Lord?" Basil asked

"I do, but I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I renounced Christ in writing and made a treacherous pact with the devil."

"Don't worry too much about that. Our God is kind and will accept you if you repent. He is kind even when we have done evil things."

The girl threw herself at his feet.

"O disciple of Christ our God," she said, "help us if you can."

The saint turned to the slave.

"Do you believe you can be saved?" he asked.

"Lord, I believe," he said. "help my unbelief" (Mark 9.24).

Basil prayed and made the sign of the cross over him, took him by the hand and hid him away in the place where the sacred vestments were kept, where he left him with a rule to follow. For three days he prayed for him before visiting him again.

"How are things going, my son?"

"In very great weariness, sir. O saint of God, I am suffering from their shouts and alarms and their darts and their stonings. And they keep holding up in front of me that contract that I wrote out with my own hands, cursing me and saying, 'It was you who gave yourself to us, not the other way round'".

"Fear not, my son. Only believe."

He gave him something to eat, prayed again and signed him with the cross. He shut him up again, and visited him after another few days.

"How are things going, my son?"

"Holy father, I don't see them any more, but I still hear them shouting and threatening in the distance."

Again he gave him some food and poured out prayer for him, then shut the door and went away. It was the fortieth day before he visited him again.

"How are things going, my son?"

"O saint of God, very well. For in a dream today I saw you fighting for me and overcoming the devil."

He prayed as usual, then led him out and took him to his own room. In the morning he called a meeting consisting not only of the reverend clergy, but people from the monasteries and all the people who were friends of Christ.

"Beloved children," he said, "Let us give thanks to the God of all. Look how the good shepherd is about to lift the lost sheep on to his shoulders and bring him back into the Church. Now what we must do is spend the night in vigil, praying that the corruptor of souls does not prevail against his good intentions"

The gathered people immediately acted on his words, and spent the night praying in tears to God with their good pastor, and crying Kyrie Eleison. At daybreak the saint took the slave by the hand and along with the whole crowd of people led him into the holy church of God with psalms and hymns. Who should appear but the devil, that perpetual bane of our lives. In a last ditch effort to stave off defeat, he arrived with all his pernicious power and without being seen seized hold of the boy, trying to snatch him from the saint's hand, making the boy cry out loud.

"Saint of God, help me!"

The devil renewed his grip on the boy, trying to overcome and subvert even the noble Basil as well.

"Shameless violator of souls!" cried the saint, turning on the devil, "father of darkness and perdition, isn't your own damnation and the damnation of those you have already won over to yourself enough for you? Will you never cease from attempting to deface the image of God?"

"You have condemned me unheard, Basil!" the devil said, and many of us could hear what he was saying.

"May the Lord curse you," replied Basil

"But you are prejudging me, Basil. It was not I who approached him, but he who came to me, renouncing Christ, and making a solemn pact with me, and here is the document itself, which in the day of judgment I shall lay before the Judge."

"Blessed be the Lord our God! The people here will not cease from lifting up their hands to heaven until you have given up that document," and turning to the people he went on, "Lift up your hands to heaven, mingling the cry of Kyrie Eleison with your tears."

The people stood for a long hour lifting up their hands to heaven, until at last they all saw the slave's document whisked up in the air and come to rest in the hands of our noble pastor and father Basil. He held it up, and gave thanks to God with a great shout of joy, along with all the people

"Do you recognise this little bit of writing?" he asked the boy.

"I do, O saint of God," he said. "It is my own handwriting."

Basil tore it in two, and led the slave into the church, where he was held worthy to be present at the sacred offering of the Mass, and to participate in the holy mysteries and gifts of Christ. By this great undertaking of his, Basil gave fresh life to all the people. He took the slave and gave him instruction, and restored him to his wife, glorifying and praising God without end. Amen.

Chapter IX

That noble man, Helladius, whom we have already mentioned [see Chapter VIII.] also tells the story of how our great holy father Basil went out of the city one fine day without telling anyone where he was going. Helladius arrived at our house and said to us:

"Follow me, my sons, and witness along with me the glory of God, and give praise to the master of one of his disciples."

Now soon after our father had left the city, a certain holy presbyter called Anastasius became aware of it by the power of the Spirit, and mentioned him by name to his wife (who was living with him as a sister).

"I am going out to work in the fields, my lady sister," he said to her, "but you get busy and tidy the house, and around about the ninth hour take the thurible and a wax taper and go out to meet the holy Archbishop Basil for he is coming to visit our house."

With some trepidation at such a glorious piece of news she did as she was asked. She was a virgin, who by saying that she was sterile had kept it secret that she had been living chastely with her husband for forty years. She met us with all due modesty and exchanged greetings with us, first of all asking a blessing from our holy father.

"And how are you keeping, mistress Theognia?" asked Basil.

She was thunderstruck at being addressed by her proper name, but managed to

reply that she was well.

"And where is master Anastasius, the presbyter, your brother?"

"He is my husband, sir, and has gone out to work in the fields."

"No, he is in the house. Don't jest with me."

She was thrown into confusion not only by this last remark and by the fact that he had addressed her by name, but also that this godbearing father of ours had taken her to be Anastasius' sister, whereas she was known everywhere as his wife. Thunderstruck, overcome by fear, she fell at his feet.

"O saint of God," she cried, "pray for me a sinner, for I am witnessing great and wonderful deeds."

Basil made the sign of the cross over her.

"Hold out your apron in your two hands," he then said, "and pour the coals from the thurible into it and put on incense."

Then, with him leading the way, we all went to the house of the presbyter, who came out to meet us, kissed Basil's feet, and greeted him in the name of the Lord.

"How is it that the saint of God comes to visit me?" he asked.

"I am glad to have found you, O disciple of Christ," said our father. Come, let us go and celebrate the Mass of God."

The presbyter of God was fasting every day except Saturday and Sunday, taking nothing except bread and water. When they got to the church, Basil asked the presbyter to sing the Mass.

"O saint of God," replied the presbyter, "being asked to do that is a case of a bad person being given a blessing by someone far better!"

"Nevertheless, be obedient with all your heart," replied our father.

The presbyter agreed, and stood at the altar for the holy Mass. When it came to the time of the elevation of the life-giving body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the saint of God and some of the worthy men with him saw the holy Spirit coming down in the shape of fire, surrounding the presbyter and the holy altar. We all communicated and gave thanks to God, after which we went back to the presbyter's house and took food.

"Tell me where your treasure is," said the saint of God, "and what your life is like."

"O saint of God," said the presbyter. I am just a poor sinner relying on payments from the public (*subiacens publicis tributis*). I have four oxen, one of which I use in my fields, one I hire out, one is for the use of pilgrims, and the fourth I use to pay my taxes. That is my retinue of servants, ministering to

the needs of my guests and myself."

"Call your sister, for that is what she is, and tell me about the things you do."

"I don't do anything good on this earth, I can't lay claim to any virtue."

The father of us all then got up, asked the presbyter to follow him and went to the door of a very small room in the house.

"Open the door of this room," he said.

"O saint of God, don't ask to go in there. It is only a necessary store room."

"But this is the reason I have come here."

The presbyter still would not unlock the door, but our wonderful father opened it by simply speaking a word of command. When he went in he found inside a man covered all over with ulcerous sores, and nobody had known he was there except the presbyter and his sister.

"Why have you been hiding away your treasure like this?" asked the holy father.

"He is mentally deranged, sir, and liable to cause injury to others and, in a word, I was frightened he might get killed."

"You have described him very well. But give me a night to minister to him, and let's see if I can bring about a reward for what you have done."

We were rendered speechless by what seemed to be an unreasonable obsession, but we left the holy man in the little room with that ulcerous man, shut the door and departed. This healer of wounds then spent all night with the man, praying to God the healer of all ills and infirmities, and the man was cured.

"Glory to you. O God!" cried the presbyter. "For you perform miracles and hear the prayers of those who fear you. Look, the doctor has made the sick man whole!"

And at this very moment the saint of God called out to us to open the door. He led forth the ulcerous man totally cured, without a mark on his body, speaking plainly and glorifying God. This great miracle having been brought to a conclusion, we returned to our own city, joyfully praising and blessing the Lord, to whom be honour and glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Chapter X

There was a woman of noble family, well endowed with worldly goods, totally immersed in the vanities of this world, occupying the highest rank in society, who, even when she was widowed, continued to spend money with great abandon, lived luxuriously, gave herself up to every kind of vice, never

did anything pleasing to God, but was like a pig rolling about in her own excrement. But God gave her a nudge and she came to herself. Her mind was suddenly illuminated with knowledge of the enormity of her sins. She went through them all in her mind and wept in great grief.

"Woe is me, a sinner!" she cried. "How can I make up for all the sins I have done? I have corrupted the temple of the spirit. I have a soul in this body of mine and I have befouled them both. Woe is me! Woe is me! What shall I do? What's got into me? Can I say that I have sinned like the harlot of that publican?"

But God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, and he wills no one to perish. And as she turned all these things over in her mind, God gave her the grace to remember all the sins she had done from her youth up. She sat down and wrote out a list of all her offences from her youth up to her present age. She headed the list with the worst great sin she had ever done, and signed her name to it all.

Choosing a suitable time when she knew that the holy Basil was accustomed to go to the church to pray, she ran out in front of him, prostrated herself at his feet and threw the list down in front of him.

"O saint of God," she cried, "have mercy on me, have mercy on all my sins."

"Why all this weeping and lamenting?" that most blessed man asked in a most caring tone of voice.

"Look, O saint of God, I have written out all my sins and offences in this list, and signed it. I beg you, O saint of God, do not ignore this list, but by your holy prayers wipe out everything in it."

The great and holy Basil picked it up and lifted up his eyes to heaven.

"To you alone, O Lord, the deeds of this woman lie open, but you have taken away the sins of the world, and are easily able to wipe out the sins of this one single soul. Indeed, all our offences are numbered in your sight, but your mercy is boundless and beyond compare."

Saying this, he went into the church holding the list in his hand, prostrated himself before the altar and prayed the whole night through, until the end of the solemnity of the Mass next day. He then went to the woman and handed her back the list.

"Have you heard that no one can forgive sins but God alone?"

"I have, father, but that is why I begged you to intercede to the mercy of God for me."

She then unfolded the paper, and found that all the sins had been blotted out

except for that one great sin at the beginning. Seeing this sin still there, not wiped out at all, she beat her breast in anguish, and fell at his feet in tears.

"Have mercy on me, O servant of God most high, and since you have struggled with all my other sins and been heard, surely you must be able to intercede for this single one that is left for it be wiped out also?"

The holy Basil wept for sheer pity.

"Rise, poor woman," he said. "I am only a human being in need of forgiveness. He who forgives has wiped out your sins as you wished, and he who has taken away the sins of the world is able to take away this sin also. If you are faithful from now on, and walk in the law of the Lord, you will not only find forgiveness of your sins but you will be found worthy of glory. Now go out to the desert, and from among all the holy fathers seek out a holy man called Ephraem. Give him the paper, and he will intercede to God for you and obtain from the Lord what you want."

She took this holy bishop of God at his word and made a rather long journey into the desert till she found this great and marvellous hermit called Ephraem. She knocked on his door and cried out.

"Have mercy on me, have mercy O Saint of God!"

He discerned in the spirit the reason for her coming and replied:

"Go away, woman, for I am only a sinful human being, in need of forgiveness also."

"But holy Basil the Archbishop sent me to you," she said, as she threw the paper at his feet, "so that you can pray to God for this last sin in the list to be wiped out. Holy Basil by his prayers has had all the other sins wiped out, so, O saint of God, don't be so reluctant to pray for this one sin. It is for this very reason that I have been sent to you."

"No, my daughter. If Basil was able to obtain pardon for all those other sins, surely he can do the same for this one? Go, don't delay, go and see him again, before his soul departs from his body."

She took this holy confessor at his word and returned to Caesarea. When she got into the city she was met by a funeral procession carrying holy Basil's body. She fell to the ground and cried out against the saint of God.

"Woe is me a sinner. Woe! I am undone! Woe is me, O saint of God, for you directed me into the desert so that you could depart this life without being bothered by me any more. And look, I have come back without getting any results after taking such a long journey through miles of sand in vain. Let the Lord God look down and judge between me and you, for you could have

interceded to God and been answered without having to send me to someone else."

And she threw the paper on to the street in front of the people carrying Basil's body, and gave them a detailed account of what she had gone through. One of the clergy, desperate to know what the one great sin was, picked up the paper, unfolded it, and found it totally wiped clean,

"Woman," he shouted, "There is nothing written on this paper at all. What a great labour and anguish you have imposed upon yourself, unaware of the great things God in his unsearchable mercy has done for you."

When the people realised the great glory of this miracle they glorified God who had such power as to be able to put away all the sins in the world, and gave such grace to his servants as to heal all ills and infirmities, and to give the power of forgiveness of sins to those who maintained true faith in God, strove to do good works and glorified God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter XI

Brothers, I want to tell you also a story about the illustrious Basil and Ephraem the Syrian. I heard some of this from the mouth of our father himself, and some of it from the reliable mouth of the holy and wonderful Ephraem. So it is true.

Chapter XI (continued), Life of S Basil, Book 1a

When Ephraem was living in the desert he learned of the wonderful doings of our father Basil, sometimes by direct revelation of the holy Spirit, sometimes by question and answer, and he prayed constantly to be given an insight into what made the great Basil what he was. He was taken up into an ecstasy, and saw a column of fire, the top of which reached up to heaven and heard a voice coming from above, "Ephraem, Ephraem, the great Basil is like this column of fire that you have seen." So taking an interpreter with him, because he did not speak Greek, he went to the great church that had the great name of Caesarea, and arrived during the holy feast of the Theophany. He went in, unrecognised, and saw the great Basil processing in to the church. He saw that he was dressed in a glistening white robe, and surrounded by reverend clergy all clothed in white and bowing to him.

"I think we have been labouring in vain," he said, as he watched the service from an inconspicuous part of the church, "for this brother, living in such

ceremony, is nothing like the vision I saw. We who have borne the labour and heat of the day profit nothing, and yet this man is given such obsequiousness and human respect! I am amazed!"

At the very moment that he was saying this, the holy man sent his Archdeacon out, telling him to go down to the West door where he would find in an inconspicuous place a man dressed in a monastic robe, with a thinning beard, rather small, and mentioning other details of his appearance, and tell him that his holy father the Archbishop invited him to come up into the sanctuary.

"You have made a mistake," said Ephraem through his interpreter. "We are simply visitors."

The Archdeacon went back and repeated this to the great Basil as he was singing from the sacred books. The holy man looked down and saw a tongue of fire coming from Ephraem's mouth and he spoke to the Archdeacon again. "Go down and say, 'Master Ephraem, please come up into the holy sanctuary, it is the Archbishop who asks you into the holy sanctuary.'"

The holy Ephraem was thunderstruck at these words, gave glory to God and changed his mind completely.

"Truly, Basil is great," he said. "Basil truly is a column of fire. Truly the holy Spirit speaks through his mouth. But tell him I would rather greet him in the sacristy after the Mass."

When the Mass was over he went up into the sacristy. Basil greeted him by name and gave him a holy kiss in the Lord.

"You are more than welcome," he said, "for you have multiplied the disciples of Christ in the Church and expelled demons through Christ in whose power you have laboured. Father, what you see in me is just a human sinner. May the Lord give you the reward of all your labour. "

The praiseworthy Ephraem replied by telling him all that was in his heart, as did the abba who was with him. They placed themselves in his holy hands, and with great affection and esteem the holy Ephraem had a request to make.

"Reverend father", he said, "there is one gift I would ask of you and I pray that you will grant it me."

"Ask whatever you like, for I owe you a great deal, especially for all the work you have done and for coming here today."

"Holy father, I know that whatever you ask from God is granted. Pray God that I may be able to speak Greek."

"That is beyond my power to grant. But since you have asked in faith, come, father and teacher of the desert, let us pray to the Lord together, for he is able

to grant your request. It is written, 'He grants the wishes of those who fear him and hears their prayer and brings them into a place of safety' (Psalms 145.19)."

They prayed together for several hours.

"Master Ephraem," said Basil when they had risen from prayer, "why should you not be ordained to the presbyterate, for you are worthy of it."

"Because I am a sinner," he said through the interpreter.

"I wouldn't mind if I only had your sins! Come, let us prostrate ourselves."

And as they lay on the floor that great priest laid his hand on holy Ephraem, said the prayer for the Deacon and told him to stand up. His tongue was opened and he recited in Greek the salve, the miserere, the suscipe, and the conserva nos Deus in tua gratia. and so it was fulfilled what was written in the scriptures, 'Then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the mouth of the dumb shall be unstopped' (Isaiah 35.5) And at that hour they both praised God in the Greek tongue. For he is all powerful and hears the prayers of those who fear him.

He ordained Ephraem presbyter and his interpreter deacon, and sent them on their way in peace, 'glorifying God for all they had heard and seen, as it was told them' (Luke 2.20).

Life No 9 Book Ib The Life of St Ephraem of Syria,
(Life of St Simeon Stylites begins further down page),
a deacon of Edessa,

by an unknown Greek writer

translated into Latin by Gerardus Vossius

Chapter 1

Our holy father Ephraem came from in the East, born of godly Syrian parents in Edessa. He lived during the times of the great Emperor Constantine and others who reigned after him. He kept himself innocent of evil deeds from his youth up. While he was still a boy, his parents in a dream saw a vision of a fruit-laden vine growing out of Ephraem's mouth, which grew to such an extent that it spread over everything under the heavens. All the birds of the air came and fed on its fruit, yet however much they ate there was still plenty left. He sought the desert from a very young age, developing a bottomless store of compunction, through which he was able to receive the divine grace of the

holy Spirit.

Chapter II

Someone else, inspired by the breath of God, had a night vision in which he saw an awe-inspiring man holding a large volume and asking:

"Who is able, do you think, to take this book and guard it?"

And a voice came to him: "No one other than Ephraem my servant."

And Ephraem, standing near, opened his mouth and devoured the book, from whence a flood of teaching sent by God streamed forth, full of compunction and penitence, filling the mind with a fear of judgment and of the second coming in majesty of the King and Lord of all, Jesus Christ our true God, who will reward each one according to his works. Thus was certified the purity and truth of the divine teachings contained in his writings.

Chapter III

Again, another of the holy old men saw in a vision a band of Angels coming down out of heaven by God's command, carrying a proclamation, a scroll with writing within and without. And they spoke among themselves: "To whom may we entrust this scroll?"

And some said this and some said that, and others replied as follows: "Truly there are many saints and righteous people, but this scroll should be entrusted to no one except Ephraem, meek and humble of heart."

And the old man saw that they gave the scroll to holy Ephraem. In the morning he heard the most striking words of wisdom for the instruction of others streaming from Ephraem's mouth, full of compunction and the fear of God, scattered about as from a free flowing fountain. And the old man knew that what flowed from that mouth had been inspired by the holy Spirit.

Chapter IV

This holy father Ephraem was filled with a desire to visit the city of Edessa and he prayed to God: "Lord Jesus Christ, let me visit that city, and when I enter let there be someone to meet me with whom I can explore the meaning of the Scriptures."

A woman who was one of the city's prostitutes met him as he was going through the gate. Ephraem the servant of God was disappointed when he saw her.

"Lord Jesus Christ," he said, "you have despised the prayers of your servant

Ephraem. What sort of common ground would this woman have with me in discussing the Scriptures?"

The woman stood still, gazing at him.

"Tell me, my girl, why are you standing there staring (intueor) at me so intently?"

"I can look at (intueor) you, because as a woman I was created out of your manhood. But you do not give me any respect at all (intueor), you only see the dust of the ground out of which you were created" (Genesis 2).

When Ephraem the servant of God heard that, he looked up to heaven and glorified God who had given her the wisdom to be able to give him such an answer as that. He realised that God had not despised his prayer. He went on into the city where he stayed for some time.

Chapter V

It so happened that another prostitute lived next door to the guesthouse in which he was staying. After he had been there for a few days, he heard her say, "Give me a blessing, abba."

He looked up and saw her looking out at him through her window.

"God bless you," he said.

"Isn't there something you have been lacking in your cell and enclosure?"

"Yes, a few stones and cement in order to block up the window you are looking through."

"Look, I spoke to you first and you have responded. I would like to sleep with you, and would you really want to not have anything to do with me?"

"Well, if you want to sleep with me, come with me to a place of my choosing and sleep with me there."

"Tell me where and I will come."

"If you really want to sleep with me I would not be able to do it anywhere else but in the middle of the city."

"Wouldn't you be ashamed for people to see you doing that?"

"If human beings can make us feel ashamed, how much more should the God whom we ought to fear make us feel ashamed! He knows all human secrets, for he it is who shall come to judge the world and reward each one of us according to our works " (Romans 2.5-6).

The prostitute was pricked in her conscience at these words. She came out to him and fell at his feet weeping.

"Servant of God," she said, "lead me into the way of salvation, and deliver me

from my many sins and wicked doings."

So the holy old man gave her many things from the holy Scriptures to think about and confirm her in her repentance. He then took her into a monastery, and thus rescued her from the company of the reprobate.

Chapter VI

He left that city and went to Caesarea in Cappadocia, where he went into the church and found the holy Basil the Archbishop preaching to the people. The blessed Ephraem began to sing his praises in a loud voice. Some of the crowd wondered who this stranger was, praising Basil like that.

"He's fawning upon him hoping to get some reward!" they said.

After he had finished preaching, Basil said, "Bring that man to me who is standing there singing my praises."

They brought him.

"Why are you standing there lifting up your voice in my praise, master Ephraem?"

"I kept on shouting and praising because I saw a pure white dove standing on your right shoulder and whispering into your ear what you were to say to the people."

The great Basil, full of the holy Spirit, then recognised him.

"You are that Ephraem from Syria, are you not? I see in you something which I have always understood you to possess, a love of quiet. As it is written in the prophet David, Ephraem is the strength of my head (Psalms 60.7 & 108.8). For your gentleness, clemency and simplicity are as unmistakeable as a light visible to all."

Chapter VII

(This chapter almost the same as in Book V.x.21)

Ephraem travelled on a bit further and was again approached by a prostitute trying to trip him up. She hoped to get him agree to commit fornication or at least to make him lose his temper, which nobody had ever seen him do. He said to her, "Follow me", and took her to a very crowded part of the city.

"Here is the place," he said. "Come on, let's do what you want."

"How can we do that here?" she said, looking at the crowd. "Wouldn't we be ashamed?"

"If you are ashamed because of human beings seeing you, ought you not to be ashamed because of God who brings to light all the hidden things of

darkness?"

The deed was not done. Thoroughly confused, she went away, unable to prevail against him in the slightest, not even making him lose his temper.

Chapter VIII

And there you have the contests undergone by the great Ephraem, who was a man most patient, gentle, pure and simple, seeking God without guile, as was written of Job (Job 1.1), unassuming and modest, humble and full of compunction beyond belief. Even when remaining silent, his countenance was enough to teach something to any one gazing upon him, for he was intent upon pouring out all his prayers to God. This holy father of ours lived a good and blessed life, he provided an example of divine virtue, he produced many instructions on holy doctrine, and when at last he was aware of his approaching death he left a last testament for his disciples and for monks in general, warning them about future events. He was ill for only a short while before he fell asleep in the Lord and was buried by his disciples in the desert. By his prayers and intercessions may Christ our God make us worthy of imitating his divine life, and obtain mercy and the remission of all the sins into which we may have fallen. To Christ our God belongs all honour and worship, with the Father and the holy and life-giving Spirit unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 10

The Life of St Simeon Stylites

by Antony, his disciple

Chapter I

(Another account of this Life in Book IX.xxvi)

The holy Simeon was chosen by God from his mother's womb and sought how to please and obey him. His father was called Sufocion, and had no other education than that supplied by his parents. At the age of thirteen he saw a church one day as he was feeding his father's sheep. He left his sheep and went inside where, after hearing the Apostle being read, he approached one of the elders.

"What was the meaning of that which was being read?" he asked.

"It was about the underlying reality (substantia) of the soul," replied the old man, "and how a human being may learn to fear the Lord with all his heart

and with all his mind" (Luke 10.27).

"What does fearing God mean?"

"Why are you asking me such serious questions?"

"I am seeking through you for an answer from God. I want to learn about the things I was listening to, because I am ignorant and unlearned."

"If you fast continually, offer prayer moment by moment, humble yourself before all other human beings, renounce attachment to money, parents, clothing or possessions, but nevertheless honour your father and mother and the priests of God, you will inherit the eternal kingdom. And on the contrary, if you do not keep these things you will inherit the outer darkness which God has prepared for the devil and all his angels (Matthew 22.13 & 25.30). All these things, my son, are fully lived out in monasteries."

At these words Simeon fell at his feet.

"You are my father and mother," he said, "teacher of everything good, and a guide to the kingdom of heaven. You have won over my soul, which before was on the way to perdition. May the Lord reward you for the change wrought in my soul. I shall do as you say and go to a monastery, if God wills, and may his will be done in me."

"My son, before you go off to a monastery, listen carefully to what I say. You will find tribulation, you will have to serve and keep vigil in nakedness, and undergo unknown evils before finding consolation as a precious vessel of God."

Chapter II

The blessed Simeon left the church and went straight away to the monastery of that magnificent man, the holy Timothy. He lay for five days outside the monastery, neither eating nor drinking. On the fifth day abba Timothy went out to him.

"Where are you from, my son? And who are your parents, that have driven you to this? What is your name? Perhaps you have committed some crime, or you are a slave running away from your master?"

"Nothing like that at all, sir. I want only to be God's slave, if he wills it so, and save my soul from perdition. Let me be admitted into the monastery to be a servant of all. Don't leave me outside any longer."

The abbot took him by the hand and led him inside.

"My sons," he said to the brothers, "see, I am giving you this brother. Teach him all the rules of the monastery."

He spent four months obedient to all without complaint, during which time he learnt the Psalter by heart, and daily received divine nourishment. The food which he was given along with the brothers he secretly gave to the poor without a thought for the morrow, for whereas the brothers ate every evening, he ate only once a week.

Chapter III

He went one day to the well to draw water, and took the rope from the wellhead, which the brothers used for drawing water and wound it round his body next to his skin, from his loins up to his neck. He went inside and told the brothers that he could not find the rope at the wellhead when he went to the well.

"Hush, brother," they said, "the abbot will deal with that in due course."

His body became infected because of the weight and roughness of the rope, which was cutting him to the bone. It buried itself into his flesh, as soon became apparent. For one day the brothers went out and caught him giving his food to the poor. They came back in and told the abbot.

"Where ever did you get this person from?" they asked him. "We can't abstain from food as he does. He fasts from one Sunday to the next, and gives his food to the poor, and there is a most horrible stink coming from his body which is more than anyone can bear. Maggots fall off him as he walks along. His bed is full of maggots."

The abbot immediately went and found it was all just as they had said.

"My son," he said to Simeon, "what is all this the brothers have been telling me about you? Isn't it enough for you to fast in the same measure as the rest of us do? Haven't you heard the Gospel telling us that the disciple is not above his master, and everyone is made perfect if he does as his teacher does? (Matthew 10.24-25) And tell me, my son, what is the reason for this stink which comes from your body?"

The blessed Simeon just stood there, saying nothing.

The abbot was angry, and ordered him to strip, and discovered the rope round his body covering everything except his head.

"However did this person come to us?" he cried, "overturning all the rules of the monastery? I am telling you now, you will have to leave us, and go wherever you like."

But with great care and difficulty they removed the rope from his body together with his rotten flesh, and looked after him for many days until he was

cured.

Chapter IV

Once cured, he left the monastery without telling anybody and went to an abandoned, dried up water hole, not far from the monastery, which was infested with unclean spirits. And that same night the abbot was shown a troop of demons surrounding the monastery with swords and cudgels, shouting, "Timothy, give us Simeon the servant of God. If not, we will burn the monastery down and you with it, for you have done an injury to that just man."

When he woke up he called the brothers and told them that he had seen a vision and was very worried about it. On another night he saw a crowd of strong men standing around him and crying, "Give us Simeon, the servant of God, for he is beloved of God and the Angels. Why have you punished him? He is greater in the sight of God than you are, and all the Angels of God grieve for him, for God intends to do many signs through him in this world such as nobody else has ever done."

In great fear, the abbot called the brothers together.

"Search out that man and bring him back here, lest we all die because of him. Truly he is a saint of God. I have seen and heard great things of him."

All the monks went out looking for him, searching everywhere and not finding him. They came back and reported to the abbot.

"There is nowhere left where we have not searched, unless perhaps he is near that deserted waterhole."

"I am asking you, brothers, to look there for him, and I will go with you. He is truly a saint and servant of God."

He chose five of them to go with him to the waterhole. Saying a prayer he went down into it with the brothers. When the blessed Simeon saw them coming he began to speak to them.

"Servants of God, I beg you, leave me in peace for an hour, that I may refresh my spirit which is somewhat disturbed as yet. My soul is greatly troubled, for I have offended God."

"Come, servant of God," said the abbot, "let us take you back to the monastery. For I now know that you are a servant of God."

He did not want to go, but they took him by force back to the monastery, where everyone prostrated themselves at his feet in tears.

"We have sinned against you, servant of God," they said. "Forgive us."

"Why are you making the burden on this unhappy sinner even greater?"

Simeon said with a deep sigh. "It is you who are our fathers and servants of God."

But he stayed with them for a further year.

Chapter V

He left without telling anyone, and went to a place not far from the monastery where he built a little cell of dry stone walling. He stayed there for three years, and many people sought him out to ask for his prayers. Then he built a little column four cubits high, on which he lived for four years. As his holy reputation spread throughout the world, the pressure of people caused him to make a column twelve cubits high, on which he lived for twelve years. They then made him a column twenty cubits high, on which he lived for a further twelve years. All the people who had gathered there then built two basilicas near him and built another column for him thirty cubits high. where he lived for four years and began to perform miracles. He cured many people who came to him with diseases or demons, and restored sight to the blind.

Withered hands were restored to health, the deaf heard and lepers were cleansed. He persuaded many people to embrace the Christian faith, Saracens, Persians, Armaceni and Laoti. Allophyli likewise heard about him and his powers, and came to bow down before him.

Chapter VI

The devil in his envy then changed himself into the likeness of an Angel and appeared in splendour in a fiery chariot with horses of fire, next to the column where the blessed Simeon was standing. Simeon too was lit up with a fiery splendour like an Angel.

"Simeon," said the devil in dulcet tones, "Listen to the word which the Lord has charged me to bring you. For he has sent me, his Angel, with fiery chariot and horses, to catch you up as once I caught up Elijah (2 Kings 2.11). The time has come for you likewise to step up into this chariot which the Lord of heaven and earth has sent. Let us go likewise into heaven that you may be seen by Angels and Archangels and Mary the mother of the Lord, with Apostles and Martyrs, Confessors and Prophets, where you may speak with the Lord who created you in his image. That is all. Come up without delay."

Chapter VI (continued), Life of St Simeon Stylites , Book Ib

"Lord," said Simeon, "Do you really want to take me, a sinner, up to heaven?" He lifted his right foot to go up into the chariot and with his right hand made the sign of the cross. Suddenly the devil was nowhere to be seen. He vanished along with his persuasiveness like dust before the face of the wind, so that Simeon was then sure it was the devil.

Chapter VII

When he came to himself he said to his foot, "Don't come back down, but stay like that until my death, until the Lord summons me, sinner that I am."

Meanwhile the devil had coolly wounded him in the thigh, which became infected with a horde of maggots which scattered out of his body and wriggled about at his feet on the column, and from thence fell down to the ground. It was a certain youth called Antony, his assistant, who witnessed this and wrote it down. Simeon told him to collect the maggots which had fallen and bring them up to him. And he put them back into his wound as Job did.

"Eat what the Lord gives you," he said to the maggots.

Chapter VIII

Basilicus, king of the Saracens, heard about him and came to visit him. As he looked up at him a maggot fell from Simeon's body as he stood in prayer. The king ran to pick it up and in act of faith held it above his eyes.

"Why do that, your majesty?" said Simeon when he saw what the king was doing. "It makes me feel guilty, for the maggot had fallen out of my putrid body."

At these words the king opened his hand and found a most precious pearl in it.

"This is no putrid maggot," he said, "but a most precious pearl."

"It is given to you as a human being according to your faith," said Simeon.

"May it be blessed in your hands all the days of your life."

And that man of faith withdrew inside.

Chapter IX

Quite a long time after this his mother heard where he was and came to visit him, but he would not let her see him, for women were forbidden to enter that

place.

"Just wait for a little while," said Simeon, when he heard her voice, "and we shall see each other, God willing."

She began to weep when she heard his voice, and loosed her hair and besought him earnestly.

"My son, why have you done this? As a reward for carrying you in my womb, you have filled me with grief. For the milk with which I fed you, you have given me tears. For the kisses that I showered on you, you have given me bitter pains in my heart. For the pain and labour that I suffered for you, you have given me the most painful wounds."

She spoke so feelingly that we all wept.

As Simeon listened to the voice of his mother he buried his face in his hands and wept bitterly.

"Dear Mother," he said, "Be at peace for a little while, and we shall see each other in the place of eternal rest."

"In the name of Christ who formed you, if there is a possibility of seeing you as a sort of stranger in that great time, why not let me see you now? Or if not, now that I have heard your voice, let me die at once, for your father has already died from grieving for you. Don't leave me any longer in this state of bitterness, my son."

In weeping and wailing she went into a state of trance, and continued her pleadings to him for three days and three nights. Simeon then prayed to the Lord and she straightway gave up her spirit. They picked up her body and brought it to where he could see it.

"May the Lord receive you into his joy," said Simeon, weeping, "for you have been greatly troubled on my behalf. You carried me in your womb for nine months, you fed me with your milk, and worked hard in caring for me."

As he said this, we all noticed drops of sweat appearing on his mother's brow and we saw her body move. Simeon lifted up his eyes to heaven.

"O Lord God of power," he cried, "you sit among the Cherubim, and see into the depths of the pit, you knew Adam before he existed, you have promised the riches of the kingdom of heaven to those who love you, you spoke to Moses in the burning bush, you gave your blessing to Abraham our father, you lead the souls of the righteous into paradise and the souls of the wicked into perdition, you tamed the two lions (Daniel 6.22) and saved your servants from the fiery furnace of the Babylonians (ibid. 3.28), You sent the ravens to feed Elijah (1 Kings 17.6), receive now her soul in peace and place her among the

holy fathers, for yours is the power unto the ages of ages."

Chapter X

It was after this that they built him a bigger column forty cubits high on which he stood for sixteen years until his death. During this time a huge wild beast (draco) was living near him in the region of Aquilo, and preventing the grass from growing. A piece of wood had damaged his right eye so that he could no longer see out of it. He came one day to the area where the man of God lived, writhing itself into complicated coils as if asking pardon, and lowering its head in humility. Simeon looked at it carefully, and pulled a piece of wood a cubit in length out of its eye. All who saw it glorified God, even though they had kept well back through fear. The beast curled itself up and lay unmoving while all the people walked past it. Then it got up and bowed down before the door of the monastery for about two hours, before going back to its den without doing anyone any harm.

Chapter XI

A certain woman, feeling thirsty one night, went to the water jar for a drink and swallowed a little serpent which had been in the jar. It lodged in her stomach, and all the efforts of doctors, spellbinders and wizards were unable to do anything about it. After a while she was taken to the holy Simeon, who ordered her to be placed on the ground and water from the monastery to be put into her mouth. He then cried loudly, and pulled out of her mouth a serpent three cubits long. The serpent burst within the hour, after having been inside her for seven days. In that same hour the woman was restored to health.

Chapter XII

The greatest possible eloquence would hardly be sufficient to describe adequately all his miracles, but his powers were so great that they cannot be passed over in silence. It so happened that water was in very short supply in the region, and the people and all the animals were in danger of perishing for lack of water. Holy Simeon saw their plight and stood in prayer. At about the tenth hour of the day there was a sudden earthquake which caused an enormous upheaval in the land to the East of the monastery. A cleft appeared in which could be seen an immeasurable amount of water. He ordered a well to be dug seven cubits deep, and from that time onwards there has been no lack of water right up to the present day.

It was at this time also that there were a group of people travelling from a distance to seek for Simeon's prayers and witness his deeds, and they paused on the way to rest under a leafy tree because of the heat. As they were sitting there they suddenly saw a pregnant deer walking by.

"By the prayers of the holy Simeon," they cried, "we conjure you to stay still for us to catch you."

And the deer stayed absolutely motionless. They caught it and killed it, and after eating some of it they were struck dumb, and it was in this condition that they arrived before holy Simeon, carrying the deer's hide with them. They stayed there for two years without being able to find a complete cure for their dumbness. Their crime was so wicked that it is almost a crime to talk about it. The hide of the deer was hung up in the church as a witness to the miracle of the cursing.

Chapter XIII

There was a large leopard in those parts killing both humans and animals over a wide area. The people came from there to the holy Simeon and told him of all the great evils which the beast was responsible for. The holy Simeon ordered that some of the earth from the monastery should be taken and scattered about in that place, and it was done. The people carried out a search a little later and found the leopard lying dead, and they all glorified the God of Simeon.

Chapter XIV

This is the injunction he gave to someone he had cured:

"Go home and give glory to God who has cured you, and don't dare to say that Simeon cured you. And don't presume to swear by the name of the Lord. That is a grave sin. If you must, swear by me a humble sinner, whether you are right or wrong."

This is why all the Eastern and barbarous peoples of that region swear by Simeon.

Chapter XV

A certain robber from Antioch named Ionathas suddenly burst into the monastery followed by many pursuers, like a lion pursued by a hunting party and unable to hide from them. He embraced the column of the holy Simeon and wept bitterly.

"Who are you, my son?" asked Simeon, "and where have you come from and why have you come here?"

"I am Ionathas, a robber. I have committed many crimes and have come here to repent."

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19.14), said the holy Simeon, "but don't try and put me to the test, lest you be found to have returned to the wickednesses you have renounced."

The official pursuers from Antioch arrived as he spoke.

"Hand over to us that evil and dangerous Ionathas," they cried, "or else the city will be in a riot. For the beasts to devour him have already been prepared."

"I did not lead him to this place," said the blessed Simeon. "He who led him here is greater than I and comes to the aid of people like this. For of such is the kingdom of heaven. But if you feel able to enter here, come and seize him. I can't do that myself, for I fear him who sent him here."

Greatly afraid, the men went away and told them in Antioch what had happened. Ionathas in the meantime clung to the pillar and embraced it for the space of seven days.

"Sir," he said to the blessed Simeon, "if you gave the word I would like to be able to walk away from here."

"In a hurry to get back to your wickedness then?"

"No, sir, but my time has come."

And he gave up his spirit as he spoke. As they were about to bury him outside the monastery, another lot of officials came after him from Antioch.

"Give us this criminal", they cried. "The whole city is in an uproar because of him."

"He who led him here," said the blessed Simeon, "came with a company of the heavenly host, and he has the power to cast your whole city and everyone in it down to hell. He has reconciled this soul to himself, and I was afraid that he might also take me as well. So don't please cause me any more trouble, humble sinner that I am."

And they too, departed in great fear, and told everything that they had heard and seen.

Chapter XVI

A few years later, he prostrated himself to pray on a Friday and stayed there all day Saturday and Sunday. I became very worried, and climbed up and

stood in front of him.

"Master," I said, "Please get up and give us a blessing. There have been people here for the last three days expecting a blessing from you."

He made no reply.

"How is it that you are not taking any notice of me?" I asked. "Have I done something to offend you? Please, give me your hand - or, has your spirit perchance departed?"

When he did not answer me, I thought I would not say anything to anyone - I was frightened to touch him. After standing there for half an hour I bent down to put my ear where I could listen more closely. There was no breath, only a smell as of many perfumes which rose from his body, and I knew that he had gone to rest in the Lord. Stunned, I wept bitterly, bent down kissed his eyes and smoothed his beard and his head.

"Why have you left me, my master?" I wailed. "Where now shall I find your Angelic teachings? How can I answer for you? Who will be able to look at this column without you, and refrain from mourning? What reply shall I give to the sick when they come looking for you and find you not? What shall I say? How can I in my lowliness explain? I see you here today; tomorrow I shall search both on the right hand and on the left and shall not find you. In what guise could I possibly take over your column? Alas, when they come from afar seeking you and finding you not!"

So great was my grief that I lost consciousness, and immediately he appeared to me.

"I shall not abandon this column," he said, "nor the blessed mountain in this place where I have become so well known. But go down and make excuses to the people, and send a message to the bishop in Antioch, but secretly lest there be tumult amidst the people. For I have gone to my rest, as the Lord wills. But you must carry on ministering in this place, and the Lord will reward you in heaven."

I came to, and in trepidation replied to him, "Master, remember me in your holy resting place."

Lifting his robe I fell at his feet and kissed the soles of his feet, and because I knew how much greater they were than mine, I placed them on my eyes, and cried, "Bless me, I pray, my master."

And again I wept and cried, "What may I keep of yours to remind me of you?" And as I said this his body twitched, but I was frightened of touching him.

Chapter XVII

No one knew what had happened. I went down from the column and sent a reliable brother to the bishop in Antioch. He came at once with three other bishops and also Ardaborius, the commander-in-chief of the army. They set up tripods around the column and fixed his garments to them. They brought his body down and laid it next to an altar in front of the column, and as they gathered together, a flock of birds flew over the column, making bird cries as if in mourning, as everyone could see. The lamentation of both human beings and beasts could be heard for seven miles around. Even the mountains and fields and trees in that place were grieving, for a thick fog spread all around. I was wondering whether an Angel would come and visit him, and indeed at about the seventh hour, seven seniors were in conversation with an Angel whose face shone like lightning and whose clothing was white as snow. And for as long as I could I listened to his voice in fear and trembling. I could not describe what it was like.

Chapter XVIII

While the holy Simeon was lying on the funeral bier, the Pope of Antioch tried to take a lock from Simeon's beard for a holy relic, but as he put out his hand it was immediately paralysed. Many oaths were sworn to God and prayers made for him before his hand was restored.

Chapter XIX

Having put the body on a funeral bier they set out for Antioch. All the people from the surrounding region grieved that they were being deprived of such a great source of relics, for the bishop of Antioch had forbidden his body to be touched.

Chapter XX

When they got as far as the village of Meroë, nobody was able to move it any further. Then a man who had been deaf and dumb for forty years suddenly fell down before the bier and began to speak.

"Welcome, O servant of God!" he cried. "Your arrival has cured me! If I deserve to live, I shall serve you all the days of my life."

He got up from the ground, seized one of the mules drawing the bier and immediately began to move it forward. And so that man was made whole from that moment. His sin had been to love the wife of another person. He had

wanted to commit adultery with her but never had the opportunity. The woman died and was placed in a tomb, but he had broken into the sepulchre, and been immediately struck deaf and dumb, in which state he had been held for forty years.

Chapter XXI

Everyone from the city of Antioch went out to bring in the body of the holy Simeon with offerings of gold and silver. With psalms and hymns and many torches they brought him first of all the principal church, and then to the church of Penitence. Many miracles occurred at his sepulcher, more than had occurred during his lifetime, and the man who had been cured served there till the day of his death. Many people of the faith offered money to the bishop of Antioch, hoping for relics from his body, but were disappointed because of the oaths that had been sworn.

I, Antony, a humble sinner, have put together this brief account to the best my ability. Blessed is he who possesses this book and reads it in the church and house of God, for when he celebrates Simeon's memory he will receive a reward from the Most High, for his is the honour and the power and the glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 11, Book Ib

The Life of St John the Almsgiver

by Leontius,

bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus

translated by Anastasius, his librarian

Preface of Anastasius

to the Lord Pope Nicolaus

For a long time I have been quietly and carefully turning things over in my mind, wondering what sort of worthy work suitable for the house of God I might undertake. I would not want to do anything which would bring discredit on my ministry, nor would I want to attempt anything greater than my own limited ability would allow. As Solomon says: 'If you have found honey don't eat more than you need, lest you make yourself sick' (Proverbs 25.16). And again, 'Delve not into things too deep for you, and search not into things greater than you can understand' (Ecclesiasticus 3.22). And quite unexpectedly

I have now been asked by certain dedicated scholars to translate into Latin Leontius' Life of John, the late bishop of Alexandria, whom the Greeks were absolutely right to call 'the Almsgiver', because of the great compassion which he showed to all. Such a great man should be of great benefit not only those who speak Greek but those who speak Latin.

I felt that I was quite unworthy and insufficiently skilled for such a great task, but I lifted up my eyes to the hills from whence comes my help (Psalms 121.1). Trusting in the help and prayers of the fathers, I cannot allow this bountiful man to be kept hidden from those who speak Latin. But although I have prepared the parchments, and drawn up a synopsis, I would not begin writing a book without seeking your Lordship's approval, a thousand times blessed as you are. For it would not be right to take anything in hand, or publish it, apart from the Vicar of God, the key-bearer of heaven, the winged chariot of the spiritual Israel, the universal Pontiff, the one and only Pope and Pastor and special Father and ruler of all. For you hold the keys of David, you have been given the keys of knowledge. In the ark of your breast are preserved the tables of the Law and the manna of heavenly sweetness. For what you bind no one looses, what you loose no one binds, what you open no one shuts, what you shut no one opens (Matthew 16.19). For in this world you stand in the place of God.

However, in turning the life of this blessed man into Latin, I have not followed the exact words and constructions of the Greek, nor ought I to have done so. I have not translated word for word but sense for sense. I have not been concerned for the niceties of Latin style, for my intention has been only to be of service to the reader. So then, my Lord, friend of angels, pray do not take offence at my insignificant person, do not expect me to be clever, or to produce ornamental prose, but rather with the godly eye of your heart, think first of how great a benefit it must be for the reader to have such a great man as an example and mirror for all. If this translation is acceptable in your judgment, confirm it by your Apostolic authority; where it is not, amend it. I only hope that the Latin will not disappoint you as being lacking in savour as compared with the pleasure to be obtained from the well-turned Greek.

Accept then this Saint, interpreted by a sinner. Think not of the translator, but of the person translated. Do not despise the purity of the water because it comes through pipes of lead, nor spurn the rose because it grows among thorns. For the guardian and lover of your soul, sent dreams as it pleased him to both Pharaoh (Genesis 41.1) and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4.5), by which

the future could be foretold. He prophesied through wicked Caiaphas what was expedient (John 11.49-50), and, finally, when he wills, he even permits an ass to speak (Numbers 22.28).

Greetings, O Prelate,

Greetings for ever!

Farewell, O blessed Pope of all the world.

Author's Prologue

Our intention in this present narrative of the life of that memorable man is identical with that of all those industrious and holy men who have gone before us, that is, to provide a beneficial and godly example of someone to be imitated, and thereby celebrate the glory and magnificence of the holy and adorable Trinity. In this man, as in all who from generation to generation shine with the true light, has been made manifest the things which may illuminate those who live in the shadow of sin and death (Luke 1.79).

O friends of Christ, we profess not to be surprised that there were men in the generations before us who lived lives pleasing to God, and left us lessons on the subject of how the devil works, for we often say among ourselves that human wickedness was not so strongly developed then as it is today, as divine Scripture foretold, saying. 'Iniquity has abounded, the love of many has grown cold' (Matthew 24.12). And so we say that we are not capable of rising to their level of merit. It is for this reason that we have decided to tell the story of this holy Life, wishing to demonstrate the proposition that the more excellent among us, even in our days, are capable of following the strait and narrow way (Matthew 7.14) and thereby shutting the mouth of those who speak wickedness and the minds of those who hate us (Psalms 63.11).

There are of course others who have expounded on the outstandingly excellent doings of John, this great high priest. By their words and deeds they have had a lasting influence. I am talking about John and Sophronius, worshippers of God, lovers of truth and promoters of godliness. But they did miss out some things in their studies of the dignity and merit of this man. They are exactly like certain industrious farmers who harvest the most rich and fruitful vines, but who leave behind the blessing of a vine to be picked over by needy gleaners, among whom I am the least. All those holy men with great power and godly zeal strove to harvest the plentiful fruit of that olive tree which in the words of Psalmist is planted in the house of God (Psalms 52.8), but by the dispensation of the Lord there are yet many fruits of the olive left over.

I beg you therefore to accept this lowly and feeble effort as the two mites of the widow (Luke 21.2), not as taking anything away from them, as if I were able to match their God-given wisdom, but simply that I am eager to commit the deeds of the righteous to writing. In the first place I know that it is not right to keep silent about anything which might be of benefit to those who are listening, lest one fall into the condemnation of the servant who hid his talent in the ground (Matthew 25.18). Secondly, in what we have written there are some delightful stories preserved in praise of that truly most holy and blessed John, which were not mentioned by those other good men. They were wise and powerful writers and lovers of history, who managed their material wisely and sublimely. They have provided a great and all-embracing inspiration for us to undertake this present task, which is simply to tell a tale, as far as in us lies, as a humble, pedestrian and shapeless character, illiterate and unlearned. May you profit from what you read.

The Life

Chapter I

When I went to Alexandria to visit the tomb of the holy and victorious martyrs Cyril and John, I attended a conference of respected and Christ-loving men to discuss the Scriptures and the nature of the soul. As we were gathered together, a stranger approached us seeking an alms. He said that he had been recently been rescued from captivity in Persia. It so happened that none of us had any small change, but one of our number had a clerk standing by, who was accustomed to giving alms secretly, even though he was paid only three nummi a year and he had a wife and two children. After the beggar had gone on his way he followed him closely, and gave him a silver cross he was wearing, saying that he had never had so much as few pennies to spare in his whole life.

I saw what had happened and realised that it was by the grace of God that he had done this. I was very moved, and mentioned it to the person sitting next to me, a man called Mennas, a conscientious man who feared God, and who was the business manager of the most holy church of the noble and most blessed patriarch John. He could see how much I admired and praised the man who had given the alms.

"Don't be so surprised," he said. "There is someone whose teaching and example inspires people to actions of this sort."

"How is that?" I asked. "Do be so kind as to tell me about it."

"He has ceaselessly followed our most holy and thrice blessed patriarch John, and is as zealous about it as a son obedient to his own father. For John said to him, 'Zacharias, be merciful, and through the words coming from my own insignificant mouth I give you a message from God that God will never desert you during my lifetime or even after my death.' And he has faithfully kept to that, right up to today. God has sent him many blessings, but has never given him anything but what he gives it immediately to the poor, almost to the point of depriving his own family and bringing them to penury. There are people who have often heard him saying to God in ecstasy, 'So, you may be giving but I am giving it away. Let's see which of us will win! For you, O Lord, are full of riches and bring help to us in our lives.'

"Certain it is that in the event of his not having anything to give to a beggar he will say to some innkeeper or merchant, 'If you give me the third part of a gold coin I will be your slave for a month or two, as you will and where you will, for my household is in great need.' And then he gives it to the poor, telling them not to tell anybody."

Mennas could see that I was also a worshipper of God, seeing that I was listening to him as if he were the Gospel itself.

"Are you amazed by all this, sir?" he asked with concern. "What if you were to discover what our holy patriarch is like!"

"Why, what more might I see?"

"Just believe, by the mercy of God. He ordained me presbyter and made me steward of his most holy church, and I have seen him do things beyond the bounds of nature. And if you would care to honour me by letting me be your servant today I will tell you about the deeds which I have seen him do."

Suiting action to the word, he got up, took my hand and conducted me into his godfearing household, where he immediately suggested that we partake of food.

"It is not right, sir," I said, "to neglect food for the soul and feed the body before feeding the soul. Let us, then, partake first of the food which perishes not, and afterwards see to the needs of the body" (John 6.27).

He then began to tell me the true story of this holy man's life.

"The first good thing about him," he said, "is that he never under any circumstances swore by any oath."

I asked for pen and paper and began to note down in due order what he was telling me.

Chapter II

It was not by divine decree, not from men or through men that he was promoted to the throne of this great city of Alexandria, beloved of Christ. First of all he demonstrated where his priorities lay. For in the presence of all in his inner circle he declared to his helpers and to him who administered the peace, that it was not right to take thought for anybody more than Christ.

"Go, therefore, through all the city," he said, as they all listened carefully and supportively, "and make a list of all those who are my masters."

They did not understand what he was talking about, and asked each other in some bewilderment who could be these masters of the patriarch.

"Those whom you call beggars and poor I call masters and helpers," he said in his angelic voice. "They really are helpers for they are able to open the doors of the kingdom of heaven for us."

His orders were fulfilled with all speed, whereupon he ordered that a certain sum be set aside each day, and provided what was necessary out of his own possessions which amounted to more than seven thousand five hundred pounds. Then like a true shepherd and not a hired servant (John 10.12) he went with his own sacred flock and with the other bishops to the holy church where he was consecrated with divine approval.

Chapter III

It would not be right to delay the story of his good deeds any longer. The very next day he sent out his stewards and other civic officials to ensure that there were no arbitrary measures of weight of various different sizes in the city. All buying and selling was to be carried out under one standard size of weight. He wrote out this order, to be circulated throughout the city, in the following form:

John, the humble and unworthy servant of the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, to all who live under our poor jurisdiction and who are ruled by this same Lord and God, take heed.

The blessed and noble Paul lays down a law for all in the name of Christ, who speaks through him. 'Be obedient to those who have the rule over you, and be subject to them' (Hebrews 13.7). For they care for you and will be held responsible for your souls. I, the least of men, yet have confidence that you will accept our requests as a divine word from God, not from men. In this knowledge I therefore warn you that in your charity none of you should be in any doubt on that score. Divine Scripture says 'God holds unequal weights in

abhorrence' (Proverbs 11.1). If anyone after reading this prescription is found to be guilty of this crime let him give all his goods to the poor, without any appeal or mitigation. We therefore hasten to publish this order and expect it to be obeyed.

Chapter IV

He was told at one time that in dealing with foreigners church officials were taking money to act as brokers for slavery. He diligently summoned them together and without upsetting anybody increased the wages which they had been getting and laid it down that none of them should accept gifts from anyone.

"Let fire consume the houses of those who accept bribes," he said.

And so by the grace of God their houses flourished to such an extent that some of them were able to give away some of their extra money.

Chapter V

He learnt that some people who were in dispute with their enemies had been refraining from putting their case to him as they wished, for they were intimidated by the officials and other staff who surrounded him. He took thought as to what he might do which would be acceptable to God, and on the fourth and fifth days of the week put a desk and two chairs outside the church, where he sat holding the Gospels in his hands. In order to show that anyone who wished might approach him with confidence, he allowed none of his staff near him except one of the church guards. He had the church guards announce this to the people, and gave orders that none of them should endeavour to dissuade their unworthy head priest.

"We human beings are always allowed to present our petitions by entering the house of God to plead before him, even though he is beyond our reach and much greater than any creature. Furthermore we urgently beg for our prayers to be answered without delay as the prophet says: 'Let your mercies speedily anticipate our requests, O Lord' (Psalms 79.8). How much more, then, ought not we to use all expedition in hearing the prayers of our fellow servants, mindful of the Lord's saying: 'Whatever the measure you use, that will be the measure by which you will be measured' (Matthew 7.1). The Prophet also says: 'It shall be done to you even as you have done'" (cf. Matthew 7.12).

There came a day when this amazing man went out and sat in the accustomed place until the fifth hour with no one coming to petition him. He was filled

with sadness and went away in tears. No one felt it right to ask him why he was so sad, except Sophronius, who took him aside and asked:

"What is the reason, O healer of God, for you to burden your holy soul with such sadness? We are all quite worried about you."

"I have not received any wages from anybody, to day," he humbly replied, "nor have I been able to offer Christ anything to make up for my numberless sins."

Sophronius by divine inspiration understood immediately why the patriarch was so unhappy.

"Today you should rejoice and be glad, O most blessed one," he said, "for you really are most blessed in so far as you have brought such peace from Christ to your flock that no one has brought a suit against his neighbour. Without lawsuit or judgment you have made them like Angels."

This gentle pastor accepted that as the truth and lifted up his eyes to heaven.

"Thanks be to you, O God," he cried, "that you have deigned to use my undeserving weakness in the priesthood. You have called me, an unworthy sinner, your priest, and have used me to feed your living flock."

His depression cast aside, he then felt able to rejoice in all humility, and in this (as many said) he imitated Constantine, who became emperor after Heracles, and whose son he was.

Chapter VI

It was during the time of this holy patriarch that the Persians mounted an invasion of Syria and laid it waste. Of those who fled from the hands of the Persians, nearly all of them were aware of the reputation of this thrice blessed man, and came to him as to a harbour after storms, seeking help and refuge. The blessed man received them hospitably and saw to their needs not as if they were prisoners but as if they were truly his natural brothers. He organised the wounded and infirm into reception centres and guesthouses, giving orders that they should be cared for and given free medicine, and allowing them to depart of their own free will whenever they wished. To males who were healthy but destitute he gave a measure of pulse, but a double measure to women and children as the weaker members of society.

There were some wearing gold rings and brooches who came seeking alms, and they were referred to the patriarch by those in charge of the distribution centre. The blessed man replied with a stern voice and piercing eye, for all that he was of a gentle and equable disposition.

"If you wish to continue as stewards of humble John as if for Christ, pay heed without any prevarication to the divine instruction: 'Give to all who ask' (Luke 6.30). If you go investigating them in searching detail, God has even more searching ministers, and so has humble John. If what you are distributing were my own personal property, which belonged to me from birth, then perhaps I might well be reluctant to give it away. But if what you are distributing belongs to God then it should be dealt with according to his own instructions. If you are frightened to do this because of your weak faith and unbelief, frightened that the number of people receiving alms will be more than the treasury can cope with, I'm afraid that I do not share your inadequate faith. For if what you are doing is pleasing to God, and if I am the unworthy dispenser of his gifts, then I don't care if the whole world should come to Alexandria seeking alms. For the limitless treasury of God is not straitened, nor is that of his holy church."

Chapter VII

He dismissed them from his service, and so got rid of the weakness and faintheartedness with which they were infected. But to those who trusted in him and admired his God-given compassion, he told the following story.

"When I was still a young boy of fifteen in Cyprus, I saw a young woman in a dream one night, shining even more brightly than the sun, more beautiful than any human sense can conceive of. She came and stood by my bed and nudged me in the ribs. I awoke instantly, and saw her actually standing there, and realised that it was indeed a woman.

"'Who are you?' I asked, making the sign of the cross. 'And why are you so bold as to come in here while I am asleep?'

"She had a crown of olive branches on her head.

"'I am the first of the daughters of the King', she said with a joyful face and smiling lips, and at these words I bowed low before her. 'If you will have me as your friend I will lead you into the presence of the Emperor. For no one has more influence with him than I do. I was the reason he became man in order to save mankind.'

"As she said this she vanished. When I had come thoroughly to myself I began to understand the vision.

"'I believe,' I said, 'that she is called Compassion and Almsgiving, which is why she had the crown of olive leaves on her head. For it was indeed because of his compassion and good will towards mankind that God took upon him

our flesh.'

"I got dressed at once and without waking anyone in the house I went out to go to the church. It was nearly dawn. On the way I met a fellow human being shivering with cold, so I took my cloak off and gave it to him, saying to myself 'By this I shall know whether my vision was true or if it was of the devil.' I'm telling you the truth, before I had even got to the church I suddenly saw coming to meet me someone dressed in white who gave me a parcel of a hundred numismata, saying, 'Take these, brother, and dispose of them as you will.' I took them very happily, but then changed my mind and thought to give them back, seeing I had no need of them, but he had vanished.

Chapter VII (continued) Life of John the Almsgiver , Book Ib

"'It was real and no phantasm,' I said to myself. And from that time onwards, when I was giving anything to anyone, I found myself saying. 'Let's see if God will reward me a hundredfold, as he promised' (Matthew 19.29). It was wicked to test God like this, but I gained a great deal of satisfaction in various ways by doing this, until at last I said to myself. 'Stop trying to tempt him who cannot be tempted, you miserable sinner!' But in the humility of my soul I gained so many assurances from God! Today those unbelievers came and tried to make me fall into the same kind of diffidence as theirs."

Chapter VIII

One of the strangers among the great number of people in the city, seeing his compassion, thought of putting him to the test. Dressed in old clothes, they approached him as he was visiting the distribution centre, where he went two or three times a week.

"Have mercy on me," he cried, "for I was a prisoner of war."

"Give him six numismata" he said to the steward.

The man took them, went away and changed his clothes, and approached the patriarch on another occasion, fell down before him and cried, "Have mercy on me, for I am in dire straits."

"Give him six gold nummi," said the patriarch to the steward.

After he had gone the steward whispered in the patriarch's ear, "This is the second time he has taken alms from you, sir." But the patriarch made as if he did not want to know. He came again for the third time as the patriarch was

bringing out the gold coins, and the steward nudged him, and pointed the man out.

"Give him twelve numismata," said that truly merciful friend of God, "for he might perchance be Christ come to test me."

Chapter IX

There was a foreign sea-captain who had suffered some loss and he came to the blessed man in floods of tears, begging him to have pity on him as he did to everyone else. He gave orders that he should be given five pounds of gold. The sea-captain bought grain and stowed it in his ship. Not long after, he was shipwrecked near the Alexandrian lighthouse, though he was able to salvage the ship. He came to the patriarch again, presuming on his goodwill.

"Have mercy on me," he said, "for the God of this world is merciful."

"Believe me, brother," said the patriarch, "if you had not mixed up money from the church with what money of your own that you had left you would not have suffered shipwreck. You gained your own money from criminal transactions, and so you have lost that along with what you had from the church."

But he still ordered that he should be given ten pounds of gold, warning him that it should be kept separate from his other money.

Again the sea-captain bought wheat, and sailing one day into a hurricane he lost everything, ship and all, and was cast up on the shore possessing nothing except his own soul. He seriously considered killing himself in his distress and confusion, and this was revealed to the holy patriarch by God who cares always for the salvation of humankind. When he had heard what had happened he sent a message to the sea-captain that he was not to worry but to come and see him. The sea-captain sprinkled dust upon himself, tore his robe and presented himself thus disfigured. When the holy man saw him like that he dissuaded him from killing himself.

"May the blessed Lord God have mercy on you," he said. "I have faith that from this day onwards you will never suffer shipwreck again for as long as you live. This misfortune has happened to you in order that your ship should no longer be able to serve the cause of unjust dealings."

And he ordered that he should be given charge of one of the ships which served the needs of the most holy church, and that it should be loaded up with twenty thousand modii of grain. He set sail from Alexandria, and for twenty days and nights he sailed through a terrible storm, unable to tell where they

were, either by the stars or by familiar landmarks, except that the steersman could see the holy patriarch himself holding a staff and saying, "Don't be afraid. Just steer skilfully."

On the twentieth day they fetched up on the island of Britain, and when they went ashore they found that there was a great food shortage. They told the leading citizen that they were carrying wheat in the ship.

"It's the goodness of God that has sent you here," he said. "Make your choice. We will either give you one numismata for a modius of wheat, or give you its weight in tin."

They decided to take half in this way and half in that. And what I hasten to tell you happened next will be found unbelievable to the faithless who have no experience of the gifts of God, but will be accepted as credible by those who have experienced his miracles. For when they joyfully arrived back in Alexandria, the captain took some of the tin out of the ship in order to sell it to an old business acquaintance of his who he knew was interested in it. He had about fifty pounds of it in a bag. His acquaintance, wanting to make sure it was pure, tested a sample of it in the fire and discovered it was pure silver! He thought that he must have been put to some sort of a test, and gave the bag back.

"God forgive you!" he said. "Were you trying to make me out as some sort of a cheat by giving me silver instead of tin?"

"Believe me," said the astonished captain, "it was tin I gave you. But I suppose it is nothing wonderful if he who turned water into wine (John 2) could turn tin into silver because of the patriarch's prayers. But satisfy yourself. Come to the ship and see the rest of the metal from which you accepted this portion."

They went to the ship and found that all the tin had been turned into pure silver. But the love of Christ will not find this a very strange miracle. For he also multiplied the loaves of bread (John 6), and turned the waters of Egypt into blood, and the rod of Aaron into a serpent (Exodus 7), and made the flames as harmless as dew (Daniel 3), so it was not more difficult to do this great miracle in response to the prayers of his servant in order to show mercy to the sea-captain.

Chapter X

One Sunday, when this most holy man was going to the church a certain very rich man rushed up to him, saying that thieves had burgled his house and

deprived him of everything they could lay their hands on. Exhaustive enquiries had not been able to reveal who was responsible, and now his utter poverty was leading him with the utmost respect to tell the most holy patriarch about his disaster. The patriarch was very sorry for him and told the steward in charge of the gold to give him fifteen pounds of it. The steward went away to get it, but after discussing the matter with the chief accountant and the bursar, between them they decided to give him only five pounds.

In the meantime the most honourable Archbishop had returned from the morning office, and was approached by a widow woman who had an only son. She gave him a note of hand promising a praiseworthy gift of five hundred pounds of gold, which he accepted and concealed about his person. He then called the stewards.

"How much did you give to that man who approached me earlier?" he asked

"Fifteen pounds, as your most sacred holiness ordered," they said

By the grace which dwelt in him he knew they were lying, and he called the man to whom he had given the money.

"How much money did they give you?" he asked.

"Five pounds," he said.

The holy man then showed the stewards the note of hand he had been given.

"God requires from you another thousand pounds. For if you had really given fifteen pounds, she who brought me five hundred would really have given me fifteen. And I can prove that by summoning the woman who gave this gift."

He sent two reverend clerks to bring back the woman who had given him the note of hand and held it out to her.

"Bring me the actual amount of gold which God put it into your heart to give me," he said.

She soon returned and fell at his feet with a quantity of gold, which the patriarch accepted and prayed over her and her son.

"Tell me, sister," he said, "Is this all you wanted to give Christ, or was there some more?"

She sensed that as a representative of God he knew already what she had done, and trembled with awe.

"Through your prayers and the prayers of Saint Menna I had written fifteen hundred in my promise, but an hour ago in the church I brought it out of my pocket ready to give it to you, my lord, and read it over again. With my own hand I, your unworthy servant, had written fifteen, but I found that it had been changed to five! Quite baffled, I said to myself that it must have been the will

of God that I should only give five."

After the patriarch had sent this worthy woman away in peace, the stewards who had been disobedient to him fell at his feet, asking forgiveness, and promised not do such a thing again.

Chapter XI

When Nicetas, the governor of the province, heard of the generosity of this most virtuous man and his ever open hand, standing head and shoulders above everyone else, he was driven by the devil to visit him.

"The state is in difficulty because of a shortage of money," he said to him. "So then, since money is given to you freely when you ask, give it to the state, let it go into the public treasury."

"It would not be right, I think, lord governor," he said, remaining quite calm, "to give to an earthly ruler what has been offered to the ruler of heaven. But if that is what you have finally decided upon, take note that humble John gives you not one single nummus. But look, it is the treasure chest of Christ that is under my humble bed. Do what you will."

The governor immediately ordered some of his men to carry all the money away on their shoulders, leaving behind not so much as a hundred nummi. As they were going out with it, others were just coming in, carrying small jars containing money donated from Africa. Some of the jars were labelled 'Best Honey', others 'Unsmoked Honey'. The governor read the labels and suggested to the patriarch that he might give him some of the honey for his own use. He knew that the patriarch was incapable of evil. The gentle pastor went to the men carrying the jars and learned from them that it was money in the jars, not honey. He wrote a short note saying:

'I will never leave you nor forsake you says the Lord (Hebrews 13.5 & Joshua 1.5). For he is the true God and does not lie. Therefore corruptible man can never thwart God who provides food and drink for all. Farewell.'

He put this label on one of the jars marked 'Best Honey' and gave it to the governor. He told those who were carrying the jar away with them to ask the governor to open the jar in their presence, and to tell him that all the jars which he had seen were filled with money, not honey. They arrived with the jars and went in to the governor as he was sitting at table, and saw that there was only one jar of honey.

"Go and tell the bishop," he said, "that he has after all shown me some ill will, for he has only given me one jar!"

He broke open the jar and emptied out all the money and realised that all the other jars which he had seen must have been likewise filled with money.

When he had read the note saying that corruptible man could never thwart God's will he was conscience-stricken.

"As the Lord lives," he said, "neither can Nicetas thwart his will. I am just a human being, sinful and corruptible."

He got up from his meal immediately, gathered together the money he had taken from the worthy father as well as the jar, added three hundred nummi of his own and went to fall at the patriarch's feet, with no thought of the respect properly due to his own position. With the deepest humility, as if he had been actually accused by somebody, he asked pardon of God, assuring the patriarch that whatever penance he might choose to give him he would accept it and faithfully carry it out. In wonderment at the man's sudden conversion, the Archbishop said absolutely nothing in condemnation of what he had done, but rather comforted him with consoling words. Divine charity was thus so mutually restored between them that the Archbishop became the governor's spiritual father.

Chapter XII

God tempted Abraham in order to bring into the open the faith that till then had been known only to God, so that the whole world might learn of it and imitate it (Genesis 22). So also did God tempt that unforgettable John. The form his temptation took came in the shape of a potential benefit for his holy churches. It happened like this:

Because of the great numbers of refugees escaping from the Persians and coming to Alexandria, which we have already described, there was an acute shortage of food, made worse by the fact that the Nile had not flooded as usual. The patriarch had spent all his own money, as well as about a thousand pounds given him by some of the lovers of Christ, and when that had been all used up, nobody was willing to give him any more. Food was still in short supply, people feared the severity of the famine, and the needs of those whom the patriarch was maintaining were not being met, though the blessed man persevered in prayer and in giving what help he could.

Now there was a citizen of that city who greatly desired to be made a deacon, but he had been married twice. He was very much aware of how desolate and needy that most holy man was in all sorts of ways, and he hoped to make use of those needs in order to gain the ordination that he coveted. He arranged for

a legal letter to be sent to him, for he did not dare to speak to him face to face: 'To John, the most holy and thrice blessed father of fathers, vicar of Christ, from Cosmas, the unworthy servant of servants of your holiness, this petition and prayer: Most holy lord, knowing that your worshipful head is bowed down in care because of the shortage of food inflicted on us for our sins, albeit with the permission of God, I do not think it right that your servant should dine at ease while my lord remains in poverty. Your unworthy servant possesses two hundred thousand modii of wheat and a hundred and eighty pounds of gold which I would like to be given to Christ through you, my lord, if only your unworthy servant might be found fit to enjoy the ministry of the diaconate with you and repent of his many sins, for necessity demands that the law be changed, as says the holy Apostle, God's preacher' (Hebrews 7.12).

Upon receipt of this the wise man of God called for the man.

"You are the man who got your notary to write me this letter and you sent it to me by your son?"

"Indeed, my lord."

The blessed and most merciful man sent everyone else out of the room, not wishing to embarrass the man in their presence.

"What you are offering would be very welcome," he said, "and in tune with the needs of the time, but it is flawed. For you must know that the Law says that a sheep, whether big or small, may not be offered in sacrifice unless it is unblemished (Leviticus 2.21), which is why God had no respect for the sacrifice of Cain (Genesis 4.5). For all that you have spoken truly, brother, in saying that necessity demands that the law should be changed, it was the Old Testament that the Apostle was quoting. What about what James the brother of the Lord says, that whoever keeps the law and offends in one particular is guilty of all (James 2.10)? As for the holy church and my brothers in need, the God who cared for them before you and I were born will continue to do so if we keep our lips from evil speaking. He who multiplied the five loaves is well able to pour out a blessing on the ten modii in my granary. Moreover, my son, what I say to you is what was said in the Acts of the Apostles: 'You have no portion or right in this matter'" (Acts 8.21).

No sooner had he dismissed the man, disappointed in his failure, than news came that two of the church's great ships that had been sent to Syria for grain had reached port. The blessed man fell on his face and gave thanks to almighty God.

"I give you thanks, O Lord, that you have kept me from selling your grace for

money. Truly, O Lord, those who seek after you and observe the rules of your holy Church shall lack for nothing."

Chapter XIII

He once punished two clerks, guilty of striking each other, with canonical excommunication for a certain period. One of them accepted his punishment with humility, the other, a maliciously minded person, was quite happy to submit to this decree, for it gave him an excuse not to go near the church but allowed him to continue in his wicked deeds. He was incensed with the holy patriarch and was threatening violence. There were those who said that he was one of the people who had helped carry the church's money to governor Nicetas and had helped himself to some of it. The blessed man was told that the clerk was still nursing resentment and was as wicked as ever in his ill will towards him.

But he was a true pastor, mindful of the saying, 'Who is weak and I am not weak?' (2 Corinthians 11.29). And again, 'You who are strong should bear the burdens of the weak' (Romans 15.1). He wanted to summon him, give him a talking to and release him from his excommunication, for he could see that he was a wolf threatening to steal the sheep. But as everyone knew, the mind of the patriarch was always liable to be forgetful of anything evil, and in the providence of God it so happened that he completely forgot to summon the man to release him from his excommunication.

Next Sunday, while standing at the altar preparing to offer the unbloody sacrifice, the affair which he had forgotten suddenly came back into his mind, just as the deacon had come to the end of the prayer and was about to unveil the holy gifts. He thought of how the Lord had said. 'If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has anything against you, leave there your gift. First be reconciled with your brother and then offer your gift' (Matthew 5.23-24). He told the deacon saying the usual prayer which deacons say to begin again from the beginning, and if he finished it again, to go back to the beginning again, until he should come back for the consecration. He went into the administration wing and ordered twenty of the staff to go out looking for the evil minded clerk, for his intention was to rescue the sheep from the mouth of the lion. And indeed, God who always responds to the desires of those who fear him caused the clerk to be speedily found. When he arrived, the patriarch, in an act of witness to the truth of the gospel, was the first to fall on his knees saying, "Forgive me, brother".

The clerk was awestruck at the example presented by this honourable pontifex to him and all the others present, and even more than that, fearful of the judgment of God that fire might come down from heaven and consume them in an instant. He gazed at the venerable gray hair lying on the floor before him and bent the knee himself, seeking pardon and mercy.

"May God forgive us all," said the patriarch. They got up and went into the church and with great joy and gladness stood before the altar, able to say to God with a clear conscience, 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors'. As these events were rumoured abroad, the clerk's change of heart became so apparent that he was found worthy of being made a lector, as a preparation for eventually being ordained to the presbyterate.

Chapter XIV

Some of the God-bearing holy fathers have said, 'It is the nature of Angels that they are never contentious but remain at peace in every way, human beings may quarrel but have the ability to be reconciled, whereas the demons are always on the attack and never make peace.' We mention this, O lovers of Christ, by way of preface to the following narrative:

Our noble patriarch decided to make an objection on a certain public matter against the governor Nicetas, whom we have already mentioned. The occasion for the dispute was that the governor wanted to sell off a certain amount of public seating for the benefit of the treasury, but the patriarch would not countenance this out of respect for the poor. They argued at length between themselves in private, but neither would give in and they parted in anger with no solution to the dispute. It was the fifth hour, and the governor was upset because he was thinking only of pecuniary gain, but the patriarch was upset and bitter on behalf of God's commandment. But at length that just man spoke sharply to himself.

"Human beings ought not to give way to anger," he said, "whether their cause is either reasonable or unreasonable."

At the eleventh hour he sent his archpresbyter and a clerk to take this memorable message to the governor:

"It is almost sunset, sir." (cf. Ephesians 4.26)

Listening to this, the governor forgot about the turmoil in his heart, for he was conscience stricken at these words. Burning with the love of God and quite overcome by tears, he went straight away to see the blessed man.

"Welcome to the church, my son," said the patriarch. "You have listened to

what it teaches."

They apologised to each other and embraced each other, and sat down together.

Chapter !V (continued) Life of St John the Almsgiver, Book Ib

"Believe me, sir," said the patriarch, "if I had not seen how troubled you were by this affair, I would not have been so tardy in coming to you. But our Lord and God goes about, visiting cities and castles and ordinary homes."

All who heard were full of admiration at the humility of this great high priest.

"Believe me, father," said the governor, "I was not listening to the voices of anyone except those who were urging me to be argumentative."

"Believe me, my son and brother," said the wise teacher, "if we were to give credence to all those kinds of people, we would be encouraging many people to fall into sin, especially these days when there are such a lot of people who hate each other. There are always many who try to persuade me into their way of seeing matters, and if I am persuaded to agree with them, there are always others who come along and tell me that my first decision was wrong. By the time I have been through this process two or three times I call a halt to the arguments of either party and keep to the decision I made to start off with. If any of them are lying they become subject to the same penalty due to anyone who can be truly proved to have uttered a slander. Since the day I have taken this position, no one has been bold enough to make unproven allegations against anyone else, and so, my son, I recommend and beg that you be of like mind. It happens so often that unjust decisions are made by those who have been entrusted with high authority, because they have been persuaded by others, and have got away scot free with going back on their first decision."

And the governor, as if he were listening to the commands of God, determined to keep the commandments inviolate from that time on.

Chapter XV

This remarkable man had a nephew called George, who one day got into a

quarrel with one of the shopkeepers in the city. The shopkeeper abused him roundly, which the youth bitterly resented, not only because he had been insulted in public but because he, the nephew of the patriarch, had been insulted by someone of an inferior class. He went to complain privately to the patriarch, weeping bitterly. When that most gentle patriarch saw him so upset and angry he questioned him about what was causing him so much grief, but in his bitterness he was unable to find words to express properly what had happened. The patriarch summoned eyewitnesses who might be able to exonerate his nephew from any blame. They gave him an exact account of what had happened, adding that it was not right that the actions of his relatives, condemned by all, should be overlooked, as it reflected on the honour of the Archbishop himself.

But the patriarch was a true physician and determined to apply a healing plaster to his nephew's anger, or take a liberating knife to amputate his passion, so he opened his mouth of wisdom and began to cure his disease in these words:

"Well now, has someone dared to open his mouth in order to condemn you? Believe what your father is about to tell you, my son, for I shall today do something which will call for the respect of all Alexandria."

The boy thought that he was about to be vindicated and recovered from his tantrums completely, thinking that the patriarch was about to cause the person who had insulted him to be whipped by the public constable and publicly disgraced. The patriarch clasped him to his breast.

"My son," he said, "if you would wish to prove yourself in humility a true nephew of mine, prepare yourself to be whipped and suffer the condemnation of everyone. For true relationship between people consists not in flesh and blood but in the virtuous meeting of minds."

He summoned the leader of the tradesmen's association and gave him instructions that the shopkeeper should be dispensed from paying his accustomed dues and public rates and even from the rent for his workplace, which in fact belonged to the most holy church. Everyone was awestruck at his forbearance, and began to understand what he had meant when he said that he would do something which would call for the respect of all Alexandria. For not only had he refrained from returning evil for evil but had proved himself to be careful for the rights of those who depended on him.

It was reported to this blessed man that one of the clerics was nursing a grudge in his heart against someone and refusing to make up the quarrel. Upon enquiring his name and position he was told that it was a deacon called Damian and that he was due to take part in the service next day at the Sunday offering. He gave his archdeacon instructions that he was to point Damian out to him when he came to the church. So when the archdeacon saw Damian coming next day to perform his Sunday duty he pointed him out to the patriarch. In order to do something about the deacon's quarrel the Pontifex himself stood at the altar, though no one realised what it was he was about to do. When the deacon Damian in due course came to receive holy Communion that holy man grasped his hand.

"First go and be reconciled with your brother," he said, "and then, having forgotten your grievance, come and receive the spotless mysteries of Christ." The deacon did not dare to protest at this in the presence of so many clerics, in such a place and at such an awesomely holy moment, so he swore a solemn oath that he would do so, and then the patriarch administered the holy mysteries to him. From that time onwards both clerics and laity took care not to nurse grudges among themselves, fearing lest the patriarch should find them out and humiliate them as he had done to that deacon.

Chapter XVII

This most holy man had an extensive knowledge of the divine Scriptures, not so that he could boast of his wisdom by reciting them by heart, but so that they might inspire all his actions, and enable him to keep the commandments. No idle conversation was ever heard to take place in the course of his daily business, unless involvement in civil affairs demanded it. He delighted in stories of the holy fathers, or scriptural questions, or dogmatic problems occasioned by the multitude of heretics in the region, whose names we do not need to spell out. If he heard anyone beginning to defame someone else, like a wise man he skilfully dealt with it by giving them a talking-to. If any offender persisted he said nothing, but gave instructions to the doorman not to allow him entry with any of the other visitors, so that others might be warned and instructed thereby.

Chapter XVIII

It would not be right to pass over another decision which this holy man made. He had heard that after the Emperor had been crowned, no one in the senate or

the army proposed a monument to him in accordance with custom, so when some monumental masons came to see him with four or five small samples of marble in different colours, and asked him what sort of memorial he wanted his rule to be remembered by - as much as to say, 'You are only a transitory human being, destined for corruption, so take thought for your soul and govern your kingdom justly' - the blessed man thought to maintain this praiseworthy custom and ordered a tomb to be built for him near where his predecessors in the patriarchate were lying. But he gave instructions that it was not to be finished until his death, in the expectation that as people were going in to the services conducted by the clergy its very incompleteness might provoke someone to remind him, 'My lord, your tomb has not been finished. Pray bid that it be brought to a conclusion, for we know not the day nor the hour when the thief might break in' (Matthew 24.42-43). The holy man did this in a desire to leave a good example for future patriarchs to follow.

Chapter XIX

Because of the multitude of our sins, the Lord allowed his own temple at Jerusalem to be looted and burned by the Persians, and when the most holy patriarch heard of this and of the great need in which Modestus the patriarch of Jerusalem found himself in his desire to rebuild, he ordered a thousand numismata to be sent to him, a thousand bags of grain, a thousand measures of pulse, a thousand pairs of scales, a thousand bags of fried fish known as menomenae, a thousand flasks of wine, and a thousand Egyptian workmen, together with a letter as follows:

Forgive me, dear labourer for Christ, for not sending you anything worthy of the temple of Christ. Believe me, had I been able, I would have come myself to take part in the resurrection of the house of the holy Christ. Nevertheless I beg you not to take offence at my own poverty, but rather seek from Christ that I may be written in the book where the truly blessed are wont to be written.

Chapter XX

Here is something which this holy man chose to do, namely, sleep on the meanest sort of bed covered with the meanest sort of bedcovering. When a comfortably well-off person in the city heard about that he went to see John and found that his bedcovering was indeed a very ragged, rough woollen object. So he sent him a new bed and blankets worth thirty-six numismata.

"Use them to cover yourself with, and let them remind you of me!" he said. Persuaded by that remark, and much more of the same, he used it for one night, but spent the whole night arguing with himself. It was as if a whole host of bedroom attendants were besetting him with questions.

"Who would have believed that humble John (which is how he always referred to himself) has a bed worth thirty-six numismata, while Christ's brothers are dying of cold?"

"How many are there whose teeth are chattering with cold?"

"How many are there who have only half a blanket over them and half a blanket under them, so that they cannot stretch their feet out but lie curled up in a shivering ball?"

"How many are there who are sleeping unfed, in the dark, out in the open, suffering the double torment of hunger as well as cold?"

"How many are there who would gladly stuff themselves with the cabbage leaves that are thrown out from your own kitchen?"

"How many are there who would gladly soak their own bread in the water your kitchen has cooked food in, then thrown away?"

"How many are there who would enjoy just a sniff of the wines stored in your cellar?"

"How many strangers are there in this city at this moment who have nowhere to sleep except in the street, probably drenched with rain?"

"How many are there, do you think, who have gone for a whole month or even two without a taste of any oil?"

"How many are there who have no change of garments between summer and winter and therefore suffer in both seasons?"

"You live in the expectation of eternal bliss, and you drink wine, and eat large fish and sleep in your bedroom. And along with all these things you have chosen to keep yourself warm in a bed and bedding worth thirty-six numismata? Living in such luxury, you should not expect to partake in the joys which have been prepared, but rather hear what the rich man heard, 'You have received you good things in this life, but the poor have received evil things, but now they are comforted, but you are in torment' (Luke 16.25).

Blessed be God, humble John will refuse to use his expensive bed for a single night more. Now blankets are being sold at four for one numismatum. So it would be right and acceptable to God that a hundred and forty-four poor people (who are your masters, don't forget) should have a blanket rather than you with your expensive bed."

He sent it off forthwith next morning to be sold. But the person who had originally given it noticed it on sale and bought it himself for thirty-six numismata and took it back to the patriarch. The same thing happened next morning, and again he bought it and took it back to the patriarch, begging him to make use of it. And it happened again a third time!

"We shall see who will give up first, you or I," said that holy man, who was really enjoying this. For the giver of the bed was very rich indeed, and the holy man was cheerfully reaping a rich harvest from him little by little. He always used to say that it was right to despoil the rich if it was for the purpose of giving to the poor. You could even take the shirt off his back without sin if it was for a good intention, especially if he was unmerciful and miserly. The benefits from this are twofold. The first is that you are being helpful to others, the second is that you can expect a great reward from it yourself. And in support of this belief he would cite the example of Epiphanius and John the bishop of Jerusalem, whereby Epiphanius deceived that patriarch into giving him money which he then gave to the poor.

Chapter XXI

In keeping with the previous chapter it is fitting to relate the story that this holy man once told us all:

I used to know someone who worked in a shop in Cyprus, he said, who was very faithful, and a virgin till the time of his death. He told me how the owner of the shop was very rich and very mean. It so happened that one day as the poor were warming themselves in the sun, some of them began singing the praises of those who gave alms and offering a prayer for each one of them, and also castigating those who gave no alms at all. Among them the name of this shop owner cropped up, and they all asked among themselves whether any of them had ever received any alms from him, and no one was found ever to have received any alms from his household.

"How much do you bet that I won't get an alms from him this very day?" one of them then said. And when they had come to an agreed price he went and stood in outside the door of the shop owner's house, waiting for him to come home. By the providence of God the shop owner arrived there at the same time, leading a donkey bringing back fine wheat flour from the mill for his own table. Seeing the beggar standing there, he searched about for a stone to fling at him, and not finding any, snatched a bag of flour from the saddle of the donkey and angrily threw that in his face. The beggar picked it up and

showed it to his companions to prove that it had been given to him by the shop owner's own hands.

Two days later the shop owner took ill and was like to die, and saw himself being put to the judgment, with all his deeds being weighed in the balance. On one side of the balance were gathered a horde of ugly Moors, on the other side beings dressed in white and of an awe-inspiring appearance. They could find nothing good to throw into their side of the balance, whereas the Moors gathered together all his evil deeds to weigh their side of the balance down.

The ones dressed in white were very sad and troubled.

"Haven't we got anything on our side?" they asked.

"Nothing", one of them said, "except one bag of flour which he gave to Christ two days ago, and that unwillingly."

They put the bag of flour into the balance and it tipped the balance slightly in his favour.

"Now go and make this bag of flour bigger," the ones in white said to the shop owner. "For otherwise these Moors will have you."

He groaned, knowing that he was being presented with the truth and no lie. He saw everything he had done from his youth up, and had forgotten, being gathered together by those Ethiopians and thrown into the scales.

"Let me take warning!" he said. "If one small bag of flour is worth so much, how many evils may one be delivered from by giving alms freely to the poor?"

And from then on he became such a prudent and caring person, and such a great almsgiver that he would not even spare his own body.

It happened one day as he was going at dawn to his shop that he met a sailor, naked as the day he was born, who had come ashore from a shipwreck, and who fell at his feet asking for his protection. Realising his need, he took off his cloak, which was one of his best, and gave it to him and begged him to wear it. But the sailor felt embarrassed, and sold it to a street trader. The shop owner noticed it as he was going by and felt very upset. He went home, refused to eat, and shut himself weeping inside the door of his study.

"How is it that I am not worthy," he asked, "for that beggar to be my memorial?"

Still worrying, he went to bed, and had a vision of someone as radiant as the sun, carrying a cross and wearing round his shoulders the cloak he had given to the sailor.

"Why are you weeping, Master Peter?" the vision asked.

"How is it, Lord," he replied, arguing as if with God, "that when we give anything out of the bounty with which you have blessed us, they take it and disgracefully turn it into cash?"

"Don't you recognise this?" he said, indicating the cloak. "It is I who am wearing it. You gave it to me, and I give you thanks for your good will, for I was cold and you clothed me."

When he awoke he was filled with wonder and began to bless the poor.

"The Lord lives!" he cried. "And if the poor are my Christ, I shall not die before becoming as one of them."

He summoned a slave of his who acted as his secretary.

"I want to entrust some highly confidential business to you, he said, "and if you betray me, or if you won't do as I say, I shall sell you to the barbarians. Take this ten pounds of gold to set yourself up in business, then take me to the holy city and sell me to some Christian or other, and give the money to the poor."

The secretary was extremely reluctant to do so.

"If you refuse to do it I shall sell you to the barbarians, as I said."

The secretary perforce agreed, and they went to the holy places, where he made contact with a silversmith, a dear friend of his, whose business, however, was not doing very well.

"Listen, Zoilus," the secretary said, "I've got this very good slave for sale. He says he is actually of noble birth."

The silversmith was rather surprised that he had this slave.

"Truly, I have not got enough money to buy him," he said.

"Borrow some money then, and buy him. He will bring you a lot of good fortune. God will bring you many blessings through him."

He agreed, and bought him for thirty numismata, dressed as he was in mean and common clothing. The secretary left and went to Constantinople, making sure he told no one, kept nothing for himself out of the price he had been paid, and gave the whole lot to the poor.

Peter meanwhile was working in his master's kitchen, and sometimes doing the washing, tasks which he had never been used to doing before. He also chastised his body with regular fasting. His master began to see that Peter was indeed a blessing above all other blessings, and was put to shame by his outstanding virtue and humility.

"Peter," he said, "I would like to give you your freedom and be to me as a brother."

Peter would not agree.

Then the master noticed that he was constantly being abused and insulted by his fellow servants. For they thought he was a half-wit, and always called him 'Half-wit'. But as often as he was being given a hard time by his fellows and went to bed in disgrace, he was given a vision of him whom he had seen in Africa, wearing his cloak, and now holding those thirty numismata in his hand.

"Don't be so sad, brother Peter," he said. "I have received your price. Continue in your endurance until you are recognised."

Not long after this some merchants selling silver came from his native land in order to pray at the holy places, and Peter's master invited them to his house for a meal. Peter recognised them as soon as he started waiting at table. And they, as they were eating, could not help noticing him

"Doesn't he look like master Peter, the shop owner!" they said to each other. As much as he could he kept his face hidden from them. But as they were eating they remarked to their host, "Master Zoilus, we think there is something rather extraordinary going on here, for unless we are mistaken you have a well known citizen among your slaves."

They could not be any more positive than that, for fasting and work in the kitchen had altered his appearance. They discussed it among themselves for a while, until one of them said, "I am sure it is Master Peter. I am going to get up and grab him."

As Zoilus heard all this he was very put out for not having realised this before. Peter heard what they were talking about from outside the door, put down the bowl he was carrying, did not go in but ran straight to the front door. The doorkeeper was one who had been deaf and dumb from birth, but was used to opening and shutting the door in response to a nod of the head.

"I am speaking to you in the name of Christ," said Peter, as he ran up to the door.

"Yes sir," said the doorkeeper, his hearing suddenly restored.

"Open up," said Peter.

"I will sir," said the deaf and dumb doorkeeper." And he got up and opened it. As Peter went out, the doorkeeper ran back in, shouting with great exultation, "Lord! Lord! I can hear and speak!" Everybody in the house could hear him and were quite petrified to hear him shouting.

"It was the one who works in the kitchen," the former deaf mute said. "He has just run outside. But go and see. Perhaps he has run away! In any case he is a great servant of God. As he came up to me he said, 'I am speaking to you in the name of Christ', and I saw a flame coming out of his mouth and touching my ears, and immediately I could hear and speak."

They all jumped up and ran out after Peter, but alas, he was nowhere to be seen. Then everyone in the house began to feel guilty including the master who had bought him and subjected him to such a subservient state, but especially all those who had called him 'Half-wit'.

That is a sample of the stories told us by the blessed John, the patriarch honoured by God. He was not content to spend only his own life in giving a helping hand to anyone who wanted it, but made use of the true stories of those who had been accepted by God.

"Anyone who spares not his own flesh," he always used to say, "but lays it down for his brother, lays it down for Christ. Why else do you think that with eagerness and humility we ought to give of our possessions to Christ in the persons of the needy and poor, if it is not to receive our reward from God, that righteous source of all recompense, in that fearful and tremendous Day? 'He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly' (2 Corinthians 9.6), but he who sows with blessings, that is generously and widely, shall also reap a manifold reward. In other words he will inherit those good things which pass man's understanding."

Chapter XXII

This holy man was impeccable in his way of life. He fell short in nothing. He truly loved to speak of the deeds of the holy fathers and those renowned for giving alms. One day he told us about the life of the holy Serapion, known as the Sindonite, who gave his cloak to a poor man, and then having gone on a little way gave his tunic away as well, leaving him sitting there naked, with nothing but the Gospels in his hand. Somebody asked him. "Who has robbed you, abba?" And he held up the holy Gospels, saying "This!"

On another occasion he sold this book of the Gospels and gave the money away in alms.

"Abba, where is your book of the Gospels?" said his disciple.

"Believe me, my son, I have sold that very thing which told me to sell all that I have and give to the poor (Matthew 19.21), that in the day of judgment I may have abundant recompense before God."

And again, when a widow woman asked for an alms from this same holy Serapion because her sons were starving, he handed himself over to her, not having anything else to give, so that she could sell him as a slave to a troupe of Greek actors, and it was not very long before he had converted those actors to Christ.

In reading this story of the holy Serapion, the holy John was overcome with admiration for his great zeal. In tears, he called all his aid workers and read the whole story to them.

"O, you who love Christ," he said, "Do you not see what profit there is in talking about the deeds of the holy fathers? Believe me, up to today I was thinking that I could not do any more than give away what money I had. I never imagined that compassion could be felt so strongly that anyone would sell himself."

Chapter XXIII

This holy man always held those wearing the monastic habit in high regard. He encouraged them and empathised with them, especially when he saw a monk emaciated for lack of bodily comforts. One of his priorities was never to accept any accusation, whether true or false, against anyone wearing the monastic habit. For it happened once that among many other tales going round, a certain monk was being accused of having been wandering about in the city for several days in the company of a very young girl while asking for alms. People who saw him were scandalised, because they assumed that the girl was his woman. They brought a complaint about him to the patriarch.

"You stand high in God's favour," they said to the bishop. "Is it not a disgrace to the reputation of the Angelic monastic habit that he should have this girl as his woman?"

The servant of God believed that he was there for the very purpose of putting a stop to sins committed against God, and ordered that the girl should be separated from him and whipped, and that the monk should be beaten and put in prison. After these orders had been carried out with all diligence, the monk appeared to him that night in a dream, showing him his back, which was a bloody pulp, for the church guardians had assaulted him without mercy.

"I hope this pleases you, my lord bishop," he said. "You have erred like any

other human being this time. Don't forget that your life and death is in the hands of your neighbour!"

In the morning that blessed man remembered his vision and was overcome with shame and sorrow as he sat up in his bed. That blessed patriarch sent immediately for his prison warder to bring him the monk from the prison, wondering whether he was the same man as had appeared to him in his vision. It was an enormous effort for him to arrive before the patriarch, for because of his wounds he was hardly able to move. When the patriarch saw him he was speechless, not knowing what to say. He could only gesture with his hand to tell him to sit on the bed. He recovered sufficient composure to cross himself, and asked the monk to take no thought for his modesty but take his clothes off so that he could see whether his back was as he had seen in his dream. The monk was wearing a linen tunic. Somewhat unwillingly he undressed to show his back to the holy man, and in God's wonderful providence his loincloth also slipped to the floor, allowing everyone to see that he was in fact a eunuch! It had not been at all obvious outwardly, for the operation had only been done quite recently. The holy Pontiff and everyone there could see how exceedingly viciously he had been flogged, and he immediately ordered that those who had beaten him so unmercifully should be suspended. He then began a long discussion with that venerable monk by admitting that he had sinned against him and against the true God.

"But you must realise, my son," he said, "that you could hardly expect not to be locked up in this city, wandering about in your Angelic monastic habit in the company of a female, to the scandal of all who saw you."

The monk then in all humility explained to the holy man what had happened. "Believe me, I am not lying. A few days ago I was in Gaza, and as I was going out of the city on my way to worship at the shrine of the holy Cyrus, this nice-looking girl came up to me outside the gates as night was falling, fell at my feet and asked if she could come with me. She said she was a Jew and wanted to become a Christian and she told me a quite horrifying story, begging me to save her from being killed. In fear of the judgment of God I accepted her, confident that eunuchs have no fear of sexual temptation from Satan. So, we came here together, most holy father, and after praying together I baptised her at the shrine of abba Cyrus. In simplicity of heart I wandered about begging for a little sustenance until such time as I could get her into a monastery."

"Oh, how wonderful!" exclaimed the patriarch. "I wonder how many more servants of God there are about, that humble John has never heard of. "

And he told those who were with him about the vision that he had had the night before. He took out a hundred numismata from his purse to give him, but that true monk and friend of God would not accept it, offering instead a very noteworthy saying to the patriarch:

"I would not ask for all that, sir," he said. "If a monk has faith he has no need of it. If he does need it, he has no faith."

This more than amply satisfied his hearers that this monk was indeed a servant of God. He bent the knee to the patriarch and departed in peace. The result of all this was that the patriarch honoured monks even more, and offered them hospitality whether they were good or bad. It was not long before he built a guesthouse for them, which he called 'Allmonks Haven'

Chapter XXIV

Once when plague struck the city this holy man took part in the funerals, which he said was useful so that he could inspect the burial places. Very often indeed he would sit with the dying as they suffered the agony of the departure of their souls. He would close their eyes with his own hands, deliberately reminding himself of his own mortality. And he made sure that no one would be left in any doubt that prayers had been said for the deceased.

For he told a story about how someone not long since had been taken captive by Persians, and taken to a prison in Persia called Lethe, that is, 'oblivion.'

Some people escaped from there and came back to Cyprus, where they were questioned by the captive's parents as to whether they had seen him at all.

They replied that they had buried him with their own hands, unaware that it was not this man but someone else who looked like him. And they told him the day and the month of his death. His parents then said the prayers for the dead for him at three set times a year.

Four years later he escaped from Persia and came back to Cyprus.

"Truly, brother," said his relations, "we thought you were dead, and have been saying the prayers for you three times a year."

"What days did you say then on?" he asked.

"Epiphany, Easter Day and Pentecost." they said.

"On these very three days every year I was visited by someone dressed in white, as shining bright as the sun. He loosed me from my iron chains and from my cell, and I was able to walk about freely all day without anyone noticing. Next day I was back in chains."

"What we learn from this," said the holy bishop, "is that when we say the

prayers for the dead, the dead are given rest."

Chapter XXV

What frequently happened to this most compassionate of men is what we read of as happening in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4). For many people, when they saw his unlimited and unsearchable generosity to people, were often moved to sell many of their possessions and bring them to lay at the feet of this devoted minister of God. There was one person who came one day with seven and a half pounds of gold and assured the holy man that that was all the gold he had. Genuflecting repeatedly before the bishop he begged also that he would pray that the Lord God would keep his son safe. He had just the one son of about fifteen years of age, who was bringing back goods from Africa in his ship.

The high priest accepted the gold from his hand, marvelling that his generosity extended to giving all the gold that he possessed. He prayed for him, with many people as witnesses, and so let him depart. Furthermore in response to the man's great faith the patriarch made a bundle of the gold and put it under the holy table in his private chapel (*oratorio cubiculi sui*) and celebrated the synaxis for the person who had made the gift, including many prayers that the son should come home safely in the ship, as he had been asked to do.

However, before a month had passed, the son died. Three days after his death another ship of his came in from Africa, containing his own brother, to whom also he owed money. He was able to describe how while sailing past Pharos the son's ship was shipwrecked and apart from one empty lifeboat all that might possibly qualify for salvation were their souls. When the boy's father, the owner of the ship, heard about this disaster his soul had almost dwell in hell, in the words of the Prophet (Psalms 94.17). To the tribulation he suffered because of his son's death was added the loss of his ship.

The patriarch was told about all that had happened to him, and he mourned almost more than the father did. He was especially sad at the loss of the only son. He did not know what to do, except beseech the most merciful God that the father would find comfort through the strength of his faith. The holy man felt extremely awkward about calling the man and comforting him face to face. Nevertheless he did so, and urged him not to fall into despair, for none of God's judgments were unjust; everything was done for the best, even when we could not see why. The faith that he had shown in the patriarch and in the gift

of the seven and a half pounds of gold would bring a spiritual reward, which he prayed would not be lost in this time of testing, which had come after having performed such a good deed. We should always remain untroubled and give thanks to God.

That night, that Christ-loving father had a dream of someone dressed like the most holy patriarch.

"Why are you so sad, my brother, and sunk in mourning?" he said. "Did you not ask me to pray to God that your son should be kept safe? Behold, he is safe. Believe me, if he had lived he would have become a dissolute and wicked person. And as for your ship, if it had not been that God was pleased at the good deed you did to me, it too would have perished in the deep with everyone in it including your brother, as it happens. But rise and give glory to God who has brought your brother back to you and has saved you son unharmed by the vanities of this world."

When he woke up he found there was comfort in his heart and all his sadness cast out. He got dressed and went straight away to that most honourable patriarch and fell at his feet, giving thanks to God as he told him about the vision he had had.

"Glory to you, most kind and merciful God," said that most righteous patriarch, "for you hear the prayers of sinners."

And to the man he said, "Don't give thanks for my prayers, my son, but thank God for your faith. Faith is able to overcome all things."

This holy man was always so humble, and prudent in everything he said.

Chapter XXVI

This blessed man once spent some time visiting the poor in the Caesarian district, where he provided some quite spacious shelters for them to sleep in during the winter. They had wooden planks laid over a solid floor, together with rush mats and blankets. There was one of the bishops with him who was a very tight-fisted lover of money

"Brother Troilus," said the blessed patriarch (for Troilus was his name), "love and honour these brothers of Christ."

Now someone had told him that Troilus' house servant was carrying thirty pounds of gold with him in order to buy a sort of anaglyphus to grace his table with. Fearing that John was about to preach a sermon at him, with a marked lack of enthusiasm he ordered his servant carrying the gold to give some of it to each of the poor. The whole amount of it quickly vanished. The patriarch

and bishop Troilus, the unwilling almsgiver (as I call him), both went their several ways home. Troilus felt very bitter, with all kinds of perilous thoughts rushing through his mind because of the money he had given away. The love of money which had engendered harshness and negligence in him finally caught up with him and made him shake all over, so that he became unnaturally feverish, and unwillingly took to his bed.

Now the most holy patriarch sent his servant to Troilus to bid him come to a meal, but Troilus refused, saying that for some reason he was suffering from a shivering sort of fever. The patriarch knew at once that the unwilling almsgiver's fever had been caused by the sudden disappearance of his money. For, as we have said, he loved his money and had no sense of compassion for others. The blessed man could not allow himself to sit at ease at his table while Troilus was languishing on his bed, so he went to see him straight away. "Don't worry, Troilus, my son," he said humbly and with a cheerful face. "Did you really think that I would have expected you to give to the brothers in that way? Believe me, I was only joking. I had in fact wanted to give each of them a numismatum for them to celebrate the holy feast day, but my purseholder did not have enough money with him, so you kindly lent me the money. See, I am bringing you back the thirty pounds now."

When Troilus actually saw the money in the honoured hand of this wise doctor and pastor, his fever suddenly left him and strength and warmth returned to his body, so that it was quite obvious what had caused the change that had come over him. Without hesitation he took the money from the venerable patriarch's hands, and the patriarch asked him in return for a receipt, disclaiming any reward that might be due for having given the thirty pounds. Troilus quite happily agreed to this, and in his own hand he wrote as follows: "O God, I have received back my own money. Ascribe the reward due for the almsgiving of the thirty pounds to the account of my lord John, the most blessed patriarch of this great city of Alexandria."

The holy man took this receipt and betook both himself and Troilus back to dinner, for as we have said, he was now completely well.

But God, the giver of rewards, decided to reproach him, and awaken in him some compassion and sympathy with the idea of almsgiving. So after his dinner with the patriarch, God showed him that night in a dream how he had been deprived of his reward. He saw a building whose magnificence and beauty no human art could possibly devise, with a doorway all of gold, and across the doorway a scroll, saying THE ETERNAL MANSION AND

RESTING PLACE OF BISHOP TROILUS.

"I was overjoyed," he told us later, "when I read this, to think that someone had provided such a sumptuous house for me. But I had hardly finished reading this superscription before a royal bedroom-attendant came along with other servants to the doorway of this gleaming house and said: 'Take that superscription down. Change it and put it back according to the orders of the ruler of the world.'"

"And as I looked on, they brought a new scroll and fixed it on: THE ETERNAL MANSION AND RESTING PLACE OF JOHN, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA, BOUGHT FOR THIRTY POUNDS. I awoke immediately, and went to the great high pastor to tell him what I had seen" And from that time onwards Bishop Troilus became a most magnificent almsgiver.

Chapter XXVII

The Lord who in due season stripped blessed Job of his riches did the same to the holy patriarch John, who also was a man full of all goodness. For some ships belonging to the most holy church encountered such storms in the Adriatic that the crew had to throw overboard all their cargo, which consisted of clothing and silver and other more valuable things, which they reckoned to amount to about three thousand pounds in weight. There were more than thirteen ships, each with a capacity of ten thousand modii.

Arriving at Alexandria the ships' captains, as being responsible for the loss, took refuge in the church. When the holy man heard they were there he sent them a word written with his own hand: 'The Lord has given, brothers, the Lord, as he wills, has taken away. As the Lord pleases so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1.21). Carry on and fear nothing from this event. For the Lord will visit you in the morning.'

Almost half the city assembled at the church next day wanting to show their support for that noble man, but he got in first by saying to them,

"Sons and brothers, don't be too sad because of the difficulties that these ships got into, because really it is all the fault of humble John. If only I hadn't been so conceited this would never have happened. The reason it happened was that I was constantly being praised for what God was doing, and was thinking to myself what great things I was doing, savouring only the things of men. So God allowed this to happen in order to teach me a lesson. Almsgiving can easily lead to pride if one is not careful, but humility comes to someone who

suffers an event like this. As divine Scripture says, 'poverty brings a man low', and again, 'it is good that you have humbled me, for so have I learned your judgments' (Psalms 119.71). I have become detestable because of my evil deeds, for my generosity has led me into vainglory. All that money has been lost because of my wickedness, and I now suffer the penalty of being in dire straits. But truly, my beloved, God is now the same God as the God of Job, and he will not abandon us. Not because of my needs, but because of the needs of the poor, he himself has said, 'I will not leave you nor desert you' (Hebrews 13.5). And again, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you' (Matthew 6.33). So it was that whereas the citizens came wanting to comfort him, it was on the contrary they who received comfort from his blessedness. And it was not long afterwards that the Lord doubly restored the goods of our latter day Job, so that again he was able to be generous towards the poor, but in perhaps a more chastened frame of mind than he was before.

Chapter XXVIII

When one of his domestic servants fell into extreme poverty, the holy man gave him two pounds of gold, so that no one would know about it.

"Now that you have given me this, my lord, I no longer feel any resentment at the sight your honourable and angelic face."

To which he made the following wise and praiseworthy reply, "I have not yet laid down my life for you, my brother, as demanded by Christ my Lord and God of all."

Life of St John the Almsgiver, (continued), Book Ib

Chapter XXIX

There was a time when the region was suffering because the usual flooding of the Nile to irrigate the fields had not happened. Someone who was being harassed because he had no money to settle his debts went to the chief banker to borrow fifty pounds of gold, pledging that he would repay it double. The

banker promised that he would make the loan but that he would have to put it off for the moment. Still harassed by the debt collectors, the man went like every one else to the door where no one was turned away, the door of the most compassionate and praiseworthy patriarch. He had hardly begun to outline his needs when the holy man said to him, "I would even give you the clothes I am wearing, if you needed them!"

For along with all his other good points he had this quality of not being able to see anyone weeping in distress without watering him with his own tears.

Without any hesitation he satisfied the request for a loan.

That night the banker dreamed that he saw someone standing at the altar to whom many people were offering gifts, and for every gift offered they were getting back a hundred fold from the altar. Now the patriarch was standing just behind the banker. An offering was lying on a bench in front of them both.

"Come now, sir banker," someone said to him, "pick up the offering, offer it at the altar, and get back your hundred fold in exchange."

But he hesitated, and the patriarch dashed in front of him, although he had been behind him in the queue, picked it up, offered it at the altar and received, like everyone else, a hundred fold. He woke up, unable to understand the meaning of the dream. But he sent a message to the man who wanted to borrow from him, asking him to come and see him.

"Here is the loan you wanted," he said.

"The lord patriarch came before you to receive your reward," the man replied.

"You put me off, sir, so I had to run to him as to a safe port in a storm, so demanding had the debt collectors been."

The banker immediately remembered his dream.

"What you say strikes home," he said. "It was my reward that the patriarch received instead of me. Woe betide the man who has an intention of doing good and puts it off."

He then told the man about his dream, which very soon everyone knew about.

Chapter XXX

As he was on his way once to the shrine of the victorious martyrs Cyrus and John, to give thanks for their glorious memory, a woman grasped him as he was going out of the city gate, and fell at his feet.

"Plead my cause," she cried, "for I am being sued over the provisions of my husband's will. There are some who had a grudge against him, and are forcing me to go to law about it."

"If I put this off," replied that most holy man, "How should I expect God to hear my prayers? Who can promise me that I will still be alive tomorrow? And what sort of excuse could I give about this if go to appear before Christ?" So he did not leave the place until he had done what needed to be done.

Chapter XXXI

God sent to this memorable man two wise and remarkable counsellors, John and Sophronius, who gave support to his good intentions, which were in any case always entirely rooted in God. They were truly good men, and the patriarch trusted them implicitly as fathers, and gave thanks that they were constantly strong in their active defence of the integrity of the true religion. They relied on the power of the holy Spirit to wage a battle of words against the Severians and other unclean heretics in the region. Like the good shepherds they were, they strove to rescue from the mouths of those wild beasts many a stronghold, many a church and many a monastery, for which reason that most holy man held them in highest honour.

Chapter XXXII

If he heard that someone was treating his slaves badly and beating them inhumanely, he would summon the owner and speak to him quite gently. "My son," he would say, "it has come to my sinful ears that you have been dealing rather too severely, as if they were your enemies, with those whom you should really think of as your children. Please, give place to your anger. God has not given them to us for us to ill treat them but to serve them. Perhaps not even for that, but so that in being placed under us, we may realise that God stands over us all. Is it a human being, tell me, who gives you the authority to buy someone created in the image and likeness of God? Although you are his master, do you really own his hand, his foot, his hearing, his soul, as if it were your own body? Is he not like you in everything?

"Hear what Paul, that glorious source of light, says: 'As many as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free; they are all one in Christ' (Galatians 3.27-28). If then we are all equal in Christ let us deal with each other as equals. For Christ took the form of a servant, to teach us that we should not lord it over our own servants. For there is one Lord for all of us, and 'he dwells on high and has regard to the lowly' (Psalms 113. 5-6) - not the exalted but the lowly. How much gold did we pay in order to subject to slavery one who has been valued and purchased by the

divine blood of the Lord? He is the creator of the heavens, the earth, the stars, the sun, the sea and all that is in it.

"It is a true fact that Christ to whom the Angels minister washed the feet of his servants on behalf of your slave, for whom he was crucified and underwent all his sufferings. You however are not giving honour to him whom God honours, and you have no mercy on him, as if he were not of the same nature as you.

Tell me, please, how often do you admit any blame for those acts for which God will surely demand payment? Never. Tell me, how can you pray every day 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' (Matthew 6.12)?"

In these words, and others like them which he brought forth from his inner treasury, he gave them a warning and let them go. If he learned that he had not amended his ways, he took steps to advise the slave to find a way out by asking to be sold. The righteous bishop would then acquire him and straightway give him his liberty.

Chapter XXXIII

After he had heard that someone well known for his almsgiving had died leaving a son destitute and in great poverty, with both his parents dead, the people who had administered the man's will came to see the bishop.

"When the father died, my lord," they said, "he was left without so much as a single numisma. But just before he made his will he called his son to him and said, 'You could have these ten pounds, my son. Is it your wish that I leave them to you, or to our Lady the birthgiver of God and carer and provider of the poor? The boy chose the holy birthgiver of God, and his father proceeded to give all the money to the poor. So you see, most holy father, he lives in absolute destitution, never straying far day or night from the shrine of our Lady."

The holy man was hearing all this from those who certainly ought to know, so without saying anything to anybody he hired a notary and told him the circumstances of the case, and set a time limit within which he should not tell anybody what he was going to ask him to do.

"I want you to go and write on very old paper a document in the name of someone called Theopentus, stating that the boy's father and I are first cousins. When you have done that go to the boy and say to him, 'Did you know, brother, that you are of the same family as the patriarch? You should not be living in poverty like this'. Then show him the document and say to him, 'If you shrink from doing anything about it, I would be willing to put your case to

the patriarch and see what he says."

Having done everything that the patriarch had asked he came back to see him.

"The boy agreed," he said, "that I should put his case to you, my lord, and showered me with thanks."

"Go and tell him that you have spoken to the patriarch, and say that I said that I knew my cousin had a son, but that I would not recognise him if I saw him. And then be so kind as to bring him to me. And when you bring him, have the document with you."

After they had arrived that righteous man had a private interview with him and embraced him.

"You are very welcome, son of my cousin!" he said.

He provided him with money, found a wife for him in Alexandria, and bought him a house and everything else he needed, full of joy at being able to demonstrate that the Lord does not abandon those who put their trust in him.

Chapter XXXIV

This admirable man had the habit of pointing out this commandment, among others: 'Do not turn your face away from him who would borrow from you' (Deuteronomy 15. 7-8 & Luke 6.30), and he never denied help of this sort to anyone who asked him. Now there was a certain evil-minded fraudster who was aware of this and asked him for a loan of twenty pounds of gold. He was one of those known as Gallodromes. To blacken the name of the holy man and put him into the same category as many others, he went about saying that the patriarch would not give him anything. Whereupon the officers of the church put him in prison and made public just how much money he had been given. But the bishop was a follower of him who said, 'Be merciful as your father in heaven is merciful (Luke 6.36), who makes his sun to rise upon good and evil, and the rain to fall upon both just and unjust' (Matthew 5.45), and he disagreed with the man's punishment. The church officers gathered around him rather mockingly.

"Do you really think it is fair, my lord, that this waster should have what might be given to the poor?"

"Believe me, my brothers," he replied, "if you have taken any of that money back from him you will have broken two commandments, but you will fulfil one of them when that amount of money has been given to the poor. The first commandment you have broken is that you have complained about the loss and given a bad example to others. The other is that you have not listened to

the Lord God saying, 'Do not seek to get back what has been taken from you.' (Luke 6.30). My sons, you should give everyone an example of patience. Does not the Apostle say, 'Why do you not rather put up with insults? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? (1 Corinthians 6.7) Truly, it is good, brothers, to give to whoever asks, and better still and more honourable to give even when you are not asked. 'To him who takes your cloak give your tunic also' (Luke 6.29). This is to imitate the Angels. It is truly divine. The Lord demands that we give help to our neighbour out of what we possess. It is good that we should deal with our brothers according to what we have, not out of what we have gained by lawsuits and arguments and compensation for injuries."

Chapter XXXV

A notable old man, aged about sixty, who had heard tales of this sort about the blessed bishop, decided to see whether he could be persuaded to do something scandalous, and if so whether he would acknowledge blame. He belonged to the monastery of abbot Seridon in Gaza, from where he came to Alexandria and met up with certain disreputable characters. Not that this was displeasing to God who 'rewards everyone according to what is in their hearts', as David says (Psalms 20.4). For he made a list of all the well known prostitutes, then took on a small job which earned him a certain amount each day. At sunset he took some of the money and went to the house of one of the prostitutes and offered it to her,

"Let me stay the night with you," he said. "but no sex."

And he stayed that night with her, making sure that she didn't commit fornication. For he stood in a corner of the cell where she slept, singing psalms and praying for her, and doing prostrations for her from evening time till dawn. When he left he exacted a promise from her that she would tell no one what had been going on. He kept on doing this until one of the prostitutes did reveal that he had visited her not for sex but for her salvation. The old man prayed, and she began to be possessed by a demon, which terrified the other prostitutes into keeping quiet about what he was doing. But people condemned the girl with the demon.

"Come off it!" they said, "God is punishing you for being a liar. That monk is a wicked man and went to you for the sake of fornication!"

And the holy Vitalius (for that was this monk's name) kept on in his intention to get no praise from men, and to go on saving souls.

"I work during the day," he said, "and at night I am free. It's time now for me to go. A certain lady is waiting for me."

What of his monastic state? People everywhere were condemning him and mocking him.

"Am I not clothed with a body like you?" he asked them. "Is it only monks that God is angry with? They are just human like everyone else."

"Well, why don't you take just one woman, abba," someone said to him, "and take off your monastic clothing, so that God will not be blasphemed because of you, or souls scandalised."

"I am taking no notice of you," he shouted, making himself out to be very annoyed. "Just leave me alone. I am not going to change my ways simply so that you won't be scandalised. I am certainly not going to take a wife and have to manage a house, and spend my days in misery. If you want to be scandalised, be scandalised, and go bang your head against a wall. Why should you be making demands on me? Has God made you judges over me? Go and mind your own business. You don't have to account for me to God. He alone is the judge, and his the holy day of judgment, when he will render to all of us according to what we have done."

Some of the church guardians who had heard tales about him on all sides told the patriarch about him. That holy man, not wanting to discredit abba Vitalius, hardened his heart and would not believe them. He remembered the case of the eunuch. He remonstrated forcefully with those who brought these accusations against Vitalius.

"Don't blacken the name of monks," he said. "Haven't you heard what the Emperor Constantine of holy memory did with certain accusations given him to read? It was during the second Synod of Nicaea, that some who had no fear of God brought disgusting accusations in writing, to their own disgrace, before that blessed Emperor, some of them clerics, some of them monks. Constantine, that saint of God, had both accuser and accused brought before him and listened to them both. When he found that many of the accusations were true, he ordered a candle to be lit and burned all the evil tales that had been put into writing.

"If I had seen with my own eyes," he said, "any priest or anyone wearing the monastic habit committing some sin, I would have enfolded him in my cloak and hidden him so that no one could see."

"In the case of that servant of God the eunuch, you thought all sorts of evil things about him, and drew my soul into grievous sin."

This silenced them and he dismissed them.

Vitalius the servant of God meanwhile kept on with his programme. But he did pray that after his death God would reveal to someone in a dream that he was not guilty of the things which were scandalising people, for he realised that people said it was scandalous thing for a human being to be doing the things which he was accused of and not receiving any punishment for it. But he did persuade many of the women to feel ashamed of themselves, especially when they saw him lifting up his hands at night and praying for each one of them. Many of them gave up prostitution altogether, some took husbands and lived modestly, some renounced the world entirely, and vowed themselves to celibacy. Right up to the time of his death, no one knew that it was because of his prayers and admonitions that these shameless women gave up their life of prostitution.

One morning at daybreak, when he was leaving the leader of these women, a certain dissolute man was going in for the purpose of having sex, and when he saw the holy Vitalius going out he slapped his face.

"You disgraceful traitor to Christ," he said. "How much longer are you going on with your wickedness?"

"Believe me," he replied, "you will soon be getting such a slap from me, the lowest of the low, that all Alexandria will gather round you as you cry."

It was very soon after this that Saint Vitalius died peacefully in his cell without anyone knowing. Now his little cell was near the Gate of the Sun quite close to the church of S. Metra. When people began to gather there for worship so near his cell several of those women came too.

"Come on," they said to each other. "Abba Vitalius is celebrating again."

Vitalius was certainly still looking after them as they gathered together, for as he was lying dead in his cell unbeknownst to anyone, as we have said, a demon in the shape of a deformed Ethiopian came and slapped the face of the man who had slapped Vitalius.

"Take that as a present from abba Vitalius," he said. And the man fell down frothing at the mouth.

As Vitalius had prophesied, nearly all Alexandria began to gather at this scene of violence which the demon had instigated, mainly because many people had heard the sound of the slapping as if it had been the flight of an arrow. The injured man came to his senses after an hour or two, and began to tear his garments and shout and run towards Vitalius' cell.

"I have done you wrong Vitalius, you servant of God!" he cried. "Have mercy

on me."

Everyone who heard him came running. Outside the holy man's cell the demon left him, throwing the man down before them as they watched. They all went into the cell and found the holy man in a kneeling position, as if praying as he gave up his soul to God, and on the floor was written: PEOPLE OF ALEXANDRIA, JUDGE NOTHING BEFORE THE TIME, UNTIL THE LORD RETURNS. The man vexed with the demons confessed openly what he had done to the holy man, and everything concerning the holy Vitalius was told to the most blessed patriarch John, who came down with his clergy to where the body of the holy Vitalius lay. When he saw what was written there he rejoiced

"Truly," he said, "humble John by God's help has escaped. For it could easily have happened that it would have been me who was slapped, instead of the man with the demon."

Then all the prostitutes, including those who had given it up, got men to carry Vitalius' body, and walked before it weeping, carrying torches and lamps.

"We have lost our saviour and teacher," they cried.

And they told everyone the whole story of what Vitalius had been doing.

"He has not been visiting us for anything disgraceful," they said. "We never saw him lying down beside us. He never so much as held our hand. You might wonder why we did not tell everyone what was going on, allowing the whole city to be scandalised, but we all knew what had happened to the one among us who was attacked by a demon, so we were too frightened to say anything."

He was buried with great honour, and the man who had been corrected and saved by Vitalius entered the monastery of abba Seridon in Gaza, and took over the cell of abba Vitalius, where he stayed till the day of his death.

The most holy patriarch thanked God profusely for saving him from sinning against his servant Vitalius. Many people derived great profit from these happenings in Alexandria, and became very friendly towards monks. They had been warned not to condemn anyone by going on appearances only. By the grace of God the honoured name of Saint Vitalius began to perform many cures after his death. By his prayers may the Lord grant us a wholesome life and mercy in the day when the hidden deeds of humankind will be made manifest. and the secrets of all hearts will be revealed.

Chapter XXXVI

A beggar asked for an alms from him one day and he gave him only ten

copper nummi, whereupon the beggar complained loudly and violently because he had not been given as much as he hoped. People with the patriarch felt like knocking the beggar down, but the blessed patriarch vehemently forbade them.

"Leave him alone, brothers," he said. "For all of my sixty years I have been doing things very unpleasing to Christ, so can I not put up with a bit of cursing from this fellow?"

And he ordered his steward to open up his purse and let the beggar take out of it as much as he wanted.

Chapter XXXVII

Whenever this most wise man heard of another almsgiver he would feel very happy, and would take him aside and ask him about it.

"Do you give alms easily, or do you have to force yourself to do it?"

Some of them modestly would not answer him, others told him the truth.

"Believe me, my lord," one of these people said to the holy man, "I don't do any good deeds. But I will tell you what I do. Out of the good things which God and your prayers supply me with, this is the course I follow.

Chapter XXXVII (continued) Life of St John the Almsgiver, , Book Ib

"I once used to be very unfeeling and hard-hearted, until I suffered a very severe financial loss, after which I took to reasoning very keenly with myself. My thoughts began to say to me that if only I had been generous with my almsgiving God would not have deserted me. So I decided to give five copper nummi to the poor every day, but once I had started doing that, Satan put a stop to it.

"'Five nummi are enough to buy food for a complete household, or to go to the baths', said Satan, and the thought of taking food from the mouths of my own family stopped me giving at once, and I realised that my evil nature had overcome me.

"'Steal five nummi from me every day,' without anyone knowing,' I said to my servant, 'and give them to the poor.'

"I am a money-changer, my lord. So the servant began to steal the money and give it away, and I almost immediately had a financial windfall. When the servant saw that we were being blessed and money was coming in, he began to steal and give threefold. At the same time, I was wondering at the blessings of God.

"Those five nummi have turned out to be very profitable, my son,' I said to him. 'Give ten instead.'

"At which he laughed and said, 'Ask how much I have stolen. Without that we would not have enough bread to eat today! If ever there were a righteous thief, it's me.'

"Then he told me that he had been giving threefold and more, and inspired by his faith, my lord, I have aspired to give from my heart."

That holy man was deeply impressed.

"Believe me," he said, "I have read about many of the doings of the holy fathers, but I have never come across anything like that!"

Chapter XXXVIII

This great John heard that a certain prominent citizen was nursing a grudge against another leading citizen, and he often urged and pleaded with him to seek reconciliation, but without success. So the holy man asked him to come and see him as if on some public business, and said Mass in his own private chapel with just him and a server. When the holy patriarch had consecrated the offerings, the three of them began the Lord's prayer, but when it came to the words 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us' the patriarch made a sign to the server to keep quiet. The patriarch also kept quiet so the citizen said the words about 'forgiving as we forgive' all by himself.

"See now," said the holy man, turning towards him with a gentle voice, "What will happen in that terrible hour when you must say to God 'Forgive me as I have forgiven'?"

As if undergoing torture by fire, the citizen fell down at the feet of the holy man.

"Whatever you tell me to do," he said, " your servant will do it."

As a result of this he came to a deeply sincere reconciliation with his enemy.

Chapter XXXIX

If this blessed man knew of anyone guilty of excessive pride, he would not

reprove him in public, but would have a little private talk with him when he got him on his own. His conversation with him would be about humility, hoping by this means to change the proud man little by little into a modest one.

"It amazes me, my friend," he would say, "how it is that my miserable soul has never been able to be humble as the Son of God told us to be on this earth. I am forever puffing myself up and putting myself in a better light than my brother. I am a little bit more handsome than he is, or richer, more outstanding, or else I have a greater position in life than anyone else. I have not been listening to the divine voice that says, 'Learn from me for I am lowly and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls'. Nor have I taken to heart the words of the saints, who described themselves as 'dust and ashes' (Genesis 18.27), 'a worm and no man' (Psalms 22.6), 'not eloquent but slow of speech' (Exodus 4.10). When Isaiah was privileged to see God, as far as a human being is capable of doing so, he declared himself to be a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6.5). Am I humble like that? Have I not been fashioned out of mud? Isn't that where my body came from? And all the glory which I imagine I have, does it not fade as the flower of the field (Isaiah 40.6)?"

With such words and many others like them this most wise man pretended to speak of himself, but in so doing cauterised and healed the soul of a man weakened by self-importance and pride. For the man with this ugly defect knew that the patriarch was really talking about him.

Chapter XL

This man whom God held in honour frequently preached on humility.

"If we had thought and meditated on the mercy and goodness of God towards us we would not have dared lift up our eyes to heaven but would always have walked wisely in lowliness. Furthermore, the Creator of all has brought us into being from nothing. Deceived by our sin into disobedience, we have been brought to life again and redeemed from death by his blood, and he has given the earth and the very heavens above to the service of humankind. He has not destroyed the sinners, but with great long-suffering, unmoved in his own nature, he watches over us with patient eye. However much we blaspheme against him, in his mercy he still woos us and strengthens us, and pours his gentle rain from above upon our lives. How many evildoers, even such as murder and steal, does he not hide and protect from being taken and punished? How many pirates, who hope to kill those whose ships they attack, does he not

save from drowning, commanding the sea not to swallow them up, in the hope that they might be converted from their wickedness? How many who swear falsely on the most holy body and blood does he not tolerate with great long-suffering, without making their lives difficult for them? How many robbers does he save from being devoured by wild beasts as they travel about? How many of those who plot together in hiding for seditious purposes escape from both guard dogs and humans?

"Or suppose I lie with a prostitute, or keep company with drunkards and those of filthy speech, isn't there a bee who flies about in the valleys and river beds gathering honey to sweeten the taste in that throat from which has flowed such wicked and disgusting language? The grape comes to maturity in order to delight the taste and make glad the heart which has betrayed its maker. The flowers in their turn busy themselves in giving pleasure to eyes which have led men into fornicating with other men's wives. Shake the fig tree as you come near it, and your hand is filled with plenty, and your mouth with sweetness, that same mouth that seduces and embraces the wife of another. All these things are the sort of thing we do, brothers, and these are the things which the kindness of God gives us in return. How urgently should we not cultivate prudence then, and take thought for our last and most terrible hour!"

He was always giving homilies like this, reminding us of our death and the departure of the soul, so that there was many a one coming in to him with a proud demeanour, a mirthful countenance and an arrogant eye, who went out again humbled, with a guilty expression and eyes full of tears.

"The least we can do in our human condition", he would say, "is to think carefully and seriously about our salvation, and keep the thought of our death in mind, for nothing will help us or be with us in that hour except our good deeds. How distressed will be the soul who is found unready to meet the Angels as they come hurrying towards him? How can he then ask for a little more time to be given him? All he will hear is, 'But have you used the time well that you have already been given?' And how will humble John escape the beasts of the reeds, when they come to demand vengeance of him? Alas, what fear and trembling will possess the soul as it tries to make its excuses to such bitter and merciless inquisitors!"

The holy man continuously bore in mind the vision given to Simeon on his pillar, for as his soul was leaving his body choirs of demons met him in his ascent from earth to heaven, each of them with its own mandate. For the choir of pride met him to see whether he was carrying any of their deeds with him,

the choir of slander met him to see whether he had spoken evilly of anyone and not done penance for it, the demons of fornication met him, to search out any voluptuous desires in him, and when his miserable soul arrived at last in heaven to give an account of itself, even the holy Angels stood back from him and there was nothing to come to his aid except any good that he had done. This noble man bore such considerations constantly in mind, inculcating in himself a healthy fear of that dread day. But he also remembered what the holy Hilarion had said when fearful at the approach of his life's end: 'O my humble soul, you have spent eighty years serving Christ, and are you now frightened to depart? Go, for he is merciful'.

"If he served Christ for eighty years," the holy patriarch said to himself, "raising the dead and doing miracles, but still went in fear of that bitter hour, what will you be able to say or do for yourself, humble John, when you come face to face with those cruel and merciless avengers and inquisitors? What excuses will you be able to give to those who inquire into your lies, your denigration of others, your cruelty, your avarice, your bearing of grudges, your hatred, your false witness? O God, do you bring them all to confusion, for human bravery is not enough to stand against them!

"O Lord, give us your holy Angels as guides to keep us and govern us, for there is a stormy ocean of madness, fear, trembling and great danger raging against us. As we pass over from our earthly city to the city which is above we beseech our guides to keep us from falling into the abyss or perishing in the dens of the wild animals, the everlasting floods, the inaccessible and trackless mountains, the bands of robbers, or the impenetrable and waterless deserts. O how great is our need for strong guides and godly guardians, as we depart from the body and ascend into heaven, seeking that long and everlasting life!" These were the teachings, full of wisdom, which that blessed man addressed to himself and everyone else. These were his daily care and meditation.

Chapter XLI

He was very conscientious about the responsibilities of his own position. There was one occasion when he decided to educate people into not leaving the church after the gospel and preferring idle gossip to wholesome prayer. So what did he do? He left the church also after the end of the gospel, to go out and sit with the crowd, to their great astonishment.

"Well, my children," he said, "where the sheep are, there is the shepherd. Either go in, and I will go with you, or else stay here and I will stay with you.

It is only for your sake that I go into the church, for I could quite easily say Mass for myself at home."

Not once but twice did this blessed man deploy this strategy. It was a magnificent way of putting the people to shame and making them amend their ways, for they were frightened of making him do the same thing again.

Chapter XLII

He allowed no talking during the sacred celebrations, but would make a show of turning the transgressor out of the church.

"If you have come here in order to pray," he would say, "set your mind and tongue to doing just that. But if you have only come here for idle conversation, it is written that 'the house of God shall be called the house of prayer' (Matthew 21.13), so don't turn it into a house of thieves."

Chapter XLIII

Something even more admirable about this most holy patriarch was that although he was not a monk, nor did he live in a church clergy house but had once been married to a wife, he nevertheless lived by the strictest rules of the church from the moment he was consecrated to the episcopate, achieving even greater heights than many a hermit living in a narrow cell.

Chapter XLIV

He nevertheless was eager to have a share in the benefits of being part of the monastic life, and went about it in this way: he gathered together two communities of holy monks and decreed that they could be of most use by having their houses in the city. He built cells for them from the foundations upwards, with two chapels dedicated to our Lady, the holy birthgiver of God, and St John.

"Under God," he said to those monks beloved of God, "I will be responsible for your bodily welfare; you must take care of my spiritual salvation. Let your vespers and your night offices be offered to God for my intentions; let whatever offices you do in your own cells be done for your own souls."

He did this to encourage these monastic friends of God in their dedication. And so permanent congregations acceptable to God were set up, such that the whole city seemed to be living like a monastery, and hymns to God were being offered up in divers places.

Chapter XLV

This blessed man also laid an injunction upon everyone that they should never befoul themselves by participating in communion with heretics, even if, by force of necessity, they had to spend their whole lives without communion in a place where there was no Catholic Church.

"If you have a legal wedded wife," he said, "but have to live for any extended period somewhere a long way off, you are forbidden both by God and our laws to desert her and live with another. Anyone who has done this is punished. But you are joined to God in the true faith of the Catholic Church - 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you to Christ as a chaste virgin' as the Apostle says (2 Corinthians 11.2) - so how can you think that you will not likewise share in the torments reserved for heretics in the life to come if you have polluted your holy orthodox faith by entering into communion with them? 'Communion' signifies 'that which makes common and strengthens the unity among those who communicate'. I beg you, my children, don't have anything do with prayer gatherings of that kind."

Chapter XLVI

Among all the good points of this blessed man there was also this: that he would not condemn his neighbour nor put up with those who condemned. The following incident shows that I am telling the truth about this teaching of his: There was a certain youth who raped a nun (monacha) and then fled to Constantinople. When this righteous man heard of it he could have died from grief. Some time later when seated one day in a meeting with some other clerics discussing matters beneficial to the soul, the youth who had raped the handmaid of the Lord came by and was instantly recognised. His fellow clerics began to heap curses upon the youth for having imperilled two human souls, his own and that of the nun (sanctimonialis). But the blessed man restrained them and enlightened them.

"No, no, my sons," he said. "Let me show you how it is that you are committing two sins. Firstly you are disobeying the commandment which says, 'Judge not that you be not judged' (Matthew 7.1), and secondly you do not know for sure if he has been in a sinful state right up until today without having repented.

"Now I have read something like this in the lives of the fathers, that there were two monks who were out on an errand and as one of them was walking along, an prostitute cried out to him, 'Save me, father, as Christ saved the

harlot!"

"Without worrying in the slightest about the difference between the sexes he said, 'Come with me'.

"He took her by the hand and in full view of everyone led her publicly out of the city. The news soon spread that the abba had taken Madam Porphyria to wife. He was intending to put her into a monastery, but as they were going along, the woman came across a little boy abandoned in front of a church. She picked him up and looked after him.

"A year later some people visited the place where the abba and former prostitute Porphyria were living and saw her with the little boy.

"'That's a fine little colt you've given birth to!' they cried. (For she had not then taken the monastic habit.) Going back to Tyre, which is where the abba had brought her from, they spread it abroad that they had seen with their own eyes the little boy that the abba had begotten on Porphyria, and it looked just like him!

"There came a time when it was revealed to the abba by God that he was near to death. By this time he had clothed her in the monastic habit and given her the name Pelagia.

"'Let's go to Tyre', he said to her. 'I've got something to say to them there. And I want you to come with me.'

"She did not want to argue with him so she went with him, and they both went there, together with the little boy who was now seven years old. As the abba was sickening and fast approaching death, about a hundred people from the city gathered round to visit him

"'Bring me some hot coals,' he said.

"They brought a thurible full of hot coals, which he took and emptied out into his lap.

"'You had better believe, my brothers,' he said, 'that just as God kept the burning bush from being consumed (Exodus3.2), these hot coals have not burnt up my clothes. Just so, I have never known the sin with a woman which gave me birth.'

"And they were all amazed at the way his clothing had not been damaged by the fire, and they glorified God and those who served him in secret. Following the example of Pelagia, the nun (nonna) and former prostitute, many others renounced the world and joined her in her monastery. And the servant of God who gave her the tonsure, his reputation restored, gave up his spirit to God in peace.

"And so, I tell you, my sons, don't be in too much of a hurry to condemn and judge others. It is easy to see the many who fornicate, we don't always see their penitence, which occurs in secret. We are aware of someone who thieves, we don't know about the sighs and tears he pours out to God. We judge people according as we see them, thief, fornicator or perjurer, but God accepts their hidden confession and penitence, and to him they are precious." And all who heard him were deeply moved by this diligent pastor and teacher.

Chapter XLVII

There were two clerics who mended shoes and worked quite near each other. One of them had several children, a wife and a father and mother, but he always had time for the church, and still was able, under God, to feed all his family. The other, although he was more clever, neglected the church and worked even on Sundays, but was barely able to support himself alone. He became jealous of his neighbour, and one day was unable to contain his jealousy any longer.

"How is it," he said angrily, "that you have so much money? I spend more time at my trade than you do, and yet I stay poor."

"Well, I've found some buried treasure," said the other, who really hoped his friend would give more of himself to the church. "That is what is making me rich little by little. But if you like, I will call you and you can come with me, and whatever we find you can have half."

He agreed, and found that he was in fact following his friend to the church, through which God blessed him freely, and prospered him.

"You see, my brother," said that good counsellor, "how one little untruth for God's sake has resulted in such benefit both for your soul and your substance, for truly, it was not in the earth that I was finding treasure, as you thought, but in the saying of the Lord, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you' (Matthew 6.33). I simply used that as a means of persuading you to follow me, and it was not something I did in vain, was it, as you have discovered, and more than discovered."

When the holy patriarch heard about this incident he made that good counsellor one of his presbyters, for he had been only a lector.

Chapter XLVIII

Up to this point the story has been in the words of that worshipper of God,

Mennas, who was next in importance to the bishop of the church of that great city of Alexandria. From here on my unworthy self narrates what I heard from some other perfectly credible witnesses. As we said in an earlier chapter, a great deal of spiritual affection developed between the patriarch and Nicetas the governor, and this present chapter is further evidence that such affection was not misplaced.

At the time when, God permitting, Alexandria was about to be handed over to the godless Persians, the pastor remembered the text: 'If they persecute you in one city, flee to another' (Matthew 10.23), so he fled to his native city in his own country of Cyprus, where Nicetas the governor, whom we have mentioned before, made him welcome.

"I beg you, if I have found favour in your sight, " said Nicetas to the holy man, "to trouble yourself still further by taking your case to the most pious Emperors in the queen of cities where you will be well received."

Chapter XLVIII (continued), Life of St John the Almsgiver Book Ib
(Also Saints Epictetus and Astion further down this page)

He gave his assent to this man of great faith, obeying God by submitting himself to his will, for Nicetas only wanted to let John benefit from his own considerable prestige. But the ship in which the holy man and the governor travelled was buffeted by gales and in danger of being sent to the bottom. During the night the governor and his aristocratic entourage saw the patriarch moving about among the poor people on board, encouraging them to join with him in lifting up their hands to pray for help from on high. As they were approaching Rhodes, the holy man was startled to hear God calling him, and saw a eunuch of shimmering appearance standing in front of him, holding a golden sceptre in his right hand.

"Come!" the vision said. "The King of kings requires your presence!" Without delay he called to Nicetas the governor and spoke to him with many tears.

"You, my lord, may have summoned me to an earthly Emperor, but the

heavenly Emperor has forestalled you, for he has warned me of my approaching departure."

He told him about the vision of the Angelic eunuch which had appeared to him, and that most glorious man was at once both sad and joyful, knowing that there was nothing he could do to prevent that holy man's departure.

Supported to the full by the holy man's prayers he abandoned the journey to the Emperor and gave the order to return to Cyprus.

Chapter XLIX

When he got back to his own city of Amathunta he told his secretaries to draw up his will. They quickly brought pen and paper and he dictated as follows:

I, John, the servant of God, freely give God thanks for entrusting me with the honour of priesthood. I give thanks to you, O God, that you have regarded my lowliness and I beseech that your loving kindness will not be lacking to me in my death. When I was chosen to be the bishop of the most holy church of that great city Alexandria, I accepted the post by the grace of God, and when I was consecrated bishop I found myself in possession of eighty thousand pieces of gold, nearly as great a number as the friends of Christ who provided it. I thought of the mind of Christ, and recognised that all that money belonged to the ruler of all, so I hastened to give back to God what belonged to God. If there is anything left I order it to be given to those who belong to God.

What a glorious thing! What holy devotion! He did not think of his own family, as many rich people would conceive to be their duty. They gather their riches through oppression and think of the gifts of God as their own property, and hoard their treasures as if they could take it with them, never giving a thought to the needy. But he sought after those things which remain for ever and may not be diminished. In very truth he cannot have been denied what God promises in the words, 'I will glorify those who glorify me' (1 Samuel 2.30). The Lord did indeed magnificently glorify that holy man who was glorified in the deeds he performed. This noble man in the course of his life could never rest from doing good works worthy of praise. What did he do? He built refugee centres, old peoples' homes, and monasteries from the foundations up, and he set up choirs of holy monks, all of which stand as a permanent memorial to his undeniable righteousness through the good works done in them. As for those who do evil, and after their death leave successors with their own evils in this life, the Apostle full of the grace of the Lord says 'Whose works are manifest, and go before them to the judgment and some

men they follow after' (1 Timothy 5.24). But on the other hand this is what has to be said about this blessed man, 'His righteous works are manifest and go before him into the kingdom of heaven and some men they follow after' (1 Timothy 5.25). He stands out among such men.

What we have said about him is no fable or exaggeration, and a testimony to the truth of that was plainly given to us in the prodigious miracles which followed soon after his precious death. They took his body and commended his soul into the hands of God - as it says in Scripture, 'the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God (Wisdom 3.1) - and offered the holy sacrifice for the honourable laying to rest of his honoured body, and in a ceremony appropriate for bishops they took him to a chapel where lay that miracle-worker St Tychon. And a great and glorious sign was done.

Chapter L

For lying in the same tomb where he was to be laid were the bodies of two former bishops who in their lifetime had been truly holy. According to the order of nature they were now lying there inanimate, nevertheless as if they were truly alive they indicated that honour equal to their own should be attributed to John. For as his blessed body was being laid with theirs, at God's command they moved aside as if they were alive and received his sacred body between them. They were shepherds honouring the greatest of shepherds, showing wondering respect for his faithfulness towards God. At God's bidding they were honouring him as they themselves were honoured by God, and making plain to all, the glory and transcendence given to him by God. This extraordinary and glorious miracle was witnessed not by one, not ten, nor even by a hundred people, but by the whole crowd which were gathered round his precious tomb.

Chapter LI

My tale must try to commemorate an even more glorious miracle that he did, which began while he was still alive but which was not completed till after he departed to the Lord. For a woman appeared in the city who knew what a holy man he was, because after he had come back from Rhodes she had heard about the Angel who had appeared to him and revealed that he was about to be called to that Lord who was hers as well as his. She was aware of a most grave sin she had committed which she was quite unable to tell anyone about. But with unquestioned faith, she came to the holy man and fell at his feet, crying

with floods of tears.

"O thrice blessed man," she cried, "this miserable woman has committed a sin which cannot possibly be spoken about for human ears to hear. But I know that if you are willing you can bring me forgiveness. For the Lord has said to you, 'Whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven' (Matthew 18.18), and 'whosoever's sins you forgive they are forgiven, and whosoever's sins you retain they are retained'" (John 20.23).

The holy man listened to the woman and feared that if he refused her request she would suffer even greater torment, whereas her faith in him might well be able to free her from her sin.

"If you believe," he humbly said, "that by using my own unworthiness God can forgive this sin that you are talking about, confess to me what it is."

"I can't bring myself to say it," she replied. "No human ear could bear to listen to it."

"If you are too ashamed, go away and write it down, if you can write, and bring it back to me."

"Truly, my lord, I can't do it."

"What about if you write it down and seal it up before bringing it to me?" - for he had a good idea of why she wouldn't say anything.

"Perhaps I could do that, as long as you would give me your honourable and angelic word that you would not open it nor let it fall into the hands of anyone else."

He gave her his word that that would be the case, so she went away and wrote down her sin in her own writing, sealed it, and brought it back to him. Having taken it from her he died five days later without having told anyone about it or saying where and what it was.

By chance, or by the dispensation of God, the woman had left the city by the time that the patriarch passed from this world to the next, for she wanted to demonstrate to God how much trust she had placed in the patriarch as God's own servant. She heard of his death a day after his precious body had been placed in the tomb. She came back to the city, frantic and almost out of her mind, supposing that her letter had been left in the bishop's house somewhere and that her sin would soon become public knowledge. But she pulled herself together, and regained her former unshakeable faith. She flung her arms around the tomb of the man honoured by God and spoke to him as if he were truly still alive.

"Man of God," she said, "I could not tell you my sin, for it was just too appalling beyond measure. But now, what I could not tell you is likely to be made known to everybody. Alas, alas! I hoped to find the disorder (confusio) in my life straightened out. Instead I will become an object of repulsion (confusio) to all. I hoped for soothing ointment, all I will be getting is bitter execration. What was the use of opening up my secrets to you? However, I will not give up or go away or cease from pouring out my tears over this tomb until I have been given an answer to my petition. You are a saint of God, you are not dead, but alive. It is written, 'the just shall live for ever' (Wisdom 5.16). All I ask of you, O man of God, is that you satisfy my worries about what happened to the letter I gave you."

And just as God said to the Canaanite woman, "Your faith has made you whole" (Matthew 15), so he also gave this woman the assurance she needed. For after persevering for three days tasting neither food nor drink, on the third night, as she tearfully poured out forceful and faithful pleas to the most blessed man, behold, the servant of God came visibly out of the tomb, along with the two bishops buried with him, one on each side.

"Woman," he said, "why do you keep on disturbing these two with me here, preventing them from resting in peace? Our vestments are dripping wet from your tears. Here, do you recognise this?" - and now he passed her letter to her - "Unseal it, examine it."

And as she was coming out of her trance she saw those holy men going back to their own place. She broke open the seal and found that what she had written had been erased completely, and instead there was written YOUR SIN HAS BEEN WIPED OUT FOR THE SAKE OF MY SERVANT JOHN.

O, my friends and brothers, who can possibly tell of all the powers of the Lord? Who is this merciful lover of mankind, who does the will of them that fear him, and glorifies them that glorify him and magnifies them by the workings of his miracles? For the grace which he had in God's sight was manifested not only in this place where his precious body was laid to rest, but shone brilliantly in places a long way off.

Chapter LII

For on the same day when this blessed man departed this life to go to God, a certain worthy and diligent monk called Sabinus who lived the monastic angelic life in Alexandria went into a trance, and saw John carrying a candle and coming out of his own house with his clerics on his way to the Emperor.

And he saw as it were a eunuch in the garb of a household servant, beckoning him on (so Sabinus himself told us) as he came out of the doorway. This signified his separation from the body. And he saw a young woman as bright as the Sun welcoming him and taking him by the hand and crowning his head with a circlet of olive branches. The holy Sabinus soon knew for sure that the patriarch had passed over to the Lord in that same hour. For some people in Alexandria questioned visitors from Cyprus about the death of the patriarch, and when they mentioned the day and the month (it was in fact the feast day of the holy martyr Mennas), they knew that Sabinus' vision was true, especially in view of the vision of the young woman taking him by the hand at the time of his death. It was then that he received the fulfilment of the promise made to him in the words which we have already mentioned: 'If you will have me as your friend I will lead you into the presence of the Emperor'.

Chapter LIII

It was not only his almsgiving and compassion for the needy which convinced everyone that he had been taken into the kingdom of heaven, but another God-fearing Alexandrian citizen, in the same night as the holy Sabinus had his vision, saw all the poor and the orphans and the widows going in to the church and proclaiming the patriarch. So that was not two voices, not ten, nor even a hundred who testified, making it clear that this memorable man had earned the right to be numbered among the saints, and subsequent events confirmed it.

Chapter LIV

For some time later, the anniversary of the falling asleep of Saint Tychon took place in the shrine where the precious body of the most blessed patriarch John had been laid. Sacred hymns were being sung on the vigil of the annual remembrance of the holy miracle worker Tychon, when the Lord of miracles himself demonstrated how worthy of being honoured was his servant John, for he caused an invigorating, sweet-smelling perfume to emanate from his coffin, so that everyone with joyful confidence returned thanks to the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit, our true God, who glorifies his Saints with infinite glory.

Chapter LV

My friends in Christ, do not be reluctant to believe in such miracles. Similar graces of God can be seen even now in connection with many Saints in the

island of Cyprus, beloved of God. Sweet-smelling perfumes flow like a fountain from their precious shrines, to the glory of God's loving-kindness and to the honour of his Saints and to the diligence and good zeal of the human beings who follow them. For insofar as we set about imitating them, we too may be found worthy of receiving the same honour from the righteous giver of rewards. So, my dearly beloved, let us fulfil the righteous counsels of our most holy father John. As sojourners and pilgrims in this life let us lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven by generous almsgiving to the needy (1 Corinthians 16.1), even as the divinely inspired Apostle said. From his store of blessings he measured out blessings, and exchanged the corruptible for the incorruptible, the temporal for the eternal, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man, the things God has prepared for those who love him, and which we all beg to be granted through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the holy Spirit be glory and honour and dominion, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen

Life No 12

The Life of Saints Epictetus, presbyter
and Astion, monk
by an unknown writer

Chapter 1

During the reign of that most irreligious emperor Diocletian, a presbyter called Epictetus lived in the Eastern regions, pursuing a religious life, chaste in all his ways. He had been brought up from infancy in the service of the Lord, and meditated on the statutes (Psalms 119.23) of Jesus Christ. When he arrived at a mature age, just as Samuel's ephod in days of old foreshadowed the promise of priesthood (1 Samuel 2.18), so did the many signs and prodigies which Epictetus performed by divine grace. By his prayers he often opened the eyes of the blind and cleansed the lepers that came to him and put to flight the demons from the bodies of those possessed.

Chapter II

One day as he sat alone in his cell offering his usual prayers to Christ, the daughter of a local nobleman (comes) was brought to him, paralysed in all her members except her tongue. Her father left her outside Epictetus' door and

went inside to the holy man, where he fell on his knees and made his plea. "Have mercy on me, O man of God most high," he said, "for your God is known by his servants to be kind and merciful of heart. Do not turn your face away from me, I beg you, for he freely comes to the aid of those who seek refuge in him. I have an only daughter aged fifteen, and over the last three years she has gradually become completely paralysed. I have no doubt that he who cured the woman who had had an issue of blood for twelve years (Matthew 9.20) will be able, if he will, to restore my daughter to wholeness. We have given our faith to him, for we are children of the holy Church and have been baptised in the name of the Father, Son and holy Spirit." The priest of God told him to bring the girl inside, which he did and placed the girl at his feet.

"O Lord God," the man of God prayed, "eternal God, you who give life to the Cherubim, you came down from heaven to bring back the exiled into the possession of paradise, by taking our humanity you have taken upon yourself our infirmities, so that we in these earthen vessels may be found worthy to possess you. I pray to you, O Lord, I pray that you may look upon the faith of your servant, and as you restored to life the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue (Mark 5.42), so now be pleased to restore this beloved daughter to her former condition, that this unbelieving and perverse generation may learn to worship your holy and terrible name, and tell of your wonders at all seasons."

He finished his prayer and anointed all her members with holy oil, and after this holy remedy she was able to bless the Lord along with her parents.

"Dearly beloved," Epictetus then urged the father, "if you would have your household freed from the last vestige of infirmity and distress, take care that you and your whole family receive the Sacrament of the Lord every week with inner devotion and pureness of heart."

He then let them return home, rejoicing and in good heart.

Chapter III

A demoniac was brought to the man of God once, and he kept him with him for three days, during which the demon did not cease from crying aloud.

"O what a cross, what torture, I am suffering!" he shouted, "It used to be really good for me once in the land of Phrygia, where I had persuaded human beings to use my rites and sacrifices. How much honour I was given there! But now I am miserable for I know honour no more. How senseless of me to have left

there and come here! I am he who is responsible for all the many blasphemous words of Montanus, and the manifold crimes committed by Maximilla. I subjugated that whole region to my worship and wickedness. It was I who attacked the city of Alexandria through Arius and persuaded them that the Son of God was a mere created being. Through Manes I instituted the Manichean heresy and showed them how to dedicate their fasting to me. Through Donatus I devastated the whole of Africa. And now, look, I have been captured like a runaway slave by one of your servants, O Christ!"

He carried on like this for hours and hours, until on the third day he fled from where he had established himself, and the cleansed man gave thanks to Christ the Lord.

Chapter IV

Again, a blind woman was taken to him, who stood before him and wept. "I don't know you," she said, "but I believe in whatever merit you have in the sight of God. Do not despise my tears, or render my prayers in vain. Doctors throughout the whole of the province have prescribed for me with diligence and care, but have not been able to do me any good. Indeed the more they have practised their art on me the more miserable and unhappy I have become. So I beg your holiness to lay your right hand upon my eyes in the name of Christ, and I believe that light will then be restored to my eyes through your mediation."

The holy Epictetus appreciated the woman's faith, and laid his hand on her eyes, glorifying the loving-kindness of the Lord.

"According to your faith, be it done to you, my daughter," he said, echoing the words of Christ (Matthew 9.29).

And immediately her eyes were opened and she saw the light.

"Glory to you, O God of the Christians," she cried. "You do not spurn sinners in their sins, but according to your great mercy you pick them up and save them when they turn to you."

And after this, along with her whole household she believed in God the Saviour.

It would take rather a long time if we were to set before the eager reader all the miracles which the Lord did through him, but we have touched briefly upon these few among the many before reverting to our main theme.

Chapter V

One day a youth called Astion, with a very beautiful face and handsome appearance, came to visit him, and the blessed presbyter made him sit down beside him, and putting his hand on his head he began gently to urge him to have faith in the Lord.

"You are a most charming young man," he said. "Tell me who you are, and where you have come from, and where you are going, and who your father's family is."

"I don't know that I could tell your blessedness where my family originated, most blessed father," he replied, "but I will briefly tell you what I do know. My father is a leading citizen of this city, and is reckoned to be very wealthy. My mother is from the noble Julian family; she is the daughter of a senator. I am her only offspring and they spend their days looking (*inspicio*) upon me as some sort of precious pearl."

Chapter V (continued) Life of Sts Epictetus and Astion , Book Ib

"You have well said that they investigate (*inspicio*) you as to whether you are a precious pearl," he said, "because that is what they have not got yet. They can only be considering (*inspicio*) the possibility of it, insofar as your soul is held by Christ to be more precious than any pearl or any other metal. For as far as I can see our Saviour has chosen you for his ministry and service. Come then, my son, renounce everything of the world, and in company with all the saints strive after those unseen things belonging to the world to come.

"Everything prized in this world is transitory and perishable, but the things which God has prepared for those who serve him remain for ever, even as he remains for ever. Gold which can be handled is not true treasure, but depends on a certain vanity of the imagination, deceiving the minds even of the righteous in this world. Similarly, silver coveted by human eyes, belies its own name, for it is processed and polished to deceive the greedy and ensnare the foolish.

"Come now, listen to me, my dearest son, and I will show you what sort of gold you should really be choosing, and the sort of silver to be desired, which our Saviour bestows on those who put their trust in him. 'I urge you to buy from me gold tried in the fire,' he says, 'that you may be enriched, and put on white garments that the shame of your nakedness may not appear' (Revelation 3.28). The gold tried in the fire is Christ our Lord, and, my son, anyone who enthrones him in the heart will be rewarded by the riches of heaven, and will

be clothed in white garments, that is in Faith, Hope and Charity, by which with the help of all his angels you will be able to overcome not only this world but also the devil, whom at present you worship as lord.

"Even your own father whom you can see is not your true father, my son. The omnipotent God is your true father, and it is because he is called father that your natural father is also called father (Ephesians 3.15). The one is invisible and ineffable, the other is visible and corruptible; the incomprehensible remains unaffected by death, the corruptible is in all things subject to death. The governance of the one keeps all things in existence; the best endeavour of the other produces nothing which endures. God gave a command and you were created, he issued a decree and you were formed in your mother's womb, he gave an order and you were born, he surveyed your progress and brought you up to your present youthful age.

And although your earthly father is to be held in respect, my son, nevertheless he is not to be compared to your true father, who formed and created us in his own image and likeness, bestowed upon us intelligence, prudence, sensitive observation, and an appreciation of all things that are good. He gave us dominion over all his works, and by grace he called us out of slavery and adopted us to be his sons and brothers and friends.

"So therefore, my son, it ever behoves us to know and adore this true father who has surrounded us with such great goodness. For to our visible father, respect is to be given only in so far as he has seen to our natural needs while we were in our infancy; he has sometimes beaten us, but more often he has been careful to provide what our childish state required, for it was a case of his own flesh embracing his own flesh, his solicitude was being poured out on the fruit of his own body. Nevertheless it is for these things that he deserves respect.

"Our mother also is held to be of a different kind - not our visible mother, but our immortal mother who lasts for ever, a worthy bride for our Saviour, adorned by Angels, celebrated by the prophets, glorified by the Apostles, exalted by martyrs and confessors, lifted up in Christ and through Christ to the heavenly bridal chamber, proclaimed by humanity as our holy mother, the Church. Her voice is as the voice of the turtledove (Song of Songs 2.12), her lips distil the sweet perfumes of the apostles' teaching. Her eyes are the two luminaries of heaven, her teeth are white, like sheep coming up from the washing (ibid 4.2), twenty-four in number, indicating in a figure the books of sacred scripture. Her hands drop myrrh (ibid. 5.5), that is, justice and true

faith. Her ten fingers signify the power and sacrament of the Decalogue, her breasts are the two Testaments, that is, the law of Moses and the grace of the Gospels. Her feet are like fine brass, the inner life of her womb signifies the fountain of the most sacred Baptism and the regeneration of all nations. Come then, my child of destiny, fly to the breasts of your true mother, accept her admonitions, renounce all that is of this world, that you may earn the right to enjoy what the Lord promises to give his children in the world to come.

"Listen to what our true father says: 'Leave your own land and your family, and come into that land which I shall show you' (Genesis 12.1), that is, the land of the living and the country of the Saints, a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3.8), that is, the teaching of the apostles and prophets. And when you have fulfilled all these instructions, he will give you possession of paradise, he will open up to you the heavenly sacraments, he will give you the glory of the kingdom of heaven, he will show you the immeasurable joy of the apostles, and reveal to you the choirs of martyrs and the company of the Angels and Archangels. And more importantly still, he will adopt you by grace as his son and brother."

That most wise youth listened to this, fell at the old man's feet, and begged to be shown this person to whom he should give his allegiance for the years to come, and who alone possessed such great power and majesty. He asked that the servants and ministers of the holy man should not reveal any of this to his father, and spoke no more with the man of God that day.

Chapter VI

Next day he arose at first light, and like a most industrious bee hastened to revisit that same place where on the day before he had pastured on celestial flowers. He went to the house of God's priest and greeted him.

"Hail, O apostle of Christ and minister of the New Testament", he said.

"You are welcome, young man," the holy man replied, "wearing as you do the robe of martyrdom and a crown adorned with various kinds of gems. Come, sit down beside me. What is it, my son? Has the seed of the Lord which we sowed yesterday in the ground of your heart borne fruit which up to now has been hindered from growing by the weeds of infidelity?"

"Most holy father," Astion replied, "as your beatitude knows, I am greatly beloved by my father as I am an only son, and I am very much afraid that if I become a Christian he could perhaps die of excessive shock, or else throw himself into the sea, or, God forbid, lose his reason, so that what for me could

be the beginning of salvation, could mean that I was simply sending him to eternal death and the fire of hell. But I have a plan, and if you are willing to carry it out with me, enrol me today as a catechumen, make me fast for a fixed number of days, and when that is over give me the sacrament of Baptism. And when I have fulfilled all the conditions of becoming a Christian, what I am asking is that you and I together leave this city and go somewhere far off wherever the holy Spirit may lead us, lest my father's tears make me change my mind."

The programme which this most prudent youth had proposed was completed, and a few days afterwards they prayed to Christ, left the city, and took ship to the land of Scythia. Here they went to the city of the Almiridenses, where nobody knew them or where they came from.

Chapter VII

Now when these most blessed men had embarked on this holy flight, the parents of the holy Astion began to search for him everywhere, going about here and there, making his name known in their grievous distress.

"What has happened to you my dearest son?" said his father, giving voice to his grief. "You are my only child, my beloved Astion. Has some wild beast suddenly devoured you, that I cannot find the slightest trace of you anywhere? You were the staff of my old age, and the light of my life. Where else I can search for you I know not. I have no idea where I can send my slaves after you. You were the most precious pearl of this city, you moved among your fellow citizens like the most beautiful of doves, you shone among them all like a ray of the sun, you glittered like a splendid moon over the common people, you showed great wisdom among the wise. What more? You made many people fond of you by your friendly way of talking to them."

His mother also tore her garments, and wept, beating her breast.

"Who has taken you away from me? Who has enticed you away? I cannot think what malignant omen may have snatched you from my bosom. But I would not be surprised if that God of the Christians has sent one of his own to pervert his heart and alienate him from us. And now I am woeful, miserable and lonely. I am in the grip of an infinite sadness and intolerable grief. All the labour of so many years has proved to be in vain. The crown of my life has fallen. The fruit of my womb has shrivelled and I am become as a wasted city. Up to today I was a mother and a queen, my son. Now I have neither the glory of a queen nor the joy of a mother. And you, my beloved, you were a tree and

you are now cut down. You were a pearl and the Galileans have stolen you, a precious gem and you have fallen into darkness, a lamp and you have been extinguished, a pillar and you have been cast down, a royal statue and you have been overturned. And what more? You were a human being, and in a moment of time, as I suspect, you were dead. And now, my son, because of you I am almost out of my mind, I despair of life, I can hardly even remember my own name."

So cried his mother and father, and found no relief to their deep despair.

Chapter VIII

Meanwhile in the city of the Almiridenses, the holy men of God found a suitable place to live and offered to God alone their acts of prayer. But as it is written, 'a city set upon a hill cannot be hid, nor can divine grace be hidden under a bushel' (Matthew 5.15), and soon the power of heaven began to show forth through the holy Epictetus the many signs and wonders in Scythia that he had formerly done in the East. For one day a woman brought her son to him, aged about fifteen, who was leading a profitless life because he was deaf and dumb. She fell at the feet of the holy Epictetus.

"I don't know where you have come from," she said, "and I have no idea where you belong. But this only I do believe, that if you will, you can bestow the benefit of wholeness upon those who are lacking, for your clothing and your religious practices proclaim you to be a disciple of that Nazarene. We have heard about how many signs and wonders have been done in his name by those among your number. You are believed to be one of his disciples so come to the aid of our infirmity. Tell us about his miracles, his kingdom, his divine sacraments, so that we also may become his servants."

"If you wish to believe," he said in reply, "in the God I preach, and will keep in your heart from now on no trace of faithlessness, but will believe with your whole heart that he is the creator of heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water and all that is in them, he will be for you what you are seeking. He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17.27-28).

He told her to let go of her son and push him forward, and he lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed to the Lord.

"O almighty God, immeasurable and invisible, incomprehensible and beyond description, health of Christians, healer of the sick, the sailor's guide, harbour for those in peril, the light of the blind, the feet of the lame, the way for the

wanderer, look, I pray you O Lord, on this your servant and loose the string of his tongue to the praise of your holy name, open his ears that he may hear of your divine sacraments. Make all his members whole, his soul as well as his body, as you did to that man who had been paralysed for thirty-eight years (John 5.5), to whom your august presence brought wholeness and healing, so that they might know your name who did not know you, and believe that you are the true God who live and reign with the Father and the holy Spirit unto the ages of ages."

His prayer done, he spat three times on the boy's mouth.

"My son," he then asked, "in what God ought we to believe, in idols made by human hands, or in Jesus Christ the crucified, who today has come to heal you?"

"We ought to believe in Jesus Christ, O most blessed man," he shouted with a loud voice, "who grants such gifts to humankind even in this present age."

A great number of the Almiridenses got to hear of this miracle and gave glory to God, and more than a thousand souls believed in the Lord the Saviour that day.

Chapter IX

Not only did the holy Epictetus perform many miracles, but the most blessed Astion did likewise. Indeed they were granted numerous graces against all kinds of infirmities, but more than anything else they were given power against the demons. Astion was going to the Danube one day to draw water, when a man met him vexed by a demon. Astion stood in front of him, prayed, made the saving sign on his forehead, and on all his members. The demon was cast out at that moment.

"Your faith and purity, O Astion," cried the devil as he fled, "have drawn the power of the Saviour down against our race."

And he was nowhere to be seen again.

Chapter X

On another occasion Astion saw a man who had fallen from a great height and was lying half dead in his own home where his parents had taken him. When he had learnt all the details of the sudden accident which had caused them such grief, he was moved with compassion and went away to pray privately, "O Christ our God," he prayed to our Lord, "who through the blessed apostle Paul restored to life Eutyches who fell to his death from a window (Acts

20.9), and through St Peter brought strength to the limbs of eighty-year-old Aeneas (Acts 3.2) as he lay in the gate of the temple, and who showed forth your wholeness and health even from your mother's womb, I pray now, O Lord, that you may look upon this man who by the work of the devil has fallen from such a great height, and grant him your wholeness and health. Make him to become one of the number of your flock, for you are our shepherd, our true Lord, who said in your Gospel: 'I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. As the Father knows me, so do I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep' (John 10.14-15)". His prayer finished he went back to the injured man.

"In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk," he said.

And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and at once he was made whole from top to bottom, and he was able to jump and run. He and his parents then went and stood outside the dwelling of the holy man and proclaimed loudly:

"The God of Epictetus and Astion is one God, truly the only God of the Christians. Therefore I shall not depart from this place today until my parents and I are made Christians."

The priest of the Lord then took the man and all who were with him and enrolled them among the catechumens, and a few days later gave them Baptism.

Chapter XI

The most blessed Astion was going to draw water from the river one day without his senior's orders or permission, when an evil thought suddenly entered his mind as he was going along. For three days this great man was unable to drive it out from his heart, which made him feel very depressed, and it showed clearly in his face.

"What is the matter, my son?" asked Epictetus, as he looked at Astion. "Why so sad, and consumed in gloom? This despondency which seems to have gripped you is not the sort of image a holy man is supposed to present, or even those who are doing penance for their own salvation. I rather think this is a death-dealing affliction such as killed the apostate Judas (Matthew 27.5), or Achitophel the counsellor of Absalom (2 Samuel 17.23).

"Three days ago," replied Astion, "when your reverence was talking about the heavenly mysteries to those people, I shamelessly went to draw water from the river without your knowledge. As I was going along a particularly sordid

and disgusting thought was put into my mind, by the devil, I suppose. And for the last three days, however much I pray with tears and use the Scriptures to try and get rid of it, I have in no way been able to succeed."

Epictetus' terrible anger against the demon immediately showed in his face.

"And why, without my permission, did you go out the door of the cell and go to the river without the prayers of the priest of Christ? You surely must be aware that the permission given by the superior to the junior is the girdle of faith, the one impregnable wall of defence against the devil. Come now, join with me in prayer and prostrate ourselves before the Lord."

After both of them had prayed long and earnestly for the mercy of the Saviour, the blessed Astion prayed by himself, and then saw a little black boy with a fiery torch escaping from his bosom.

"Your confession, Astion," it said, "has grievously constricted my powers today. One prayer of yours has made me defenceless and desolate in every way. So, from here I shall go to the heart of Sir Latronianus and stir him up against you. He will bring all kinds of punishments against you, on the grounds that you have come into this province like robbers and evildoers, turning many away from the worship of the gods by your poison, and bringing them to your God."

Having said this, the demon was no longer to be seen.

Chapter XII

The holy servants of God continued in their spiritual exercises, single-mindedly singing psalms and praying to our Saviour Jesus Christ, and by divine grace doing many miracles not only among the people but also among their animals. Suddenly Sir Latronianus visited the Almiridensian region and for three days carried out a public inspection of all the imperial offices there. On the fourth day somebody told him about the doings of those most blessed men, saying that they were evildoers, enchanters (magi), enticing many people away from sacrificing to the gods. He immediately ordered some of the officials of public order to go after sunset to the dwelling of the holy men, seize them, and bring them in chains to the prison. When the most blessed men were arrested they sang psalms all the way to the prison: 'God is our help and strength, a very present help in time of trouble' (Psalms 46.1), and 'The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge' (ibid. 46.11). And again, 'Many are the troubles of the righteous and godly, but the Lord delivers them out of them all. He takes care of every bone, and not one of them shall

be broken' (ibid. 34.19-20).

When they had actually been put into the prison, they continued all night singing psalms and praying in their accustomed way. When they had finished the office of vigils, Epictetus had a few words with Astion.

"Tomorrow, my beloved son," he said, "if the judge questions us as to our family, our names, what province we belong to or where we have come from, let us say hardly anything. Don't tell him our names or family, our native land or where we come from. Just tell him we are Christians, and that answers all questions about our name, our family and our native land. We are nothing but worshippers of the true God. If after this he orders us to be tortured, let us not say anything under torture except 'Lord Jesus, may your will always be done in us'".

Chapter XIII

Next day, early in the morning, Sir Latronianus ordered the courtroom to be got ready in the centre of the town, and got the town crier to summon the people as loudly as he could to come and see a disgraceful and horrid sight. And at the third hour Latronianus came forth like a raging beast. As the people eagerly watched, he ordered the holy men to be brought out for all to see. They were put on show in front of him, but as soon as he looked at them he was overcome by uncontrollable trembling. He could not bear to gaze at the holy men, for their faces shone like the sun, so great was the grace which filled them.

Epictetus at this time was aged about sixty, of noble stature, with a flowing beard and a head of splendid silver hair. The most blessed monk, Astion, also exhibited the same sort of noble stature, overwhelmingly handsome and graceful. He was about thirty-five years of age. For the next hour Sir Latronianus questioned them.

"What is your first language? what is your family? What province were you born in? Explain yourselves so that all these people can hear."

"We are Christians," they replied, "born of Christian parents. Our native land is Christianity."

"I want to hear you tell me your names. I know you are a follower of that cursed, perfidious person, and so does every one here."

"We are Christians. We acknowledge and adore Jesus Christ our Lord, by whose power all things exist, and we abominate all your idols, as Scripture says: 'Those who make them are like unto them and so are all who put their

trust in them" (Psalms 115.8).

This infuriated him and he ordered them to be stripped and beaten. And when these martyrs of Christ were being abused, they lifted up their eyes to heaven and said; "Lord Jesus, our master, may your will be done in us."

They were beaten severely for a long time, but the cruelty of Latronianus was able to make no impression on these worshippers of God.

Chapter XIII (continued) Life of Sts Epictetus and Astion , Book Ib

"Where is your marvellous defender then?" cried Latronianus in a rage. You have been calling on him unceasingly to come to your aid. Let him come then, and snatch you out of my hands if he can."

"We are Christians, O tyrant," was all they would say. "May the will of God be done in us."

He ordered them to be put on the rack, and stretched by its iron claws, but even as they were being stretched they kept on saying: "We are Christians, Latronianus you tyrant. May the will of God be done in us."

The tyrant then ordered burning torches to be put under them as they hung on the rack. They endured this torment with wonderful bravery, continuing to say: "We are Christians, tyrant, May the will of God be done in us."

It was not till the seventh hour that Latronianus ordered them to be taken off the rack and sent back to the prison.

Chapter XIV

One of the court officials called Vigilantius listened to these martyrs under torture repeating incessantly 'We are Christians, Latronianus you tyrant. May the will of God be done in us', and thought to himself that this incantation must have very great power, seeing that throughout all their torture they said that in repeating it they did not feel any pain. He began to think about it deeply and to repeat it while in his house and when out in the open, when going to bed and when getting up, in fact at all times. He kept this up without ceasing for three days, and on the fourth day began to shout it out aloud in public.

"I am a Christian, Latronianus, you tyrant. May the will of God be done in us."

He visited the most blessed martyrs in the prison and begged that he and his

whole household might receive the sign of life, since they now believed in God the Saviour. He it was who later buried their holy bodies with great honour.

Chapter XV

On the fifth day, Sir Latronianus at last came back to the judgment seat and ordered the holy presbyter Epictetus and the monk Astion to be brought out. As those servants of the demons led them out they began to sing psalms:

"In you we shall overcome our enemies, O Lord, and in your name we pour scorn on those who rise up against us. For we put not our trust in human bow and spear; nothing can save us but your right hand and your arm and the light of your countenance, for we have found favour with you." (Psalm 44.4-7).

The martyrs of Christ were made to stand in front of the seat of that most irreligious Latronianus.

"Will you do as I say and sacrifice to the gods, or are you going to persist in your madness?"

"You have now interrogated us many times," said the holy Epictetus, "you have given us many soft speeches, you have promised us all kinds of gifts and great honours, and yet you have never heard us reply anything other than that we are Christians. You must know that we have never ceased from saying so." Latronianus' reply to all that was to roar like a lion and shout orders to his soldiers.

"You, who serve in this most splendid building," he said, "bring salt and vinegar and rub it into their wounds. Then fill a brass cauldron with pitch and asphalt, put a fire under it and when it boils throw them in. Quickly!"

"We are Christians, O tyrant," they said. "May God's will be done in us."

But even this form of torture they bore with great bravery, and seemed to come to no harm at all. That most savage tyrant ordered them to be lifted out and taken back to the prison.

"We don't want their constancy to put us in a bad light," he said, "still less that their bravery should persuade people to become Christians. Put them in solitary confinement for the next thirty days, and give them nothing to eat or drink."

The athletes of Christ continued daily to be refreshed by the divine word, by that bread which came down from heaven, and sang psalms without ceasing, 'God have mercy upon us and bless us, and show the light of your countenance upon us, and have mercy upon us, that we may know your way

upon earth and your salvation among all peoples' (Psalms 67.1-2)

Chapter XVI

Now there was a certain foreigner there when these holy martyrs were suffering torture for Christ's sake, who recognised the most blessed Astion as he stood before the judge, and remembered his name and family. He returned promptly to the city in the East from whence he came, visited Astion's mother and father and told them everything that had happened. He told them that he was being martyred as a Christian along with an old man called Epictetus, and told them exactly the name of the place where they were. They fell down before the person bringing them this news, and questioned him keenly to make sure that what he was telling them was true. He swore with an oath that he was telling the truth.

"If only I could be fortunate enough to see the face of my son again," the father said, "I would do anything he asked, and accept anything he told me, without the slightest hesitation."

"And I", said his mother, "miserable and wretched as I have been all this time, if only I could be so blessed as to see him again in the flesh, I would put my house and everything I have at his disposal and would submit myself to him, for he is dearer and sweeter to me than anything else. Even if he wanted me to become Christian I would not refuse him. As long as he was with me I would even suffer torments and gladly meet my death."

At once they arranged for all their money and possessions to be put in trust, and with three servants left their home, took ship for Scythia, and arrived at last in the Almiridensian region. Now the chief priest and leader of the holy churches of God in that province was Evangelicus, a most blessed man.

Chapter XVII

Meanwhile, the thirty days completed, the tyrant ordered the holy martyrs to be brought before him. They came out cheerful in heart and with shining faces.

"I have interrogated you many times," said Sir Latronianus, "on your language, your family and place of origin, and you have never told me the truth. Seeing that I don't know anything about your native land, your family, or even your names, I have come to the conclusion that you cannot be anything else but demons in human flesh, who are well known to have no name or family. So that is what I name you, and that is no more than you

deserve. Listen carefully now, you demons in human flesh. If you do not sacrifice to the immortal gods today your heads will be cut off."

"We are Christians," said these martyrs of Christ, "and in the name of Christ we are accustomed to casting demons out from people's bodies, demons that you worship and adore as gods. Would that you were not possessed of such a malignant demon."

These words maddened Latronianus so much that he raged like some wild beast, and he ordered his officers to stone those holy men. He then ordered them to be beaten with ashen rods for as long as breath remained in their body. But these most blessed athletes of Christ bore it all patiently, saying nothing but "O Lord our God, may your will be done in us." The torture went on for a long time, but they remained cheerful and strong-hearted in their confession of the Lord.

When Latronianus saw that his madness was not prevailing against their constancy, that servant of the devil ordered his officers to continue their wicked deeds by taking them outside the city and cutting their heads off with their swords. They still kept on singing psalms as they were taken away: "'O praise the name of the Lord, praise the Lord you servants of his' (Psalms 135.1), for in everything the will of our God is done in us".

Chapter XVIII

When they had arrived at their destination, they stood facing the East, lifting up their hands and raising their eyes to heaven, and prayed to the Lord:

"Blessed are you and worthy of all praise, O Lord God of our fathers; you are exalted above all ages. It is not the will of a human being, but your divine will that has been done in us in all things. For you are he who have taught those who believe in you to do your will and proclaim your marvellous works at all times. It is your holy Spirit who governs each one of us in good things according to the desire of our hearts.

"You are he who governed Abraham according to your will, you sanctified Isaac, and strove with Jacob giving him the name of Israel, you preserved the chastity of Joseph in the midst of the persuasive blandishments of Egypt, you kept Susannah unspotted from the pollution of her betrayers, by the gift of the holy Spirit you purified the hearts of all your prophets and the minds of the most blessed apostles, by your grace you have granted a crown to us, your athletes, and have given us the victory in all our struggles on behalf of your holy name, you have led us humble sinners towards this land for us to

proclaim and preach the teaching of your Gospel to those who live here, you have been our governor and master, and provider of all our good, who have governed us even to this very moment according to your will.

"We beseech you, O Lord, to send us your holy Angels to free us and defend us from the power of the adversary, and lead us victorious and triumphant before the throne of your majesty. And keep the people of this region and city in your fear, protect them in your mercy, guard them in your goodness, govern them according to your will, bless them all both small and great, and by the honour that they have given to us because of your holy name, show them the rewards of everlasting life. Grant us faithfulness, and whenever we offer our petitions to your divine majesty, grant that in all goodness they may be fulfilled.

"And now O Lord, take us up into your eternal hands, lead us into your heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of all the Saints; for you are its light and its bride, you are its foundation and creator, and with Angels and Archangels, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs and confessors we praise and glorify the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit unto the ages of ages."

Chapter XIX

As all who heard this prayer cried Amen, the holy Epictetus asked the executioners to take the blessed Astion first.

"Surely, O most blessed father," said Astion, "you deserve to be the first to offer this most salutary sacrifice?"

"The fiery wrath of the old serpent is subtle and devious as of old, my son," replied Epictetus. "What I now want done is for the benefit of both your salvation and mine. For seventeen years now, by divine grace, I have cared for your spotless purity, and would you now in this last hour spoil the labour of so many years? No, what I want to do, my son, I do by the inspiration of the holy Spirit. Abraham offered up his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Genesis 22.2), Jephtha offered up his daughter as a sacrifice (Judges 11.31-35), Peter also sent Stephen before him into the heavenly places (Acts 7). And although I don't believe that the goodness of God could not have preserved your chastity without my help at all times even up to the present day, nevertheless you must know that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. So do not now cast doubts on my good intentions. I do believe that Michael and his Angels, Abel and the prophets, Peter and the apostles, Stephen and the martyrs and

Daniel with the confessors will come to meet you, my son, and enfold you in their bosom, and lead you to the throne of Christ our Saviour with psalms and spiritual hymns."

"May your will and the will of God be done, O priest of God and venerable father," replied Astion. And making the sign of the cross on his forehead, he offered his prayer to God.

"O my Lord, you are my protector. Into your hands I commend my spirit" (Psalms 31.5).

And as he said this, the executioner cut off his head. The holy Epictetus immediately gave glory to God and threw himself upon his body.

"Strike me now, I beg," he cried to the executioner, "even as I am lying on the body of a holy martyr."

It was done, and all who were present, Christians and pagans alike, gave tearful thanks to God for the good teacher Epictetus and for the perfect obedience of his disciple.

Chapter XX

And as they were giving God glory and honour, behold, the bodies of the holy martyrs suddenly shone as white as snow, and were seen to give off a splendour as of the rays of the sun. Anyone suffering from any kind of infirmity was delivered from all pain and grief as they touched the bodies and reverently embraced them. At sunset Vigilantius came with all his household and some other Christians and secretly carried away the bodies of the holy martyrs, and anointed them with myrrh and precious spices, and buried them in a specially suitable place with hymns and psalms and great devotion. Many signs and prodigies to the praise of Christ's name are being done in that place up to the present day.

Latronianus, however, became totally possessed by a demon that very night, and early next morning came into the praetorium and stood there shouting out all kinds of mad nonsense. He drew his sword and began to chase and strike at the leading members of his staff, and running about now here now there, he raged at some of them like a mad dog, and tore the clothes off others. They realised that he had lost his mind, and fought and struggled with him till they had managed to disarm him and bring him to the ground, where they bound him hand and foot and threw him into a small cell. After two days the demon asphyxiated him and in a violent fit he gave up his spirit.

Chapter XX1

The third day after the passion of the holy martyrs had dawned, when Vigilantius came to their tomb to pray, and suddenly Astion appeared to him. "My parents will be coming in search of me today," he said to Vigilantius. "I beg you, most beloved brother, hurry down to the harbour and take them into your house, giving them what comfort you can, for they have suffered great grief because of me. And try and make them understand about our Saviour and his many wonderful acts."

Vigilantius gave glory to God at hearing this and hastily went down to the riverbank. At the third hour he saw a small ship coming into the harbour. Two passengers got off the boat and began to enquire from bystanders whether any of them knew of, or had seen, a young man by the name of Astion. Many people immediately began to talk freely about him, as Vigilantius stepped forward.

"I saw him and knew him," he said. "But come to my house and rest a while, for you must be very tired after your journey in the ship, and after a while, if you like, there will be an opportunity for me to take you to him without any delay."

They threw themselves down in front of him, and grasped his feet and kissed them.

"Please, if it is at all possible," they said, "take us to him before we have even had anything to eat."

"Just grant my request first," said Vigilantius, "and then I will do what you have asked and what you want."

When they had gone to his home and were sitting down having a meal, Astion's mother talked to Vigilantius.

"If you can show me where he is, my dear brother," she said, "I will place a golden crown upon your head!"

The father also spoke to him

"If only I may see him today, young man," he said, "I will clothe you in cloth of gold and bestow the half of my goods upon you!"

"Three days ago," said Vigilantius, "he departed for a far country, and gave into my keeping half of what he owned, together with his house and some writings, and he said to me, 'If anyone sent from my father comes looking for me, bring him to this little house of mine and tell them that Astion said to wait for them there until he comes back safe and sound. And if they would inherit his legacy let them be diligent in carrying out everything that is written in this

book, and let them be happy, nothing doubting."

"Just what is this country," asked the mother, "where my only beloved Astion has gone to?"

"It is a country of very strong and powerful people," he replied.

"Quite a few people living there?" the mother asked.

"Very many noble people, who are said to be in possession of paradise, who dwell in everlasting light, whose life is God himself, whose existence is deathless, whose garments have been sprinkled with blood, whose heads bear crowns of purest gold inset with various precious stones. The King of that region is all powerful and greatly to be feared, and his name is God of gods and Lord of lords, his messengers are called Angels of justice, they are clothed all alike, and their touch is like burning fire. And the senate of this great Emperor is exceeding illustrious, for some of them are prophets, and the others, apostles.

"And the city of this King is brilliant above measure, for its walls are constructed of pure gold, with twelve gates, and a single pearl hanging from each one (Revelations 21.21). The first gate is called Peter, the second Paul, the third Andrew, the fourth John, the fifth James, the sixth Philip, the seventh Bartholomew, the eighth Thomas, the ninth Matthew, the tenth Thaddeus, the eleventh Simon, the twelfth Matthias. It has a magnificent temple, with a Holy of holies and an altar of gold. In front of it there stands a wonderful man with a twelve-stringed psaltery who ceases not to sing the praises of the King, saying, 'Praise the Lord in the highest, praise him all you Angels of his, praise him all you powers' (Psalms 148.1-2). The name of this man is David, son of Jesse. And the streets of this city are paved in pure gold, and its river is a source of eternal life, its trees bring forth their fruits month by month, and their leaves are for the healing of souls. Its light is beyond description, and its gates are never shut, for there is no night there nor any shadow of darkness, but joy and never-ending gladness are the eternal lot of all who dwell there" (Revelations 21 & 22)

"And do you not know, my dearest brother," said the mother, "who it was who called my Astion thither? I hope it was not because he was taken in some crime, or was it perhaps that one of the council or the senate summoned him, and adopted him because of his great beauty?"

"He went there," said Vigilantius, "because the prince of that country called him into his fellowship with great honour. I was not able to see all that company myself, but he told me about them himself. He said they were of the

most splendid and beautiful appearance, with golden weapons and garments of hyacinth. And because he had fulfilled faithfully and with his whole heart everything that the prince of that region had commanded, he had been called thither by his servants and given the governorship of ten cities."

"In the midst of all that glory," said his mother, "do you think he will have remembered us at all?"

"He keeps you very vividly in mind," said Vigilantius, "and deeply desires to have you with him for ever, if only you are able to fulfil willingly what is written in the book which he left me."

"Come then," said his mother, "Show us these things which he has left behind."

And they all rose from the table as they spoke.

Chapter XXI

Then Vigilantius took them to the cell of the holy martyrs and showed them the Cross of the Lord, and the sacrosanct Gospel of Christ.

"This is what your son Astion left me," he said. "And if you will accept the mystery of this divine power and carry out what is written in this book, you will surely see him and dwell with him in that country for ever."

The father picked up the Gospel of Christ and opened it at the place where Jesus spoke to his disciples, saying:

"Amen, amen, I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in majesty, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left home, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, shall receive a hundredfold and possess eternal life. For many who are first, shall be last, and the last first" (Matthew 19 28-30).

"Who is this Lord Jesus then," asked the father, "and who are they who followed him? And who are they whom he bade to leave father and mother, wife and children, for his sake, who he said would receive everlasting life in the blessedness to come? I beg you, dearest brother, if you know what the truth of all this is, do not hesitate to tell us about it."

Chaptert XXI (continued) Life of Sts Epictetus and Astion, Book Ib
(Also St Macarius of Rome further down page)

So Vigilantius opened his mouth, and beginning from the Scriptures, told them about the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, about how everything was made by him from the beginning of the world, and how he had made a man in his own image and likeness, and placed him in the most delightful garden, and took a rib from his side and fashioned it into a woman, and how Adam because of the serpent was expelled from the garden of delights and sent into this mortal world, and how Eve, because she preferred to listen to the serpent rather than the Lord God was condemned to bear children in grief and suffering, and how the holy prophets were sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Son of God, and preached and were not listened to, and how the Lord God Jesus Christ, who alone is the Word and Wisdom of the Father, the power and the splendour of glory, came down in the latter days and was born into this world by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and how he made disciples of those who followed him, and sent them to preach the word of salvation to the gentiles, giving them the name of Apostles, and how he made them inheritors of the kingdom of heaven because they despised the vanities of this world and loved him alone above their love for anyone else.

When Vigilantius had said all this and much more, they turned to the place in the Scriptures where Jesus said:

"Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who confesses me before other people I will confess in the presence of my Father in heaven. But whosoever denies me before other people I will deny in the presence of my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. I come not to bring peace but a sword. I am come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are those of his own household. Anyone who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whosoever will not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10.32-38). He who would save his soul shall lose it, and he who would lose his soul for my sake and the Gospel shall save it"(Mark 6.35).

And again: "They shall bring you before kings and rulers, but take no thought for what you shall say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your

Father who will speak in you. The brother will deliver up the brother unto death, and the father the son, children shall rise up against their parents and deliver them up to death, and you shall be hated by all for my name's sake. But whosoever perseveres to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10 18-22). He then turned to the last of the four Evangelists, and read to them from the Gospel of St John:

"Father, I will that those whom you have given me should be with me where I am, that they might see my glory, which you have given me, for you have loved me before the foundation of the world (John 17.24). May they be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as you and I are one, I in them, and you in me, that they all may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that you have sent me, and that you have loved them even as you love me" (John 17, *passim*).

Chapter XXIII

When the father had read these things and much more, he turned to Vigilantius.

"I beg you, dearest brother," he said, "Can you explain thoroughly to us what we have just read, for we can hardly understand any of it."

"When our Lord Jesus says", replied Vigilantius, "that he will confess in the presence of his Father in heaven those who confess him among people, and that he will deny in the presence of his Father in heaven those who deny him among other people, he is talking about those of us who believe in him and who put our trust in his holy name. So if there comes a time when the rulers of this world say to us: 'Deny your God and worship these idols which are our great gods', and we refuse for the sake of his name, we shall suffer the threats and torments of the tyrants, but we shall ever be acknowledged in that blissful country of the Father and his holy Angels, where he has made us his most dearly beloved friends.

"And among that number your only most dearly beloved and most holy Astion now stands. For just a few days ago, Latronianus, the ruler of this province, demanded that he deny Jesus Christ, whom we truly believe to be the Emperor in heaven, and that he should obey his command to show respect to the demons. But he would in no way consent to obey. He was strong in his faith, and strong in spirit against those who wished him evil. There was another

venerable old Christian man with him called Epictetus who persevered steadfast to the end in his holy confession of faith. And the heavenly Emperor looked with approval on the sincerity of their love for him, and sent his servants, the holy Angels, to take them up with great honour to that country where he dwells, that he might bestow upon them that eternal reward which he has promised to all who strive bravely against his adversaries.

"And so to your Astion, as to all like him, has been given the fulfilment of the promise that you have just been reading about, 'that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory you have given me I have given them, that they all may be one in us'. Most respected father, we call them the Martyrs of the Saviour, those among whom are numbered your Astion."

Chapter XXIV

"So he's dead, then," cried the mother, "and you didn't know how to tell us!"

"We are all dead," replied Vigilantius, "who live in this mortal flesh and in this vain world, if we exist without any knowledge of our maker. For with him only is there true life, and true food and drink, and unending dignity for those who are worthy of receiving it. Deathless, they reign for ever, and dwell in perpetual joy."

"I would like to see him dwelling in glory," said the mother. "Do you think he would still recognise me, who once gave him birth? Living in such glory as you say he is, perhaps he might look upon me with some distaste, now that mourning for him has made the beauty fade away from my face?"

"If you will do what is written in this book that the holy Astion and Epictetus left me," replied Vigilantius, "and believe in your heart on Jesus Christ, the king in whom he believed, you shall be able to see him. If you won't believe, it would be impossible for you to see him or for him to call you his mother, inasmuch as you remain unwilling to keep the commandments of his Father."

"Look," she said, "this is his father here."

"His true Father is the Lord," said Vigilantius, "with whom he now dwells, and who has given him such great gifts in the blessed world to come. This man here is mortal, and his children are mortal, and when he thinks to stand, suddenly he falls, and when he thinks he is alive, suddenly he dies, for he does not know the true Father whom Astion knows, of whom it is written, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name'."

Chapter XXV

They discussed these matters for the rest of the week, and spoke to each other about Christ's miracles, which they were happy to hear about, and by the time Sunday came they both believed in Christ. Vigilantius took them to a certain presbyter called Bonosus, who had so far avoided persecution by living in hiding. He prayed with them and questioned them, and enrolled them that same hour among the catechumens.

"See now," they said to Vigilantius, "we have done what was written in that book you gave us. Show us now the treasure which you said our Astion entrusted to your keeping."

"Come with me without any more delay", he replied, "and I will show him to you. But I have, however, put him in a hidden place, and I am not sure whether I can get him out of it. But if you will, let us go to the place and spend all night there, and perhaps we shall be able to persuade him to come out of the place where I hid him. "

They went to the tomb where he told them that they must spend the whole night in vigil. At dawn, just as it was beginning to get light, behold, a brilliant light shining all around them, together with a wonderfully sweet perfume, and they saw the holy Martyrs, who up till then had been asleep, standing there in their own bodies and praising God. The holy Astion rushed into his mother's arms and kissed her, saying, "You have done well to come from the East, O disciple of Christ, my mother Marcellina!"

Likewise the most blessed Epictetus clasped the husband's cheeks and kissed him, saying, "Rejoice in the Lord, my dearest brother Alexander, for now that you have been numbered in the company of the faithful, you have won the promise of eternal blessedness."

To Vigilantius he said, "Rejoice also in the Lord, my dearest brother Vigilantius, for you have been found worthy of having fulfilled in you what is written in the Scripture, 'He who converts a sinner from the error of his ways shall save his soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins' (James 5.20)."

Chapter XXVI

"O my dearest and blessed lady mother," said Astion, "everything written in the sacrosanct Gospel of Christ our Lord is true. Hasten therefore to live by it, that you may be found worthy to enjoy its promises. So put together a portion

of your wealth for me, divide it up and distribute it to the poor, for the sake of your own salvation and my eternal satisfaction, that so you may deserve to come to us adorned with the crown of righteousness and good works."

"Are you being well treated," asked his mother, "by your king and his company, my dear son?"

"So well that I could not find the words to describe it to you," he replied, "for the Lord God has taken me from slavery and adopted me as his son. He has granted a mansion to me in his city, he has brought me to serve in his household, he has showered the greatest honour upon me among his senators and brought me into the delights of paradise. And his servants also count me worthy to be one of them and love me. Every day, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I go with them to visit the sick, to bring back the lost, to enlighten the blind, to save those in peril on the sea, to fight against the prowling bands of barbarians on the earth, to console the mourners, to defend the weak, and to drive out the demons from the bodies of the possessed. Even today they have given me some good advice about you: 'Counsel your father and mother well, so that they too may come hither'"

"Do you mean to say that they know all about us?" asked his mother.

"They know you well and love you dearly, mother," replied Astion, "if only it is your will to know them, and are able to arrive at that same blessedness as theirs."

His mother felt a great joy spreading through her breast.

"Do you really think a miserable wretch like me can get to that place?" she asked.

"If you put your trust completely in Jesus Christ our Lord and God, just as Vigilantius trusted, and distribute all your goods to the poor, you too without fail shall live and rejoice with me where I am now in eternal blessedness."

And having encouraged them in these words and much more, the blessed athletes of Christ departed from them.

Chapter XXVII

On the fortieth day after the martyrdom the bishop Evangelicus visited the region of the Almiridenses, so Vigilantius and the holy presbyter Bonosus took them to see him. They told him in detail all that had happened and asked that they might be consecrated to Christ in the number of the faithful. He rejoiced greatly in the Lord, welcomed them, prayed for them, and gave them the sacrament of Baptism. He went back with them into a neighbouring city

and celebrated with them for the next eight days. After he had gone away again, Alexander and Marcellina expressed their thanks to Vigilantius. "You have given us so many blessings, dearest and most loving brother," they said. "Your saving teaching has enabled us to escape from the snares of the devil and come to the knowledge of Christ our Saviour. You have a glorious part to play in the wisdom of the holy church, you are brilliant in your teaching, your love for the religion of the holy Gospel is perfect. You have showed such great love in taking strangers into your care, indescribable kindness in defending the defenceless and assisting the weak. With burning faith you have worked for the destruction of idols and promoted love for the holy Martyrs. You have lived up to the meaning of your name by your vigilance in all the good works you have done for love of the Lord. No greater praise can be given you but to say that you are held to be the most intimate friend of God."

They took Vigilantius and the holy and venerable presbyter Bonosus back to their own city, where they remained, joyful in spirit, and perfect in the sight of the Lord. They gave all their possessions to the poor, and glorified God the Father Almighty, who had led them out of darkness into the light of his knowledge.

The martyrdom of the holy athletes of Christ, Epictetus the presbyter and Astion the monk, took place in the city of the Almiridenses, on the eighth day of July, at the time of the tyrant Diocletian and the governor Latronianus. But according to us it took place during the reign in heaven of Jesus Christ our Saviour, to whom with the Father and the holy Spirit be all honour and glory, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 13

The Life of Saint Macarius of Rome,
a servant of God who was found
to be near Paradise.
by Theophilus, Sergius and Hyginus

Chapter I

Glory and magnificence be to the only most blessed God, who through innumerable miraculous examples daily beckons us towards the heavenly joys of blessed life, unworthy and lukewarm though we are. We three wretched

and humble monks, Theophilus, Sergius and Hyginus, beseech all you most holy fathers and brothers that you lend your ears to what we shall tell you about the pathways through life of the most holy Macarius of Rome, who appeared to us at the twentieth milestone from Paradise. We only ask that you should place credence in what we say, for it would have been much easier for us to have avoided giving offence by remaining silent, than to be accused of giving false witness.

Chapter II

We three brothers, Theophilus, Sergius and Hyginus, renounced the world for God's sake, and joined the monastery of the hegumen Asclepion, a most famous father of many monks, in Syrian Mesopotamia between the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Together, the three of us were thankfully accepted by the father and the gathered community of the brothers; we gladly submitted ourselves to the yoke of the Rule, and began to share in the common life.

Chapter III

Quite a long time after that, one day when the synaxis of the ninth hour was finished, we went out to the banks of the river Euphrates and sat down to talk for a while about how servants of God should persevere in their labour and way of life. And I, Theophilus, had a thought come into my mind which I expressed to my brothers, Sergius and Hyginus.

"Beloved brothers," I said, "I hope you will be willing to stay with me all the days of my life, and I wonder if you would be willing to go with me to the place where the sky meets the earth."

"We have always held you to be first and foremost our spiritual brother, Theophilus," they said, "and nothing will be able to separate us. We like your idea very much, so don't delay to go off to where your heart's desire is fixed. And we shall be with you in life or in death."

We got up from the riverbank and went back to the monastery, and after vespers, when all the work of the monastery was completed and all was quiet, we secretly left. We walked for seventeen days and arrived at Jerusalem, where we worshipped at the shrines of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. We went to Bethlehem where we saw and revered the holy Manger where Christ was born, and where the Magi brought gifts to Christ, guided by a star. We saw the wonderful place, about two miles from Bethlehem, where an Angel with a multitude of the heavenly hosts sang glory to God in the highest.

We went up the Mount of Olives and worshipped in that holy place where Christ's feet had rested before being lifted up and hidden in a cloud as he ascended into heaven. Returning to Jerusalem we worshipped God again, and signing ourselves with the cross we commended ourselves to God and the Saints before commencing our journey, in a spirit of complete detachment from the concerns of this world.

Chapter IV

We journeyed steadily with Christ as our companion, until on the fiftieth day we crossed the river Tigris into a vast level plain in the country of Persia. We arrived at Assia, where Mercurius, the martyr of Christ, killed Julian the Apostate. We next came to the city of Kitissifodo, not far from Babylon, and worshipped where the three children, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, were laid to rest (Daniel 3). We stayed there a few days, offering hymns of praise to God.

We continued our journey for another four months, crossing the whole of Persia, and arrived at the land of India, where we found a house, quite empty, and rested there for two days. On the third day we saw a man and a woman, both carrying arms, coming towards us. We were terrified, but decided we would go out to meet them. When they saw us they thought we were spies and hastily went back the way they had come. They gathered together about three thousand Ethiopians, and after a while came back with them. They hurried up to the house in which we were praying, dug a ditch around it and set fire to each of the four corners of it, eager to burn us alive.

When we realised what was happening we were even more terrified, but calling upon Christ the Saviour of all, we ran out into the midst of them. They began to talk to each other excitedly in their own tongue, surrounding us with threatening looks, but we could not understand them nor they us. Finally they took us and shut us up inside a very dark prison. Nobody brought us any food or water. We never ceased calling with tears upon the mercy of almighty God the creator of us all. After a time when they thought that we would have died of hunger and thirst they came back and crowded round the prison and were surprised to see us at our prayers. They opened the door and brought us out with a great deal of talk among themselves, bound us tightly again with sharp untreated fibres and drove us out of their territory. As God is my witness we had been eighty days without food.

Chapter V

After being driven out from their lands we travelled for quite a long time towards the East, and arrived at a wonderful place, consisting of a glorious plain full of tall trees laden with delicious fruit. Praising and glorifying God we ate these sweet-tasting fruits till we could eat no more. From there we entered the land of the Chananaeans, whom some people call Cynocephali, and we were quite amazed at what they looked like. They lived in caves in the rock with their wives and children, but with the grace of Christ protecting us they offered us no harm.

Chapter VI

We journeyed still further East for a hundred and ten days, till we arrived at the land of a people called Pichiti. They were extremely small, being no more than one cubit high, and when they saw us, they were convulsed with terror and fled. We praised God who had delivered us out of their hands and pressed on with our journey.

Chapter VII

After this we came to a fearsome, mountainous country, into which the sun was scarcely able to penetrate. Neither grass nor tree grew there, but we saw great numbers of serpents, dragons, asps, basilisks, vipers, unicorns and other horned animals, besides many other death-dealing beasts and poisonous creatures, of whose names and nature we were completely ignorant. But with the right hand of God protecting us we passed through them completely unharmed, with the hissing of the dragons and serpents continually in our ears for twenty days, to the extent that we could hardly get any sleep unless we blocked up our ears.

Life of St Macarius of Rome (continued), Book Ib

Chapter VIII

Next we came to a terrifying place of high, rugged cliffs and deep valleys.

After spending seven days there it seemed to be impossible to go any further. But on the seventh day we saw a stag in front of us, roaring as it went, and we followed it. A pathway opened up for us, along many more even greater cliffs, and we did not manage to get out of that country without a great deal of labour and difficulty. But we emerged into a vast wide plain where there were a great number of elephants, but we passed through the midst of them unharmed.

There was no clear indication of which way we should go next, but we wandered on for nine days along various little pathways, without any food, calling with tears upon the clemency of the Lord, until at last we came out into another wide plain with abundant fruit.

And now the most dense fog descended upon the place. There was no light, just a thick cloud covering everything in darkness. Troubled and distressed, we fell to the ground in plaintive prayer poured out to God. We continued like this for seven days, neither eating nor drinking, without ever a glimpse of the light of heaven. After perserving in our troubled prayer for seven days, a dove appeared to us, circling round us, beating its wings strongly, as if to encourage us to keep on walking. Giving thanks to God we got to our feet and followed the dove through various pathways, until we found ourselves in front of an archway, with an inscription around it. We were delighted to see this inscription and gave thanks to God. This is what it said:

THIS ARCH WAS RAISED BY ALEXANDER, SON OF PHILIP OF
MACEDON, WHEN PURSUING DARIUS KING OF THE PERSIANS.
ANYONE WANTING TO ENTER THIS TERRITORY SHOULD TAKE
THE LEFT HAND PATH. THE LAND ON THE RIGHT IS TRACKLESS
AND FULL OF CLIFFS AND NARROW PASSES.

Chapter IX

So we kept to the left and journeyed on for many days. On the fortieth day we became aware of an unbearable smell which almost took the life out of us. We fell to the ground and prayed to the Lord that he would mercifully revive us. After a while we got up from the ground and noticed a great lake containing a multitude of fiery serpents. Voices floated up from this lake. We heard them moaning and complaining, a vast multitude of them, and a voice from heaven thundered out, saying:

"This is the lake of judgment and punishment, in which those who deny Christ are tormented."

The sound of this voice caused us to beat our breasts and weep copiously. We

passed by the lake in fear and trembling into a place between two very high mountains, where an enormous man appeared, a hundred cubits high, bound in brass chains around the whole of his body. A long chain stretched out from each side of his body, one of them fixed to the mountain on the right, the other to the mountain on the left, and he was surrounded on all sides by a most intense flame. His voice could be heard from forty miles away. When he saw us he cried out, weeping and howling, and complaining how bitterly he was being tortured by the fire.

Chapter X

We were greatly frightened at this sight, but we covered our faces and crossed over into the mountains at some distance from him. We came out into another place of many cliffs of a very great height. Here we saw a woman with flowing hair, her whole body wrapped in the folds of a most horrible dragon. She opened her mouth as if about to speak to us, but the dragon moved his head towards her mouth and bit off her tongue. This woman's hair reached right to the ground. As we watched this in awe and terror, we suddenly heard plaintive voices coming up from the depths, crying, "Have mercy on us, have mercy on us, O Christ, son of God most high."

Consumed with terror, we fell to our knees in prayer and tears, saying, "O Lord who have created us, receive our souls, for our eyes have seen your judgment on the earth."

Chapter XI

We got up and carried on our way, however, in deep mourning and grief and fear, until we came to another place where we saw many great trees which looked like fig trees. In their branches were what looked like a flock of birds from heaven, crying with a human voice, "Spare us, O Lord who fashioned us, spare us, most merciful, for we have sinned over all the earth before your face."

We too prayed: "Show us, most merciful Lord, the meaning of these marvels that we have seen, for we do not understand what they are."

And a voice came, saying, "It is not given for you to understand the mysteries that you have seen. Just keep on your way."

Chapter XII

We moved on from there in great dread, and came to a place which was much

more pleasant and beautiful. Here we saw four men of most venerable appearance. Their faces were of such marvellous beauty that it would be impossible to describe them in credible terms. They each wore golden crowns, studded with gems and precious stones. They carried golden palm leaves in their hands, there was a great and fearsome fire in front of them, and the stems of the palm leaves were sharpened to a point and held in front of them. The very sight of them filled us with great fear.

"O most high servants of the Lord our God," we cried, "have mercy on us, that the palms and the fire do us no harm!"

"Fear not," they replied. "Walk securely in the way that the Lord has shown you. For the Lord has put us in this place to guard and watch over this pathway until the day of judgment, when the whole world shall come to be judged."

Chapter XIII

At these words we bowed before the men, and passed by them at a respectable distance. We walked on for forty days, taking no food and drinking only water. As we walked along we suddenly heard a multitude of voices singing psalms, and a most beautiful perfume as of the best and most precious balsam came to us, overwhelming our nostrils like the scent of sweetest honey. This most beautiful scent, like that of nectar, combined with the sound of an ancient and heavenly melody, induced a feeling of drowsiness in us, but when we awoke we could see a marvellously decorated church, most precious. It seemed to be made entirely of crystal, and in the middle of the church an imposing altar, and from under the altar flowed a stream of water the colour of whitest milk. In fact we assumed that that water really was milk. Standing around this stream were some holy and honourable men singing a heavenly song. It was the sound of the Cherubim. We were very much in awe of them as we gazed upon them.

The North side of this church looked like green jade, the South side was the colour of pure blood, the West was all white, like milk or shining snow. Stars above the church shone with a more than earthly light, the sun there was seven times as hot and strong as in our world, the hills and trees were taller. The leaves and fruits more abundant and sweeter than those on the trees of this world, and the birds of the air sounded altogether different from those on our earth. The earth itself was of two colours. Parts were as white as snow, parts the colour of scarlet. We were awestruck, and fell down there in worship. We

bowed to those men, and fearfully went forth to take up our journey once more.

Chapter XIV

For the next hundred days, as God is our witness, we took no food, but refreshed ourselves frequently with water. Suddenly we were surrounded by a multitude of people, both men and women, who were no taller than a single cubit. We were very frightened at the sight of them.

"Let's let our hair down and charge at them," I, the miserable sinner Theophilus, said to my brothers Sergius and Hyginus. "Perhaps they will run away from us and the Lord will deliver us out of their hands."

This seemed like a good idea to them, so we untied our headbands letting our hair float free and suddenly rushed at them. Seeing this, they hastily picked up their children and fled, gnashing their teeth. And we praised the Lord who had delivered us.

We then crossed a river, and found ourselves in the midst of shining plants as white as milk, with a taste like honey. They were about a cubit high. We ate these delicious plants till we were sated, giving thanks to the Creator of all, who had preserved us in the midst of so many great dangers and freely nourished us with his grace. As we continued on our journey along wandering paths we suddenly saw a most beautiful woman, and we fell down in worship and praise of God who had shown her to us.

Chapter XV

For many days we kept on our journey till we came to an impressive-looking cave. We made the sign of the holy cross on all parts of our body and went inside this cave, but found no one there.

"But it is so clean in here," we said, "that it must belong to some human being. Let's stay here till evening, and we shall meet the person who lives here."

After sitting there for an hour, rather weary, we smelt a most delicious perfume which induced us to go to sleep. But we woke up after a short interval, went outside and looked towards the East. There we suddenly saw a man a long way off, hurrying towards us, whose hair, as white as snow, floated in the wind and covered his whole body. We could see him coming towards us, prostrating himself on the ground, and getting up again as he shouted, "If you are of God, make the sign of the holy Cross and come towards me. If you are from the devil, get away from me, the servant of God."

"Give us your blessing, holy father," we said in response, "and fear not, for we too are servants of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. We too are monks who have renounced the vanity of the world."

Hearing this, he came right up to us, lifted up his hands to heaven and prayed for quite a long time. His prayer finished, he shook his hair back from his face and mouth and gave us a blessing. His hair and beard were milk-white, and his face was as the face of an Angel. He was like a tree planted by the waterside (Psalms 1.3), he was very old, and his eyes were not visible because of the way his eyebrows hung over them, his toenails and fingernails were exceedingly long, his beard and hair covered his whole body, his voice sounded thinly as if coming from some deep place, and the skin of his face was as hard as the shell of a tortoise.

Chapter XVI

"My beloved brothers," he said, "where are you from, where have you come from? Tell me how the human race is getting on, how the Christian faith is doing, and whether the Saracens or any other peoples still wage war against the people of Christ."

We replied to his questions one by one, telling him of the dangers and difficulties we had encountered along every step of our journey, and of our desire and intention to find the place where the curve of the sky met the earth.

"My beloved little children," he said in reply, "listen to me. It is not possible to travel from this place to paradise while still clothed in human flesh. For I, a great sinner, also laboured under this desire to go forth to where I would be able to see where the earth joined the sky, until one night an Angel of the Lord appeared to me in a vision, saying, 'Go no further, lest you presume to tempt the Lord your God.'

"Why may I not go any further, my lord?" I asked.

"It is twenty miles from this place," he replied, "to the paradise which Adam and Eve delighted in. And the Lord placed a Cherub with a whirling fiery sword in front of the garden to guard the tree of life. From his feet to his navel he was shaped like a man, his breast was as the breast of a lion, and the hand that held the sword guarding paradise was like crystal, preventing any approach."

"When the Angel told me this, I asked no more questions, nor did I try to go on any further."

So I, Theophilus, and my brothers, companions on our journey, took in what

the holy man had told us, prostrated ourselves before him, and praised the Lord as we saluted him.

Chapter XVII

When evening came he said to us, "My beloved brothers, come outside the cell and wait for a while. I have two lions who roam about during the day and come back to me in the evening. I would not want you to suffer any harm from them if you were to come upon them unawares."

Somewhat alarmed, we nevertheless went outside with him. Almost immediately two lions came roaring up to the holy man and bowed down before him. He put his hands on their heads, and stroked their necks.

"My little children," he said to them, "These are three brothers who have come to visit us from the outside world. Pray do not do them any harm." Then, adding to us, "Come closer. Don't be afraid."

We were too frightened. We made our apologies and went back inside!

We celebrated the evening office together, after which we dined in silence on nuts and roots and water. In the morning we said to the holy man, "Holy father and master, may we ask your blessedness to tell us the story of your life, where you came from, and what you are called?"

"My name is Macarius, my most beloved sons and brothers," he replied. "I was the son of a Roman citizen, born and bred in the imperial city, and I occupied a prominent and flourishing position in the city's affairs. As soon as I had left boyhood behind me, my father married me to a wife, much against my will and in spite of all my protests. On the day of my wedding, when the bridal chamber had been prepared, and the bride was ready, and many invited guests were present, and my father was in celebratory mood urging all the guests to enjoy the feasting, which they had begun to do with much dancing and general hilarity, I quietly left, and fled to the house of a widow who was a family friend. I remained hidden there for the next seven days, during which she daily visited my parents' home, listening to everything that was said about my wickedness, and telling me all about it when she came back.

"My father searched everywhere for me without any success, and wept greatly, as did my mother and all the family. On the eighth day, Sunday night, I said goodbye to that widow and went out onto the public highway, where I found a venerable white-haired gentleman, dressed as if ready for a walk.

"What direction are you going in, senior sancte?" I asked, after greeting him.

"Wherever you like," he replied, turning to look at me. "I am quite happy to go

with you. Everyone in town knows about my journeyings.'

"Reassured by this, I gladly went with him. From then on we stayed in whatever house was close at hand, and we gladly accepted what bread we could beg. After walking for many days we came to the place of torment and narrow pathways through which you say that you have likewise travelled. When we had gone thirty miles from that place, my companion suddenly disappeared as we were sitting down, in the middle of a conversation we were having. I was thrown into a turmoil, not knowing where to turn next, and flung myself on the ground, weeping bitterly. And suddenly he reappeared in a flash of light!

"Don't be worried, my beloved friend,' he said. 'I am the angel Raphael, and I have been sent to help you and bring you to this place, on the orders of the Most High. The Lord has been watching over your journey. You have passed through the place of darkness, the place of torments and the place of punishment, and you have now come out into the light. So fear not, rise up and continue your journey.'

"And again, he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared."

Chapter XIX

"With renewed strength I rose and began to walk on. I saw a wild ass some way off and I cried out to him.

"Greetings, in the name of Christ who created you! Show me the way in which I should go.'

"He ran quickly up to me and turned off in front of me into a small and narrow pathway. I followed him and walked along with him for two days. On the third day I saw in the distance a stag of astonishing size. When the wild ass saw it he was frightened and ran back away from me, leaving me alone in a confined place, with no clear way ahead. I shouted out to the stag.

"If you have been sent to help me, I conjure you in the name of God to show me the pathway.'

"He came up to me as gently as any domestic animal, and turned off into a narrow mountain pass, turning round to look at me from time to time. We went for three days like this. Then on the fourth day we came up against an immense and terrifying dragon, spread out in the middle of the way ahead. The stag suddenly fled as soon as he saw it. I felt very frightened, and fell to the ground. Then, strengthened in the Lord, I arose, protected myself with the sign of the holy Cross, and spoke to the dragon.

"In the fear of God Almighty, harm me not!"

"It raised itself up to its full terrifying height and spoke to me in a human voice.

"Come, blessed man, for you are Macarius, the servant of God most high. The holy angel Raphael has described your face and figure to me, and given me strict orders to meet you and lead you to the place that God has prepared for you. It is now the fourth day that I have been waiting here for you without eating anything. But this very night I had a vision of you sitting in the midst of a shining cloud, and I heard a voice coming from above, saying, "Hurry, meet up with Macarius, the servant of God, who is almost here, as I foretold." So arise, follow me, nothing doubting; come, and I will show you the place in which you may pour out your praises to God.'

"Having said this he then changed into the appearance of a young man, and led me to this cave where we now are. We had no sooner entered it than he disappeared.

Chapter XX

"At the back of the cave this miserable sinner then saw two lion cubs, with their mother lying dead beside them. I dragged her outside and buried her, and gave thanks to God and glorified him for doing so many marvels in my sight, and freed me from so many tight corners. I picked branches from the trees to make a bed for the two little lions to stretch out on, and cared for them as if they were my own sons. And so we lived in peace together for two years.

"And then the devil, who never rests in his envy of the human race, attacked me with his snares. For one day at about the seventh hour, as it was getting really warm, I went outside the cave and saw a most beautifully worked headscarf lying on the ground. It was a real delight to the eyes. I thought to myself, 'How does this headscarf come to be here in this wilderness?'

Thinking that it really was a headscarf, I forgot to protect myself with the sign of the Cross, miserable wretch that I am, for the sacrosanct sign of the Cross is proof against all the phantasms of the enemy. I reached out my hand, picked it up and took it back into the cave.

"Next day as I went out I found a pair of women's shoes lying on the ground, and even then I did not begin to suspect that this might be the work of the devil. I did not protect myself under the banner of the Cross, but picked up the shoes and took them into the cave, where I laid them down next to the headscarf.

"When I went out on the third day, I found the devil standing there in the shape of a woman, wearing the most beautiful clothes, and I miserably still did not recognise the snares of the devil, nor did I sign myself, but spoke to her, in the belief that it really was a woman.

"Where have you come from?' I asked her. 'And who could have guided you to this wilderness?'

"She just kept on weeping bitterly, and I like an idiot began to weep with her out of sympathy.

"Most holy father,' she at last managed to say. 'I am the most wretched daughter of a Roman citizen who decided to marry me against my wishes and will to a certain noble young Roman, and the wedding day came, and the bridal couch was prepared and the feasting begun, when the bridegroom suddenly disappeared in the midst of it all. There was great consternation all round, they searched for him in this place and that place in a terrible state of turmoil. Meanwhile, I was glad, and secretly left home, began my journey that same night, and without any guide travelled through those same narrow mountains and valleys until I arrived here.'

"I believed everything I had heard. I believed she was my intended bride, and I took her by the hand and led her into the cave, during which time she never ceased weeping. I was sorry for her misery and tears and grieved deeply for her. I made her sit down beside me and offered her some nuts to eat. I had no suspicion as yet that this was all the work of the devil, and of course I had not protected myself with the sign of the Cross. We had a long conversation as we sat side by side. Then I began to feel as tired as if I had been working hard, and she began to caress me all over with her hands, and I felt even more overcome by sleep. To cut a long story short, wretch that I am, I who had never before agreed to sin with a woman, came to the realisation that I had committed sin with her in my sleep. For suddenly waking from sleep, I found myself lying on the ground, unclothed as if I had been with a woman, although by now she was nowhere to be seen.

(Also St Posthumius further down this page)

Chapter XXI

"At last I knew I was the unhappy victim of the devil's tricks. I rushed out of the cave, beating my breast and pouring forth floods of tears. My companions, the lions, must have realised my sinfulness, for they both fled from my sight. When I saw them go, I began to call devoutly upon the mercy of Christ, with great grief and lamentation, begging that he might order them back again, if only I might be given a rule of penance. And immediately the most merciful Father allowed me to do penance and called the lions to come back straight away.

"They came back with me into the cave and they dug a hole in the earth as long as a human being, into which I lay down and I ordered the lions to bury in that place up to the neck. I spent three years buried in that trench. During a very heavy rainstorm the roof of the cave suddenly gave way over my head, and I could see light. I put my hand outside and was able to feel the herbs which I could pick and eat.

"After three years the lions came back, and seeing the light shining round me they dug away the earth which was covering me, and I came out totally healed in body, and feeling all my pristine virtue restored. I glorified my Lord Jesus Christ, went outside the cave, knelt on the ground and stayed there without moving for forty days and forty nights, praising and praying to God, and giving him thanks for the great gifts of mercy which he ever shows to us sinners.

Chapter XXII

"At the ending of those forty days I went inside the cave and behold, the four corners of the cave shone brilliantly with a heavenly light and I saw the human form of our Saviour Christ, holding a golden rod in his hand, and singing a marvellous song in the sweetest of voices, and the voice was as loud and strong as if it were the voice of a thousand. When the heavenly voice of the singer had come to an end, suddenly a voice proclaimed three times: 'Amen, and forever, Amen'. At that moment the Saviour left the cave and ascended up to heaven, and a tall pillar of fire came down into the cave like an extensive cloud. There were thunderings and dazzling lightnings, and I heard all the birds of the air singing each in its way, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord our God'. When I saw and heard the immensity of the vision I was terrified.

Caught up into an ecstasy, I fell to the ground and remained there for eight days, and then I understood how Christ our Lord, the Saviour of the world, had gone into the cave and blessed it.

"I then went into the cave and began to make reparation for my ignorance and negligence, praising and glorifying Christ our Saviour and redeemer and creator of all, who had borne with me so patiently, and led me to penitence, and finally had shown me such great mercy. These things all happened when I had been in the cave seven years at the age of forty.

"See now, my beloved sons, I have given you a true account of my life. Now think, if you are able to withstand all the attacks of the wicked enemy, stay here with me. But if not, go back to the monastery from which you came, and may the Lord be with you on your journey."

Chapter XXIII

Having listened to what the holy man of God had told us we fell to the ground and glorified the Lord who alone does great marvels, and replied to Macarius, the holy servant of God.

"Most blessed father Macarius, pray for us to the Lord that we may be able to return to our monastery and spread the tale of your holy life throughout all the churches of Christ, for we believe that it was for this very purpose that the Lord guided us to you."

The old man then poured out prayer for us for a long time, and blessed us all and embraced us, and commended us to Christ that he might direct our ways in peace. Then he handed us over into the care of the two lions, giving them instructions that they were to guide us as far as the place of darkness, where the darkness had encompassed us for seven days and seven nights. Macarius, the holy servant of Christ, bade us farewell, and we quickly came back to the arch of Alexander, where the lions saluted us and with hurried steps returned to the servant of God.

Chapter XXIV

By the favour of Christ we continued on our journey without any difficulty, and entering the land of the Persians came to that wonderful plain called Assia where the holy Mercurius had killed the apostate Julian. We entered the city of Kitissifodo, the place of the three children, not far from Babylon. We crossed the river Tigris, and on the fifteenth day arrived at Jerusalem and prayed at the sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ and at all the other holy places, pouring out

thanks to Christ the Saviour of all who had preserved us in safety both going and coming. Leaving there we swiftly arrived back in our monastery and found our hegumen and all our brothers safe and well. We told them in due course all the wonders we had seen and heard, the merciful acts of the Lord, and the life and doings of the most blessed Macarius. They praised and glorified God for everything they heard, singing hymns to God the Father Almighty, and his only begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour, and the lifegiving Spirit who enlightens our souls, three persons in one God, who lives and reigns to be blessed and praised everywhere, now and always, and through deathless ages of ages. Amen

Life No 14

The Life of the blessed Posthumius,
the father of five thousand monks.
by an unknown author

Prologue

As with great longing you have ever desired to hear about what is holy, so we have a duty of care in this respect, lest the times are passed over in silence. So therefore we cannot stay silent about the works of the Lord, unceasingly shown forth in his servants. First and foremost, then, you should be told about the holy servant of God, Posthumius, and the manner in which God deigned to call him into his grace, according to the accounts given by those who witnessed the unfolding of his life. It has been my care to provide these writings for your delight, inasmuch as the Lord is able to manifest the mysteries of his kingdom to those who believe in him, even through the efforts of untutored rustics such as myself.

The Life

Chapter I

Posthumius was a native of Memphis, of noble birth, blameless in childhood, unskilled in letters, unaffected by all the pernicious doctrines of the Egyptians, as never having had any truck with the delusions of that race. He was a weaver of ropes, and did not frequent the company of other young people, so

never at any time shared in the fripperies of public society, dancing was never something that attracted him. Throughout the whole of his life obscene language never proceeded out of his mouth, and his heart was completely free from avarice. Even while still living in the world he never gazed at young women, and lying was something he avoided with all this strength. He expressed hatred for neither neighbour nor stranger. At all times he preserved peace in his soul.

Chapter II

He had reached the age of thirty-seven living like this, when it pleased God to call him out of the corruption of sin into the incorruption of eternal life. For an angel of the Lord appeared to him as he was weaving his ropes.

"Posthumius," called the angel.

"What is it?" he asked.

"What is that in your hand?"

"A rope I am weaving."

"Do you know the most high God who is in heaven?"

"Sir, I have no notion of a god in heaven. I am a simple rustic with no learning. I have been plying my trade from my infancy up, and have never had the opportunity of learning anything from people who live in cities. I have always avoided company."

"Pray to God and he will give you both wisdom and knowledge."

"I don't know how to pray to God. I wouldn't know what to say."

The Angel took a laurel leaf, wrote the words of a prayer on it and gave it to Posthumius.

"Eat this," he said, "and it will taste as bitter as gall. But it will fill your heart with prayers for wisdom, give you an outline of prayer and sound doctrine."

Posthumius took it and ate it, and it was bitter to his mouth. But then his heart was filled with sweetness, and he mightily magnified the Lord. We may truly believe that what was happening to him was the same as what happened to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3.3) and the apostle John (Revelation 10.9), who ate and were filled with wisdom and prophecy.

Chapter III

The angel of the Lord then touched the lips of Posthumius. The bitterness was dispelled and his tongue spoke of the mighty works of God.

"Posthumius," the Angel then said, "Kneel on the ground and face the East,

and what you must pray will be given to you by God."

Posthumius knelt on the ground and faced towards the East, and he was filled with prayer.

"I will bless you, O Lord God Almighty, king of heaven, who make your name known to those who know you not. Your name is made manifest through our Lord Jesus Christ, your son, who gathers to himself a people called out every nation. To bring succour to the world bowed down with its burdens, you did not spare your only-begotten son, for the sake of the salvation of the human race. Through him, by your mercy, I pray that you may show light to them that sit in darkness. You know, O Lord, that I have no store of words, and yet you have given me the gift of being able to speak to you, and you have taught me what I should pray for. For I know in myself, O Lord my God, that verily the blind see, the deaf hear, the tongues of the dumb are loosed, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the poor have the gospel preached to them, and sinners are called to repentance. (Matthew 11.5).

"Who am I that you should be mindful of me? How is it that my weakness has prevailed in your sight that you have come and sought me? Wherefore I pray now that you may wash me from the stains of those sins which belong to the misery of my natural state. They have long oppressed me, for I lived in unfaithfulness, brought up by my parents to live in the manner of the gentiles like a dumb beast. You have sent me your Angel and struck my thigh (Genesis 32.25), you have opened up my heart of stone. Woe to him who keeps silent about you, for he shall suffer for ever in the burning fire. I have learned in a brief moment that there is no joy for the ungodly in your sight, nor relief for the wicked after death, for unless they turn to you they cannot be saved. But since it has seemed good to you that I should not be lost, O Lord the redeemer of my lowliness, lead me into even better things yet, that I may fully know Jesus my Lord and Saviour who is one with you, who is blessed for ever."

This is the first prayer that holy Posthumius made, through which the angel of the Lord led him into the path of seeking for true faith.

Chapter IV

Posthumius eagerly expected that the angel of the Lord would visit him again. He trusted and hoped that the Lord would always favour him in this way. And behold, a few days later, as he was twisting ropes from rushes as usual, the angel of the Lord came in to him.

"Hail, Posthumius," he said, as Posthumius rose to his feet in awe. "Is it your

will that I should take you to a priest of God who will baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit?"

"O my lord, holy messenger of God," replied Posthumius, "that is the great joy that I desire above all else, for you would be teaching me the fulness of the pathways of God, and how to bring to perfection the works of supernatural grace."

The angel of the Lord seized him by the hair of his head and carried him off to a certain holy man called Priscus, who feared God.

"Teach this man about the way and wisdom and knowledge of the Lord," the angel said to Priscus, "and baptise him in the name of the Father, Son and holy Spirit."

The priest of the Lord was delighted to hear this, though he did not at first realise that it was an angel of the Lord who was introducing him, until the Angel was suddenly transformed before his very eyes into a splendid figure of beauteous countenance, clothed in shining white garments. The priest of God was afraid, and flung himself to the ground, but the Angel immediately raised him up.

"Fear not," the Angel said, "I am the guardian of you and of all your brothers. It was necessary that you should be shown the glory of our God (Apocalypse 22.16), so that you should learn how to teach this man the word of the Lord and enlighten him about the path of salvation, so that he might live for ever with the Lord."

Having spoken thus, he departed from them.

Chapter V

Bishop Priscus took Posthumius into his care and taught him about fasting. He laid his hands on him and enrolled him as a catechumen, and very soon taught him the meaning of the Sacrament and baptised him. At his baptism he was filled with the holy Spirit, and spoke this prayer:

"I give you thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ, that through your holy Spirit you have deigned to reconcile me to God the Father, and have redeemed me from death and the eternal punishment prepared for those who do not believe in you and who are burdened with the weight of their own sins. For the sins from which you have happily delivered me were heavier than lead, and I rejoice in being freed from all my iniquities and my bondage to them. Truly there is no respect of persons with God (Acts 10.34), and his mercies are manifold. How could I, unworthy as I am, become part of your new creation unless you

touched me with your heavenly finger? You have come swiftly to my aid; you have overthrown the hostile law reigning in my members, and cleansed me by water and the rebirth of the holy Spirit. There is a renewed spirit giving voice in me, who for such a long time have lain prostrate among the lost sheep.

"I rejoice in having been enrolled under the sign of a great name, like a soldier assigned by grace to the following of an Emperor. Dumb, I have been given a voice, and I long to bear witness to your children in a hymn of praise, for you have brought me out of captivity. In your wisdom you have sought out the foolish, you have brought life, you have refreshed the needy, you have brought the dead back to life, you have called me from afar to approach your majesty; although a stranger to the fellowship of Israel, by the grace of Christ you have willed me to be one with the Communion of Saints. Therefore I cleave to you. and when you have taught me how I shall sing psalms to your name, I shall sing and bless your name for ever and unto the ages of ages."

Chapter VI

At the time when Posthumius was baptised he was quite unlettered, but he grew in the name of the Lord with increased faith and virtue from day to day. He was on fire with a zeal for brotherly love, and bound himself to all the brothers in the bonds of humility. He keenly felt the demands of love, and sought out all the brothers who were members at that time of the local churches. He learned how to sing the psalms, he chastised his body with fasting, day and night he prayed to God. He dined on the herbs of the field, his drink was cold water. He covered his body with a hair shirt and tired himself out by running about in the desert in order to subdue his body. He considered it a sin to neglect any part of his routine. He avoided idle speech, he learned how to bend his ear to the divine books. He detested all bad language. He was a model of purity in all his prayer.

He ceased not from weeping, and when as often happened he suffered from the attacks of demons he found safety in the fortress of prayer. To avoid over indulgence in sleep and to avoid pandering to his mortal limbs, he would sleep for a little while on stony ground, and when the hardness of his bed made his body ache he would get up and continue with the work of God. He allowed himself bread and water in due measure, but never got up from the table with a full stomach or with his thirst completely quenched, for he said it was not fitting to obey all the demands of the body. He practised obedience and taught it, and he bore patiently and humbly with people who were angry or proud.

When Satan tried with his wiles to divert him from his purpose, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and immediately knew that help from above was there for him. Right through to old age he continued his way of life as he had begun it. To the very end, he used these methods of practising contempt of the body. If ever he was afflicted with a fever or severely tormented by stomach pains he did not give way to his illness. He would not look for extra warmth, or lessen his fasting, for he said that if he pandered to his body with hot meals he might lose the redemption of his soul from the Lord. But if ever he was so severely ill as to lose all the strength of his legs so that he was not physically capable of getting up to keep vigil, he still did not cease to pray and sing psalms as he lay. If his tongue was dried up with thirst he felt uncomfortable in his inmost being, lest the devil, the soul's enemy, should rejoice, and a holy man of God should be found negligent in the work of God. But when he seemed to be permanently distracted by such thoughts he went to the bishop who baptised him, and asked for his blessing to go out into the most hidden parts of the desert without taking any food with him, and stay there for a long period of time to meet the numerous attacks of the demons. And the Lord, who had converted this venerable man from the world, fortified his heart to be able to withstand all the demons' craftiness.

Chapter VII

Posthumius' way of life became known to blessed Antony's disciple, the holy Macarius, who began to hold his name in such high regard that it seemed good to him to go and visit him in the desert. Now this same Macarius had been left in charge of Antony's monks. There were almost fifty thousand of them, disciples of that illustrious man. Macarius knew that the time of his departure from this world was drawing near, and he was wondering whom he might ask to take charge of this flock of the Lord after his death.

When the holy Macarius met the holy Posthumius he took him gladly to his heart, not least because he had heard of his reputation from an Angel. He had not come merely for the sake of making a visit, but to make an assessment of his character. And Macarius found Posthumius' whole way of life very pleasing, and began to suggest to him that it might be a good idea for him to come and see the legacy of the holy Antony, prince of anchorites. Posthumius had no desire to go there at all, and resisted the idea with all his strength, but when he was warned in a dream to go without delay, he found himself unable to deny the divine majesty any longer. So in the company of Macarius he

undertook the journey and came to that vast company of monks, governed by Macarius alone, who, as we have often said, had been the one to bury the body of the master after his soul had been called out of this world.

Now that he could see the end of his own life in this world approaching he called the holy Posthumius to talk to him.

"Look, brother, the time of my departure is at hand. I have heard of your good reputation, and as my general debility increases I have come to believe that the end of my old age will be of great relevance to you. You have done well to come here with me. Now take up the governance of this flock of God with paternal love. Don't ask whether it will be useful to you, but rather whether it will benefit the salvation of many (1 Corinthians 10.33). Do not run the risk of losing the grace of that honourable reward which you will receive from the Lord in due season."

The holy Posthumius fell down at his feet.

"Dearly beloved father," he said, "How can you think of placing on me the care of this great multitude? I am only an unlearned rustic. Seek out men of merit who are better fitted than I to care for the souls of so many people."

"I am not listening to your excuses," said Macarius. "I do not accept them as valid. All these men will be under your direction, for there is no other man of such great abstinence with the capability of guiding the souls of these people, and dealing sympathetically with them. Beloved brother, I can assure you that the Lord himself by his own choice has named you as being the one to take over the ministry in this place. And there is no way that I can countermand the decrees of heaven."

Chapter VII (continued) Life of St Posthumius, Book Ib

Posthumius could find nothing to say in reply to this, and even as he was turning all this over in his mind, Macarius gave up his spirit. Crowds of people soon gathered for his funeral rites.

Crowds singing psalms, others singing many different kinds of hymns, but all singing praises to God as if with one voice, until his body was carried to the

sepulchre to be buried. There was no one completely overwhelmed by grief at Macarius having left the monastery so suddenly, for the Lord had provided Posthumius, someone like Macarius, to take up the governance of his flock.

Chapter VIII

Three days later Posthumius prayed to be given a fountain of pure teaching through Jesus Christ in the holy Spirit, which he might be able to pass on wisely to that great multitude. After a further three days, the Angel who had converted him came as usual, and confirmed him as the teacher and ruler of the monastery in that place from which Macarius had departed. He gave him a schedule of spiritual precepts and departed. Posthumius gathered all the brothers together and opened his mouth to teach them.

"My little children," he said, "hear the word which the Lord has spoken to you. It is his will that he should fill our minds with a clear Rule containing precepts of justice and love. I speak to you as a father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God. I have received these prescriptions from the hand of an Angel, so that for your edification I can speak to you about all the things which have been poured out into my heart. Listen carefully, then. The commands which come from my mouth are the commands of God."

1. Obedience to the seniors

The first rule of community living is that obedience should always be given to those in authority.

2. Chaste fear

The second is that those who live under the rule should serve the Lord in fear and purity.

3. Temperance

The third is that you should live in this world in a spirit of temperance, godliness and justice.

4. Bodily discipline

The fourth is that you should discipline your body in everything, in order to promote the salvation of your soul by fasting and the mortification of the flesh. These are good works which you should delight in.

5. Frequent prayer

The fifth is that you should constantly be directed towards prayer, since the Apostle tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5.17). Praying and fasting, we shall keep the gifts of faith constantly in remembrance, and be able

to overcome the plentiful presence of the demons.

6. Humility

The next deals with the sort of error which leads to the downfall of the soul, that is, beware of the evil of pride in all that you do. It was pride that cast the angel out of heaven in the foundation of the world, and we know that pride is the root of every other sin. To drive it out of our thoughts, pray always to God that he may clothe you with humility.

7. Flee Worldliness

Another deadly infestation in the flesh is the temptation to worldliness, the root of all monastic vices.

8. The bonds of Charity

Above all keep hold of the bond of charity among yourselves, and in unswerving faith never lose hope of hastening towards the kingdom of the God of eternity. The aim of monastic discipline is the pursuit of perfect love. These chains of charity and peace adorn the soul and are completely devoid of self-seeking. Therefore sincere love is all that is needed in this life, for those who love each other are called the children of the kingdom. Those who have perfect love are they who are spotless and eat bread in the kingdom of God (Luke 14.15). You will be perfect, therefore, if charity sets you on fire as a pure sacrifice, with zeal, seasoned with gentleness. The Lord Jesus will rejoice in you, for you have faithfully carried out what he has commanded. For the first of the laws laid down at Mount Sinai and given to Moses was: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul (Deuteronomy 6.5). And the second: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Leviticus 19.18). There can be no love of God without love of neighbour. The plain truth of this precept is that the rule of charity should reign in every part of your body. Then will your love be fulfilled if you have laid the yoke of obedience on everything you purpose doing.

9. Obedience to each other

Obedience must be held in great honour in the community. It will profit you nothing, my little children, if you love each other but are not obedient to each other. Love without obedience causes dissension and weakens the conscience. Just as weeds prevent the seed from bringing forth fruit, so does disobedience render fasting in vain, nor does prayer bring forth any fruit. So then, let anyone who desires to live in unity and share a common mind consider these commandments as being of major importance. And let anyone who is as yet far from perfection carry out what he can glean from the writings of the

fathers. If a brother carrying a load on his back finds it too heavy for the weight on his shoulders and then, with the abbot present, comes across a pool of water for washing or irrigating, and takes it to be drinking water, he commits a sin if he drinks from it without asking the abbot first. And this is so even if he allows a junior companion with him to drink from it without permission from the abbot. Though he might be burning from the heat of the sun, if the abbot tests him by forbidding him to drink, he commits a sin if he grumbles about it, even if only in his thoughts. Furthermore, if you tread upon a thorn as you walk along, it should not be pulled out unless the abbot says so.

10. The rule for sleeping

Spread your woven vine branches out at a distance from each other. And when you retire to sleep keep a distance of a cubit between each person. For if your bodies are too close to each other it could encourage lascivious thoughts.

11. Keeping vigils

The night office is an especially spiritual work, because the demons hate the light and are busy at night. There is no reason for any seculars to be awoken until the hour for the common prayer of the brothers at cock crow. There is no need for the individual choirs to wake each other for prayer, but let the first person to awake beat his breast so that those still sleeping will also be woken up. Satan often rolls his nocturnal darkness around anyone deep in sleep, so therefore I say to you, my little children, be vigilant for you know not the hour when the thief will come (Matthew 24.43).

12. The Love of God

Strive also to be pleasing to God in the spiritual quality of your life. Let the precepts of the law and the divine commandment to love God be lodged with wisdom in the depths of your heart. You need not be wise in anything other than what the simplicity of the Scriptures of God enjoin. There are many who have other ideas about God and fall away from the love of him and the love of one's neighbour. People like this should heed what the prophet Baruch says about the 'peace of righteousness and the glory of godliness' (Baruch 5.4).

When God sees the brotherly love exercised by his people to be without blemish then he makes them all to become partakers of the friendship of God. Wherefore those who love God in the glory of doing a good work perform a good work also in rendering null and void any love of this world in each other. They declare that any thoughts coming from the devil into the hearts of the servants of God are profane, and their desire is to live like anchorites in so far as they deny the body even while still living in this world. It is the things of

heaven they delight in, they no longer seek after the things of earth, for they have thrown down the foundations of secular darkness and trampled them underfoot.

13. Speech tempered with salt

Since you are fashioned to enjoy the kingdom of heaven it is fitting that you please the Creator by maintaining your virginity in mind and body, guarding the fruits of your faith and the tenor of your speech as carefully as possible. It is a shameful thing that anyone might have cause to accuse a monk either in small matters or in great. We must be above reproach; as the Apostle teaches, let your speech always be tempered with salt (Colossians 4.6). This is the seasoning which the Evangelist means when he says, 'You are the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5.13). I beg you not to let it depart from you, lest in departing from you it be cast out of the congregation and reviled by the tongues of the enemy.

14. Avoiding slander

I beg you, my little children, according to the programme which I received from the Angel's hands, to have no truck with the ungodly who speak evil, who without cause are forever attacking the Church of Christ with their biting tongues.

15. The avoidance of dissension

Cast out from your midst any disagreements you may have with one another, for you know that our Lord is not a Lord of disagreement but of peace. If a brother, at the suggestion of the devil, has a grievance against another brother, let him put it out of his mind in faith and obedience. Remember it is not I who say this, but God who has taught me by the hand of his messenger.

16. Hospitality to pilgrims in obedience to superiors

If you wish to give evidence of your obedience to superiors, show hospitality to strangers and obey the precepts of the Lord (Hebrews 13.2).

17. Avoiding anger

The soldier of God should in no circumstances show anger, either to his brothers or to outsiders.

18. Avoiding contention

Whatever the occasion, let no one presume to pass judgment on any secular servant of God, for there is a distance to be kept between us and them. Do not allow anyone to go to law with you; it is better for a monk to suffer deceit and injustice than that the voice of a soldier of Christ be raised in anger.

19. Business dealings not suitable for monks

It is not right for a monk to take part in business deals for the sake of making money. Rather he should be bargaining for the rewards of heavenly benefits. Let him promote the word of salvation, let him persuade souls into heaven, let him overcome the competition from worldly desire. For a Christian heart of any sort is triumphant, especially the heart of a servant of God. By the exercise of the divine power of prayer it puts out of business the diabolic deceiver of souls.

20. The demon put to flight by the sign of the Cross, prayer, fasting, recourse to God.

If a demon fills you with dread, run to the shelter of the Cross. He will be put to flight immediately. His wiles are not proof against frequent prayer and fasting. My little children, you need have no cause for alarm if whole armies of demons assail you; the numerous ranks of Angels are able to come to your aid. When crowds of demons seem to be growing in strength, cast your eyes up to heaven and say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, help me for I am weak'. When the servant of the prophet Elisha was frightened by those coming to attack them from Samaria, the prophet said, 'Open the eyes of your servant, Lord that he may see, for those who are for us are more than those against us' (2 Kings 6.17). Even so, the legions of the angels of God will come to your aid, and strengthen your faith.

Chapter IX

"These are the commandments, my little children. If they are lodged in your hearts, however weak, I have explained how they are weapons against the devil. I would not want to have passed over in silence the attacks he brings to bear on us, so that you are able to resist his malice.

"Once when I was sitting on a mountainside, an enormous army of soldiers came towards me. When I saw them in the distance I immediately recognised them as angels of Satan. But I cast all terror aside, fell to the ground on my knees and prayed to God that they might go away, calling upon the Lord my redeemer. And that approaching throng, like straw caught up by the wind, was suddenly brought to naught. So I gave thanks to the Lord through our Lord Jesus Christ who quickly brought me victory in the contest, and straightaway heard my prayer. I have been attacked over and over again, but the Lord has saved me out of all. Therefore, my little children, be constant, for the Lord is eager to set us free. Love the Lord, therefore, and hate the malignant enemy, and the God of mercy will be with you, that you may escape from his

treachery. Amen."

Life No 15, Book Ib

Life No 15

The Life of St Frontonius, abbot,
author unknown

Prologue

You have often asked me to tell you about holy things, which I have been quite willing to do. So I have decided to provide an outline of a temple of God, about people no longer clothed in sheepskins, but who are now clothed in gold and silver and precious gems, so that we also, as living stones, may be built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2.5), by profiting in Jesus Christ our Lord from the examples of those who are better than us. I am, of course, talking about what was done in the Nitrian desert, and I will not miss out any of the truths by which this present little work may serve as edification for monks.

The Life

Chapter I

Frontonius, then, was a true servant of God, and as he progressed from day to day in the fear of God he became less and less at ease with public community life and grew in desire for the trackless desert. He called about seventy like minded people to him, and said to them:

"What have we got in common with this sordid world, whose works it is only right for us to renounce in order that we might follow a path to heaven? So, taking nothing with us, let us go to the desert to seek for the glory of heaven, and practice a higher discipline of virtuous living."

They all agreed with what he said, and went forth to the desert taking with them a few olive tree seeds, and forks and hoes to till the ground.

"The Lord says in the Gospel," Frontonius said, "'Take no thought what you shall eat or what you shall drink or what you shall wear, for all the nations of the world seek after these things, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6.31-33)

Let us hold fast to that promise, and we shall find that the work of the Lord will be fulfilled in us."

So they all dwelt in the desert, labouring constantly in the work of the Lord, and the Lord came to the aid of his servants as they progressed in the spiritual struggle. Frontonius himself prayed not only on his own behalf but on behalf of all, knowing that it was written, 'Not seeking after what is profitable for me alone but what is for the salvation of many' (1 Corinthians 10.33).

Chapter II

After they had lived in the desert for quite some time, the enemy of Christians began to tempt them, making them think that they ought to go back to the world, for the Anchoretic life was too severe and more than anyone should have to put up with, and they murmured in their hearts.

"What is the point," they asked, "of living in the desert as our father Frontonius wants us to do? Can't those who live in towns and walled cities see God? Are desert-dwellers the only ones to see him? Don't their good actions speak for them? Who can exist on the bread of Angels? Here are we, dying of hunger. The hard work of vigils does not get done, we are weakened by over severe fasting, our knees are so weak that we can hardly stand."

Chapter III

Frontonius was aware of their murmuring, but before they came to him to say anything he got in first.

"Why are you angering God," he said, "by murmuring among yourselves, questioning whether desert-dwellers are the only ones to see God, and saying that it is impossible to exist on the bread of Angels? You have been planning to come to me as abbot, asking to live in the city, where people could see us, and as a sacrifice to God supply us with food to eat, according to how much each one of them is inspired by God. But know this: the Lord does not slay the soul of the righteous by hunger, for the eyes of the Lord are always over those who fear him and he keeps them alive in famine (Psalms 33.18-19). And have you forgotten what the Apostle says: 'In hunger and thirst' (2 Corinthians 11.27)? But living here in the desert you have never lacked root vegetables to eat, and you have not always been fasting.

"So remember what has been said to you before: 'Take no thought what you shall eat or what you shall drink or what you shall wear, for all the nations of the world seek after these things. The Lord knows how to give food to those who fear him. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6.31-33). If the Lord feeds the

crows and all winged creatures, how shall he not feed those who bear his yoke and pray to him constantly? If we were really dying from hunger in the desert, then we might run to him accusingly and say: 'We believed in your Gospel where you said that you would give bread from heaven to all who believed in you. We have done all you asked, we hoped in you, and now you have just deserted us. But if you have just been testing us, now prove yourself to be truthful and fulfil your promises.' So don't go on murmuring against God, lest you perish from serpents as our fathers did in this desert (Numbers 21.6). If you wait on the Lord he will give good things to those who fear him when he wills."

These words stilled their murmuring a little, for they had been in deep gloom.

Chapter IV

Now I have promised to deal briefly with everything in my own untutored way, and cover all the things which it would be right to include under that heading, and, in a little book like this, to run through all the opinions and arguments in simple speech such as any Reader might be able to understand. So let us go back to the reason why this work was begun, and show that I don't claim any credit for it.

Chapter V

An Angel came to a certain rich person one night and said:

"You dine in rich splendour, but my servants in the desert lack bread. Rise then at daybreak and take some food to my servants out of all that I have given you. I have given you the task of feeding this flock of mine. You have always been filled with awe at the blessings which heaven has poured out on you; I have never deserted you. It is my pleasure therefore that you should refresh by your almsgiving my poor people living a spiritual life in the desert, who have entrusted themselves to me as their Lord. So you must tell them that I speak to you as one sent from the Lord. Unless you do this you will spoil your peaceful accord with the Lord your God."

Chapter VI

In some trepidation he rose from sleep, and went out in the morning to call together some faithful friends and some of his trusted servants.

"I had fallen asleep in bed last night," he said to them, "when suddenly a messenger appeared who said: 'You dine in rich splendour, but my servants in

the desert lack bread. Rise then at daybreak and take some food to my servants out of all that I have given you. I have given you the task of feeding this flock of mine'. I would very much like to send them some food, but I don't know where these servants of God are. I am very eager to do what I have been asked, but who can tell me where I should go? I must be obedient to the Angel, and therefore to God. You are all people of some standing. Surely you can tell me where they are."

But nobody could tell him, because the monks lived in an unknown part of the mountain, and nobody knew where it was.

Chapter VII

The next night that rich man was subjected to a much more threatening visit. He was buffeted severely and censured, and once more urged to take food to the servants of God. Again he rose up at daybreak and consulted his friends. "If you can't tell me where these servants of God are," he said, "then ask around from other people."

He accompanied his request with floods of tears, and showed them the bruises which he had suffered at the hands of the Angel that night. But still nobody was able to tell him where the servants of God dwelt. Then one of his friends, wiser than the rest, came up with an idea.

"If you are willing to accept my advice, my dear friend," he said, "perhaps you might find this idea useful. You have got seventy camels. Load them up with all kinds of provisions which you know that the servants of God would eat, and drive the camels out on to the highway with no one in charge of them. If what you have been told really comes from God you can be sure that you will get your camels back again safely. But if this turns out to have been a blow directed against you by the devil, you will just have to accept humbly that this time you have been whipped by the devil, to avoid you having to suffer an even more severe fate. If you don't like this idea, see if you can find someone else with a better one."

The rich man and his companions thought this idea was a good one. So they loaded up sixty camels with food that the servants of God would be able to eat, except that five of them carried loads of animal fodder.

"Whoever comes across them," they said, albeit with some anxiety, "when they examine the loads and see the fodder, will surely take pity on the beasts and feed them."

They tied all the beasts one behind the other with leading ropes, and tearfully

sent them on their way, committing them into the care of the Lord, trusting that if this was of God they would come back safely. There was to be no one in charge if them.

Chapter VIII

After going out of the city gates a servant loosed hold of the leading camel. Followed by the rest of them the leading camel moved into the neighbourhood of the mountains, totally unaccompanied. I doubt, however, that the camels could have arrived where they did by such a direct route unless the messenger of the Lord had gone before them (as we later understood). For, as we were later told, on the fourth day, as the brothers were doing the work of God at the ninth hour, the leading camel came and knelt down outside the monastery door. The brothers could not hear the sound of the camel's little bell for the noise of the hymns they were singing. But the abbot was placed near the gateway, and he was the first to notice them, to his overwhelming joy. The entrance to the monastery was quite a narrow one, and it was the abbot, because of his authority, who was in charge of the doors. But placed as he was in the midst of the other brothers, he said nothing until the singing had finished. Then, in almost indecent haste, he called out to the brothers. "Where is your murmuring now?" he cried. "See, the Lord has speedily sent us food from on high. He has issued his commands to some wise person and sent us these laden camels. Come, let's unload them and give these weary beasts some relief."

They all rejoiced with an exceeding great joy, and all together gave thanks to God, as they happily unloaded the camels. As they unloaded five of the camels they found the loads of animal fodder. They washed the animals' feet, and using the saddles for mangers, they fed them out of the food which they had brought with them. The animals had been able to find some food from vegetation as they were following their tortuous route through the mountains, so they were refreshed by several different kinds of food.

Chapter IX

Next morning, the abbot chose the wise course of not giving way to greed, and divided the food into two. He reloaded the camels with one portion, giving an equal weight to each one, so that none of them was disadvantaged, and gave thanks to the God of all for not giving way to greed, since he was intending to return half the food to the rightful owner of the camels.

Meanwhile, the owner of the camels and his friends were trying to reassure each other about the possible risk the camels were being subjected to, and praying to the Lord that this honourable man would not suffer loss. They were gathered together, fasting, on the eighth day, when one of them who had sensitive ears caught the sound of the tinkling of bells being carried towards them on the breeze. He said nothing at first, until he was sure that it really was bells that he was hearing.

"I think," he then said, "that the sound of bells can be heard coming from up the mountain."

They went outside and saw the camels returning. They were filled with a marvellous joyfulness at being able to congratulate their friend. Whereas before they had been mourning the probable loss or death of the animals, now they were delighted at receiving them back completely unharmed, looking well, and not having lost condition. So the owner took them back with great thanksgiving, and was even more amazed when he examined their loads. He then invited all his friends, as well as a great number of the poor, to a splendid banquet, and distributed to the needy the goods which had come back with the camels. He was given lavish gifts by his friends, blessings which he accepted graciously, giving thanks to the Lord.

Chapter X

From that time onwards, right up till the time of Frontonius' death, he would mark the anniversary of his first consignment by sending another lot of basic foods to the same people. And the Lord inspired other rich people also, so that the servants of God with Frontonius never lacked for anything, but were provided for by the generosity of all. They continued to keep vigil in the work of God, sons with their father who fed them with banquets of spiritual nourishment. He fed them daily with words of heavenly wisdom, rejoicing happily in the Lord who had inspired him with the intention of seeking out this precious place in the trackless desert.

Chapter XI

When you have read this, pass it on, that many monks may be edified. He who not only reads it, but entrusts himself to the servants of God and does likewise, will be even more greatly blessed. For he will receive his reward from Christ Jesus our Lord, who loves those who give alms to the poor and cares for the servants of God with an open heart, to the glory of our Lord

Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.
These things all took place during the time of the Emperor Antoninus, in the
thirteenth year of his reign.
(End of Book 1b.

Life No 16, Book 1c, Barlaam and Josaphat.

Life No 17, Book 1d

The Life of St Eugenia, Virgin and Martyr

[celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on December 25]

by an anonymous author [Rosweyde suggests Ruffinus]

Chapter I

During his seventh consulship the Emperor Commodus [180-192] sent that distinguished man Philip to Egypt as prefect of Alexandria, with supreme authority over all the local administrations throughout the whole of Egypt. He arrived in Alexandria from Rome with his wife Claudia, his two sons, Avitus and Sergius, and his daughter Eugenia. He fulfilled the duties of his prefecture with exemplary Roman thoroughness, and brought the benefit of Roman law to the whole province of Egypt. He imposed a complete ban on all those who followed strange magical rites, forbade the Jews to advertise their presence publicly, and ordered all the Christians out of Alexandria. He himself was more of a student of the philosophers than a worshipper of idols, but he set up all the Roman ceremonies and observed them religiously, not because he believed in them but merely to maintain tradition.

Chapter II

He gave his daughter Eugenia a thorough education in the liberal arts, and having taught her to be fluent in Greek as well as Latin, he then allowed her to study philosophy. She had a very sharp intelligence, and a memory so gifted

that she had only to hear or read anything once in order to grasp the meaning of it and permanently retain it. She was a beautiful girl with a shapely figure, but even more beautiful in her mental capacity, and sweeter still in her love of chastity.

When she was fifteen years old her hand in marriage was sought by Aquilus, the son of Aquilus the consul. Her father asked her if she would be willing to be married to this young man of such a distinguished family, and her reply was that a husband should be chosen on his personal qualities, not on his family.

"It would be him that I was marrying," she said, "not his parents."

Persevering in a path of chastity, she had turned down several suitors, when the teachings of the blessed apostle Paul came into her possession, and although of pagan parents she began from then on to live as a Christian in spirit.

Chapter III

Now since all the Christians had been ordered out of Alexandria, she told her parents she would like to see all their country estates beyond the city limits. Permission was granted and she was soon visiting one of their villas where she was able to hear a group of Christians singing the psalm 'All the gods of the nations are demons, but our God made the heavens' (Psalms 96.5). To hear this made her sigh and weep, and she confided in her two slaves, eunuchs called Protus and Hyacinth.

"I know that you are just as well educated as I am," she said, "and we have studied together the deeds of humanity both good and evil. We have conscientiously worked our way through the syllogisms of the philosophers, put together with such misguided effort. We have studied the arguments of Aristotle and the ideas of Plato, the principles of Epicurus and the counsels of Socrates and the Stoics, but if you could sum it all up as comprising everything the poets have written, everything the orators have proclaimed, and everything the philosophers have thought, it is all counted to be as nothing by this phrase that we have just heard being sung by these dancing Christians, 'All the gods of the nations are demons, but our God made the heavens. Praise and beauty are before him, holiness and majesty belong to his sovereign power' (Psalms 96. 5-6)".

She said the scriptures should be consulted. They read the Apostle and were delighted with the Prophets. They found that they agreed with one another in

faith, and with burning desire decided the means by which they might penetrate into the mysteries of divine knowledge together.

"It is an unfair authority which I have over you as mistress," she said.

"Wisdom makes me your sister. So then, be my brothers, as divine wisdom says we should, not as human considerations dictate. Let's go to the Christians together, and let's hurry, as I suggest. I hear that Helenus, who lives in that place where the praises of God are sung day and night, is what they call a bishop. Whenever we go near them we can hear them singing. But this bishop is said to be fully occupied with various matters to do with the church, and has put a presbyter called Theodore in charge of those who give themselves up to the praise of God. He is credited with many miracles, his prayers give sight to the blind, demons are put to flight and the sick are healed. In their wisdom, however, they don't allow any women into the visitors' area of this congregation, so bearing this in mind I think I should cut my hair off, and wear men's clothing, and decide to go out tomorrow night and perhaps the way to them will be shown to us. You two could walk alongside a basterna, [a small horse-drawn carriage] from which you could let me out while the other slaves are going on in front. We could let the basterna go on empty, and then all three of us could go on, dressed in household livery, and so walk to where the men of God are."

They thought this was a good idea, and the following night they put their plan into action.

Chapter IV

Christ bestows such grace upon those who believe in him! For it so happened that the bishop Helenus was going to this monastery at the same time as they were. Now it is the custom in Egypt that when bishops visit monasteries they are accompanied by a whole army of people singing psalms, so along with Helenus, bishop of Heliopolis, came about ten thousand people singing the psalm 'The way of the righteous is made plain, and a path is prepared for the holy' (Proverbs 2.8). Eugenia turned to her companions.

"Just think of the meaning of what they are singing," she said, "and you will see that their rhythmic psalm applies directly to us! Earlier God's dealings with us led us into an agreement about his word, and we heard that all the gods of the nations are demons but our God made the heavens. And now, see, a path is laid out for us to follow, by means of which we are promised the gift of being able to move away from the cult of idols and come to the worship of

Christ. Look, there are a thousand people coming towards us, singing with one voice, 'The way of the righteous is made plain, and a path is prepared for the holy'. Let's find out where this crowd is going to, and whether it is going to the same place as we are. Let's join this singing crowd, so that we shall be admitted as new arrivals, and so we may learn a bit more."

Chapter V

They joined in with the singers, and asked who it was that was leading them, the only one riding a little donkey in their midst, with people in front of him and behind. They were told that this was indeed bishop Helenus, a Christian from his infancy, who even while growing up as a child in the monastery had advanced so far in the virtues of holiness that when asked to go and fetch fire from a neighbour he carried some burning coals in a fold of his clothing without them doing any harm. [It was a not uncommon practice for children to be entrusted to the care of monks]

"Then again," the tale continued, "a certain magician came among us who tried by the force of his arguments to mislead the people of God. He said the bishop was a deceiver, and that he himself had been sent by Christ as a teacher. He was very cunning and made use of the divine Scriptures to lead the people astray. In the end the whole congregation came to this man, our father, whom you can see among us and said:

"Zareas tells us that he is the one who has been sent by Christ. Set a time when you will either acknowledge him as your equal or else prove to us that he is telling lies, if you can."

"So a day and a place were decided on in the city of Heliopolis. Zareas came with his magic spells, bishop Helenus came with his prayers.

"Now we shall see whose spirit is of God," said Helenus. He turned to Zareas and they began a contest of words, but Zareas was so subtle that he was unable to beat him in any rational argument. He turned to the people and asked for a moment's silence.

"In this contest," he then said, "we should keep to the teaching of St Paul, where he says to his disciple Timothy, "Do not go in for verbal arguments. They are good for nothing except to confuse those who hear them" (2 Timothy 2.14). So lest you should think we are bringing forward this text in fear rather than with due caution, let a fire be lit here in our midst, and let each of us walk into the flames, and let the one who is not burned be accepted as the one whom Christ has sent."

"This was agreeable to everyone, and a large fire was immediately started.

"Go into the fire, then,' the blessed Helenus said to Zareas.

"No, it was your idea,' replied Zareas. 'You go first.'

"The most blessed father Helenus signed himself with the cross, and walked into the roaring flames, where he stood for about half an hour with neither his clothes or a hair of his head coming to any harm. Then he asked Zareas to go in. Zareas exhibited a marked reluctance and tried to run away. But the people caught him and threw him in anyway, where surrounded by the flames he began to burn. The holy Helenus went in and pulled him out, half burned but still alive, and the people drove him out in disgrace from their territory. "This is the man you see before you, and daily, wherever he goes, the people crowd round him praising God."

Chapter VI

Eugenia sighed deeply and fell at the feet of the person who had told her all that.

"Please," she said, "introduce me to this man along with my two brothers here. We want to turn from idols to Christ. And because we all came to this conclusion together, and because we are brothers, we would also like to ask him to make sure that we are never parted from each other."

"Well, be patient for a while," was the reply, "until he goes in to the monastery where he will rest for a while. When an opportunity offers I will tell him all that you have told me."

As they got nearer to the monastery, people came out to meet their father, singing a psalm to God, 'O God we have known your mercy in the midst of your temple' (Psalms 48.9). And as the bishop and the people went in, so did Eugenia and her companions Hyacinth and Protus. No one knew them except the person with whom they had been talking.

Chapter VII

Once the morning praises had been completed, the bishop rested for a while before giving instructions that things should be got ready for the sixth hour, when he would celebrate the divine mysteries. The ninth hour would provide an opportunity for the fast to be broken. As the bishop was resting he had a vision in which he was taken before the image of a woman to whom he should offer sacrifice.

"Then in my dream," he told us afterwards, "I asked permission of those who

led me there to speak to this goddess of theirs. Permission was granted and I said to her, 'You ought to realise that you are merely a creature of God, and come down from your pedestal and forbid anyone to worship you.' She listened, came down and came up to me, saying, 'I will not let you go until you have reunited me with the creator and foundation of my being.'"

As the bishop was turning these things over in his mind, he was approached by Eutropius, the man with whom Eugenia had been speaking.

"There are three slaves here, brothers," he said, "who have together decided that they want to turn from the worship of images and be numbered among the servants of Christ in this monastery. They have begged me, implored me with tears, that I should bring them to the notice of your blessedness."

"I give you thanks, good Jesus," said the blessed Helenus, "that you have given me prior warning of this."

He ordered them to be brought before him, took Eugenia's hand and offered up a prayer. He then took them aside and with a very serious look on his face asked them the reason for these things being said about them, and that he needed to know where they were coming from.

"We are Roman citizens," replied Eugenia. "This brother of mine is called Protus, the other one is Hyacinth, and my name is Eugenius."

"You are well called Eugenius," said the blessed Helenus, "for you are acting manfully, and your heart will be strengthened by your faith in Christ. So Eugenius is a good name for you. But you should know that by the holy Spirit I have already seen you and me in a vision, but you were in the body of a Eugenia. I have been told why you are here, though it was not given to me to know about these friends of yours. However, the Lord has deigned to reveal to me that you have prepared a most pleasing dwelling place for him in your body, for you have kept the prize of virginity and rejected the false blandishments of this present world. But you should know also that you will have a great deal to suffer because of your chastity, but he will never desert you, for you have given yourself to him completely."

He then turned to Protus and Hyacinth.

"You may be slaves," he said, "but you have boldly laid hold upon the dignity of freedmen, and you will continue to do so. So let me keep silent, hear what Christ the Lord says to you: 'Amen, Amen I say to you, I no longer call you slaves but friends' (John 15.15). Wherefore I call you blessed, for you have opened your hearts to the holy Spirit and wholeheartedly consented to the commandments of our Saviour. And you will enjoy the glory of all those who

come to him."

The blessed Helenus said all this quite openly, informed by none other than God himself. He said that she should remain in male clothing, and that they would all be kept with him until such time as they had been instructed about the holy rite of Baptism and made members of the monastery.

Chapter VIII

Now let us return to what happened after Protus and Hyacinth went off with Eugenia in their charge. Led by the slaves, the horses brought the *basterna* back empty to Eugenia's mother. It was noticed while still some way off and everyone in the household went out to meet it with great joy. But when they found it empty their joy was turned to weeping, and there was a great outcry throughout the whole city. Who could have imagined that the daughter of the prefect could have gone missing? There was enormous distress, floods of tears, everyone mourned in a state of unbelief. Parents mourned a daughter, brothers a sister, slaves a mistress. A gloom descended upon all, and unending mental tribulation. A search was decreed throughout the whole province, auspices were taken and oracles consulted. The demons also were entreated with sacrifices and other disgusting superstitious practices to reveal where Eugenia was. They all indicated only that gods from heaven had carried her off.

Her father came to believe that this was true, and in order to get what comfort he could in the midst of his grief, he decreed that a feast day should be kept. He consecrated her to be numbered among the gods, and caused a golden image to be made of her, to be venerated with no less honour than that given to the other gods. Her mother Claudia, and her brothers Avitus and Sergius were, however, inconsolable; they found their grief unbearable.

Chapter IX

Meanwhile the blessed Eugenia, manly in spirit as well as in clothing, remained in that monastery of men. She made such great progress in divine knowledge that at the end of two years she had committed to memory all the Scriptures of the Lord. She displayed such an aura of peace that everyone declared her to be numbered among the Angels. Who could discover that she was a woman, since the power of Christ and her immaculate virginity were protecting her in a way that was marvellous among men? No one was before her in coming to prayer, she became all things to all (1 Corinthinans 9.22), she

consoled the sad, rejoiced with the happy, calmed the angry, put the proud to shame by her example, and rejoiced in being like a sheep rescued from the power of the wolf. She was blessed with so much grace that whenever she talked with anyone who was feeling depressed, grief was banished and well-being restored. Her companions, Hyacinth and Protus, stayed close to her, and followed her example in all things.

Chapter X

In the third year of her conversion, the abbot of the monastery passed to the Lord, and it seemed right to everybody that they should choose the blessed Eugenia as their abbot. Eugenia was alarmed that they had chosen a woman to be superior over men, contrary to all the rules, fearing in particular that they would take advantage of her and pay her no respect.

"Let us pay attention to the Gospel in this situation," she said, "for Christ should be listened to above all whenever Christians embark upon any course of action. Let us see what he demands in this election you have made, so that I can conform myself both to your wishes and his commandments."

She opened up the Gospels and began to read.

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them and exercise authority over them. But among you it shall not be like that. He who would be first among you let him be as the last, and he who would be master, let him be as your servant'" (Matthew 20. 25-27). So then I have decided to submit to your wishes and accept the leadership, and also obey the commands of the Lord. Finally I rely on your continued charity."

They all very happily approved of what she said. More than anyone else she took upon herself the monastic tasks which were usually assigned to the lowliest members. She fetched water, cut firewood, kept everything clean. She chose one of the smaller rooms in the gatehouse for herself, not wishing to appear more important than the gatekeeper himself. She took great care over the brothers' food, and kept very strictly to the orderly recitation of the psalms and maintained the regular observance of the third, sixth and ninth hours, vespers, night office and matins. She would have considered herself a failure in God's sight if any portion of the hours in praise of God were missed out. Her work in all this became so acceptable in the sight of God that she was able to expel demons from those possessed and open the eyes of the blind. I intend to deal with many of these deeds one by one, so let us hurry on for as much as we have time for.

Chapter XI

There was a woman from Alexandria called Melanthia, the most notable of all the other matrons, who heard of Eugenia's reputation and came to her because of a quartan ague from which she had suffered for more than a year. The blessed Eugenia anointed her with oil and immediately the disturbance in her gall bladder disappeared. Completely restored to health, she walked to an estate of hers near the monastery and ordered three silver bowls to be filled with silver coins and sent to the blessed Eugenia in thanksgiving for her cure. Eugenia sent them back.

"We have enough and more than enough of this world's goods here. So, my dear Melanthia, I urge and implore you to be a mother to the poor and share this out among those who are much more in need."

Chapter XII

Melanthia was annoyed when she got this message. She went to Eugenia and begged her to change her mind and promised to give her even more. Having spent quite a long time with the blessed Eugenia without realising that she was a woman, she began to get quite enamoured of this person whom she thought to be a very elegant young man. She decided that he was just a creature of earth anyway, attributing her cure to his magic arts, not to his sanctity. She became infatuated with him, and decided that he was just angling for more money. She offered him more and more, but for all her persistence, everything she sent to Eugenia was simply sent back with grateful thanks. She determined on an even more destructive path and, pretending to be ill, asked Eugenia to visit her. She tried to impose herself upon Eugenia, who was sitting at her bedside.

"My breast is bursting with insatiable love for you. The only possible remedy for this condition is for me to make you the master of all I possess. Why torment yourself with your stupid, useless sexual abstinence? Look, I can offer you enormous wealth, tons of gold, and plenty of silver, and a large and varied household. I can be very generous. I have no children, I have been widowed for the last year. Take their place. Be master not only of all my possessions but of me, too."

Eugenia heard her out and replied, "The blackness [Melanthes (Greek) = dark-coloured] of your name bears witness to your wickedness. You are making yourself into a dwelling place for the devil. Melanthia, you unsavoury

deceiver, leave the servants of God alone. We have our own battles to fight. Let your wealth belong to someone like yourself. We prefer to be beggars with Christ. Banish all your lustful desires. This insanity has taken you over and is endangering your own salvation. You are possessed by a dragon pouring out poison, but your poison has no effect on us, for we call on the name of Christ and find the mercy of the Lord."

Life of Eugenia (continued), Book 1d

Chapter XIII

But she felt no remorse for her deceits. She went back to Alexandria, determined to expose Eugenia before she herself could be exposed. She complained to the prefect.

"I have had dealings with a villainous youth who pretends to be a religious Christian. He has a reputation for being able to heal the sick, so when I was ill I allowed him to visit me. He must have thought I was one of those who enjoy a bit of an orgy, for he had the cheek to try and seduce me in the most obscene language. If I had not cried out and been saved by my maid coming in, he would have forced himself on me like a barbarian."

The prefect was furious, and ordered guards to go to the monastery and bring back in chains this person and everyone else who was there. There was not one prison big enough to hold them all, so they were chained up in various different places. A day for the imposition of the death penalty was decided upon, some to be thrown to the beasts, some to be burned, others to various different kinds of torture. The news of it was widely circulated, and it became a subject of obscene conversation throughout the whole of the province of Egypt. Everyone believed Melanthia, and everyone joined in condemnation, unable to conceive of such an eminent person to be capable of lying.

What next? The day of the death penalty arrived, and people poured in from all the towns round about to see those revolting prisoners thrown to the beasts. They were brought in, chained together to the blessed Eugenia with iron collars round their necks, with no one aware that she was a woman. A fierce

uproar broke out from the people, hurling all kinds of insults. The prefect ordered that Eugenia should be brought nearer to him so that he could hear for himself her true account instead of having to rely on a messenger relaying her words to him. The horsemen were ready with their canes, the torturers with fire and all the other means of inducing people to confess and incriminate themselves.

Chapter XIV

Philip then spoke to her.

"Tell me, you most loathsome Christian, did your master Christ include in his commandments that you should give yourself up to corruption, and attack a woman's chastity and modesty by your cunning deceits? Tell us now, you monster of depravity, what kind of madness was it possessed you to accost that noble woman, Melanthia, gain access to her on pretence of being a doctor, and then entice her to exchange her wholehearted commitment to chastity for the disgusting morals of the brothel?"

Eugenia listened to all this with lowered head, so that she was not recognised, then made her reply to the prefect.

"My Lord Jesus Christ whom I serve advocates chastity, and promises eternal life to those who maintain the integrity of their bodies. I could now accuse Melanthia of being a false witness. Nevertheless I would prefer to be wronged myself, than for her to be punished if convicted, lest I lose my spiritual reward for being patient. However, if your sublimity will promise, on your authority as prefect, that you will not give her the punishment prepared for me, and that her false witness will not bring her to any harm, then I shall prove that the crime I am accused of should redound upon her own head."

The prefect promised, on his own reputation as prefect, to do as she asked, and Eugenia went on:

"O Melanthia, name of blackness, Melanthia of the night, you have drawn swords against us, you would have all Christians hung. Damn us, cut us down, deliver us to the flames, that is where you would be well pleased to have us. Christ does not have the sort of servants that you have accused us of. But let your maid be brought forward, who you have said was a witness of my crime. Perhaps the lie may be uncovered out of her own mouth."

The maid was made to stand forth in the presence of the judge.

"This shameless young man," she said, "has often been known to fornicate with common people. It was sheer shamelessness that led him to brazen his

way into my lady's bedroom at the first hour of the morning, saying at first that he had come on a healing mission. It soon became apparent that lust was his intention, and it would have come to violence if I had not come in and roused the whole household, who will also bear witness today to this crime." The prefect called the other slaves who she said would confirm her account was true. He asked each one of them, and they all testified that it had happened as she had said.

"What have you got to say to that, you hardened sinner," the prefect asked furiously, "with all these witnessing against you, bringing such a heavy weight of evidence?"

Chapter XV

"All will now be revealed," said the blessed Eugenia. "The time for silence is past. I had hoped that the accusation against me would be left until the judgment to come, when my chastity would be obvious to him alone who is ever to be lovingly served. But lest these wicked insults result in the servants of Christ being mocked, let me in a few words lay bare the truth, not in a spirit of human vainglory, but simply for the glory of the name of Christ. So great is the power of his name that even women who fear him can come to be worth as much as any man. We believe that neither sex is considered to be superior in his sight, since the blessed apostle Paul, the universal Christian teacher, has said that the Lord makes no distinction between male and female, for in Christ all are one (Galatians 3.28). I accepted this saying with a whole heart. With complete trust in Christ I decided to be a woman no longer, but to live bravely as a man in Christ, and preserve my virginity intact. I have not taken on some twisted semblance of honesty as if I were a man pretending to be a woman, but as a woman I have lived as a man, while strongly embracing virginity in Christ."

Having said this she tore the tunic she was wearing from top to bottom and stood revealed as a woman.

"You are my father, according to the flesh," she said to the prefect, "and Claudia is my mother. There are my two brothers sitting next to you, Avitus and Sergius. I am Eugenia, your daughter, and for the love of Christ I have renounced all the delights of the world as being worth no more than dung. See, here are Hyacinth and Protus, my eunuchs who entered the school of Christ with me. Christ has favoured me so greatly that by his mercy he has made me conqueror over all polluting lusts, and I trust that I shall remain

faithful to him to the very end."

Chapter XVI

Father recognised daughter, brothers a sister, slaves a mistress. They all rushed towards her and embraced her with floods of tears in the sight of all the people. A message was sent to Claudia, her mother, and she too came hurrying down to the arena. A tunic of cloth of gold was brought, which Eugenia put on, albeit unwillingly, and she was lifted aloft and taken up to the prefect's stall. All the people cried out "Christ is one, the only true God of the Christians!" There were many Christian people, with priests and bishops, in the amphitheatre, who had come with the intention of giving burial to the accused after their death. They all with one voice sang a psalm, 'The right hand of the Lord has grown marvellous in power, your right hand O Lord has broken in pieces your enemies' (Psalms 118.16)

Eugenia was carried away into a triumphal procession, and just to make sure that proof of her chastity was not lost on the people in their joy, fire was seen to descend from heaven and engulf Melanthia's house completely, so that not a trace of anything she possessed was left. The church, which had been dead and buried for the last eight years, was reopened. The Christian people were allowed to return, the prefect surrounded by his lictors was baptised, and so were his sons, and also Eugenia's mother Claudia. All citizens' rights were restored to the Christians, and a report about the Christians was sent to the Emperor Severus, [Emperor 222 - 235, according to Encyclopaedia Britannica] to the effect that Christians were perfectly good servants of the Republic, so that they should be allowed to live in the city without restraint. The emperor approved the report, to the great joy of every city, and the dignity of the Christian name flourished.

Chapter XVII

But the envy of the wicked one always hovers around anything holy, and evil is for ever fighting against the good. Thus, several of the most influential of the Alexandrian idol-worshippers took it ill that Christians should have citizens' rights, and went to the emperor to complain that Philip had upset the state of the Republic, in that he had governed it inefficiently over his nine years of office, and that in this tenth year everything was falling into chaos.

The worship of the immortal god was being neglected, and the whole city had turned to the worship of some man or other whom the Jews had executed. There was no respect for the old laws. People everywhere were going into the sacred temples, not for the sake of worshipping in good faith, but simply to utter endless blasphemies, saying that the images of the Gods were merely bits of stone or brass. These complaints, and a lot more like them, were made to Severus and Antoninus Augustus, who were then constrained to issue the following decree to Philip.

"Our divine father Commodus, the former Augustus, appointed you to be not merely a prefect but more like a king, in that you would not be replaced during your lifetime. We desire to add to the benefits you have received, by making sure that you maintain the traditional worship of the omnipotent gods. Either that, or lay your office aside and yield up all your authority."

Chapter XVIII

He bowed to the decrees of Augustus, and took some sick leave, while gathering together all his assets and distributing them to various churches and poor people throughout the province. Living in the fear of God and worshipping Christ he was a great source of encouragement to others. All Alexandria combined to regard him as their bishop, so from then on the republic had him as prefect until such time as his successor might be appointed, and the church had him as bishop, for because of his great faith he had been chosen for this priestly office. And this episcopate of his lasted for a year and three months.

Chapter XIX

At that time a new prefect named Perennius took up his office. He tried hard to discredit Philip, but found it difficult because of the high regard in which he was held throughout the city. So he organised some men who pretended to be Christians in order to gain admittance to him, whereupon they stabbed him as he was celebrating the regular Sunday prayers. [He is commemorated in the Roman martyrology on September 13.] The assailants were handed over to Perennius the prefect, who, although he knew perfectly well what his orders had been, acted as if this was the first he had heard of it, and sent them to prison. A few days later, exercising his princely discretion, he released them. Meanwhile the most blessed Philip lingered on in the flesh for three days after the attack on him. He desired nothing more than to strengthen the hearts of

those who doubted, so to that end he prayed that he might receive the crown of martyrdom, not wishing to be deprived of that honour. While still in the flesh he had put demons to flight and enlightened the eyes of the blind; is it surprising that he wished also for the palm of martyrdom? What he wanted he was indubitably able to command, and so it fell out that from sharing the name of Philip he became one who shared the crown. The martyrs took him into their company, just as the church had deservedly accepted his priesthood. His daughter the holy Eugenia established a monastery of Christian virgins in his house, and ordered his precious body to be placed in the guesthouse which the most blessed Claudia had built and endowed for the reception of pilgrims. Claudia herself, together with her sons Avitus and Sergius and the blessed Eugenia, returned to Rome.

Chapter XX

The Roman senate welcomed back Philip's sons, and assigned one to the consulship of Carthage, and the other to the deputy consulship of Africa. Around Eugenia, however, many matrons gathered as well as quite a number of virgins. Whether they were friends or just acquaintances she was able to persuade them to believe in Christ, and to dedicate their virginity to the Lord. A member of the royal family called Basilla very much wanted to join them, but could not do so openly because they were known to be Christians, but she sent a messenger to Eugenia telling her of her desire to be instructed in the Christian religion. So the blessed Eugenia had a meeting with her most blessed companions Protus and Hyacinth.

"Get yourselves ready for Christ is calling you to some military service," she said. "I would like to offer you to Basilla as if I were giving her a present, so that you can teach her what it means to be a handmaid of the Lord."

Basilla thanked Eugenia for this gift and accepted them as if they were slaves, but honoured them as apostles. She spent all her time with them, and although they appeared to be her eunuchs and slaves, there was not a time, night or day, which they did not spend in learning about Christ and in prayer. Cornelius, protector of the sacred law in Rome, came and baptised her secretly.

[Cornelius is listed as Pope of Rome, 251 - 253.] Now that the blessed Basilla was confirmed in the fear of God, by the mercy of Christ she and the blessed Eugenia spent practically every night in each other's company.

Chapter XXI

The blessed Claudia was the focus point for all the widows, and the blessed Eugenia for the virgins. The holy Cornelius, pope of the city of Rome, led a night-long vigil of hymns for them every Saturday until Sunday dawn, and at cock-crow in the quiet of the night, he celebrated the sacred mysteries. That was how he ministered to them on the Sabbath, but, as we have said, Eugenia and Basilla spent almost every night together in rehearsing to each other the wisdom of Christ. How many virgins came to the Saviour through Eugenia! How many brides came to Christ through Basilla! How many women gladly embraced their widowhood through Claudia! How many young men put their trust in Christ the Lord through Protus and Hyacinth!

Chapter XXII

When Valerian and Gallienus were joint emperors, persecution of Christians began, because Cyprian [Bishop of Carthage 249 - 258] was turning Carthage upside down and Cornelius Rome. Authority was given to Paternus the proconsul that Cyprian should be killed. Cornelius, however, was held in such high esteem by so many leading Romans that he was able to remain in hiding. Eugenia then consulted Basilla.

"It has been revealed to me by the Lord," she said, "that you will be made to suffer for your virginity." "And the Lord has thought fit to tell me," replied Basilla, "that you are about to receive a double crown of martyrdom, the first because of all that you achieved by your virtuous labours in Alexandria, [It needs to be remembered that the primary meaning of "martyrdom" is "witness", not necessarily including shedding of blood.] secondly because you are about to shed your blood."

"O Lord Jesus, son of the most High," said Eugenia as she lifted her hands up to heaven, "you brought us salvation through the virginity of your mother. Through the prize of my virginity, lead into the kingdom of your glory all those whom you have entrusted to my care."

Chapter XXIII

Eugenia called together all those virgins who were living with her and Basilla. "See now, the time of the grape-harvest is at hand," she said, "when the grapes

are plucked and trodden underfoot, in preparation for the royal feasting which is to come. Without shedding of blood no one gains imperial power, no one has the highest honours showered upon them. You therefore, my branches of vine, beloved of my heart, be ready in the Lord. For virginity is a sign of the highest virtue and nearest to God. It mirrors the life of the angels, it is life giving, the friend of holiness, the way of security, the mistress of joy, the leader of virtue, the spur and crown of faith, the prop and support of charity. There is nothing worth working for and striving after like living in virginity, or what is even more glorious, dying for the sake of virginity. The deceptive pleasures of the world come with a great momentary joy, but depart leaving perpetual grief behind. They bring short-lived laughter and eternal tears. They offer fresh flowers, but leave you with withered stalks. They pretend that the passing moment will last for ever, but hand you over into the torments of everlasting ages.

"Therefore, my beloved virgins, who have run with me in the race of virginity, go on in the love of God as you have begun. The time of weeping will be short; bear it unflinchingly and bravely, that you may be able to enter into the realm of eternal joy with all your heart. I have offered you all up to the holy Spirit, and I trust that for my sake he will keep you whole and unstained. Don't imagine that the way I look is my true self; contemplate rather in the spirit my actions and deeds."

Having said this she kissed them all, and wiped away their tears with a strong heart. Basilla and Eugenia said goodbye to each other and departed.

Chapter XXIV

The day came when a serving girl spoke to Pompeius, Basilla's betrothed.

"We know that our mistress Basilla has been intended by the Emperor for you, and that you have spent the last six years or more of your young life waiting until such time as you might be old enough to have her. But you must know that her cousin Helenus is a Christian. She also has become a Christian and has not the slightest intention of marrying you. And it was only a pretence that Eugenia offered her those two eunuchs Protus and Hyacinth as a gift. She regards them as her teachers, and daily kisses their feet as if they were immortal gods, whereas they are really practitioners of the magic arts that Christians go in for."

Pompeius immediately went to see Basilla's cousin Helenus, who was also her guardian and teacher.

"I would like to celebrate my marriage within the next three days," he said, "so I would like to see my promised bride, whom our mighty lords and masters have decreed that I should marry."

Helenus realised that Basilla's position had been revealed to Pompeius.

"Because of my relationship to her father I have been responsible for her welfare since infancy," he said, "but now she has got a will of her own, so it is not for me to order her to see you. It is entirely up to her."

Chapter XXV

Pompeius' passion was aroused on hearing this, and he hastened to Basilla's house where he ordered the janitor to announce him. But all he got was a message relayed to him from Basilla:

"I know of hardly any reason at all why I should see you, or listen to you, or even greet you."

This made him very angry. He attended an almost full meeting of the senate and prostrated himself before the Emperor:

"Come to the aid of your Roman citizens, O most sacred prince," he said, "and banish from the city these new gods that Eugenia has brought with her from Egypt. For a long time now these people called Christians have been undermining the republic. They make a mockery of the sacred ceremonies of our constitution, and despise our mighty gods as being empty idols. They are subverting the very laws of nature; they break marriages up and decide about marriages themselves, considering it against their principles for a bride to accept the bridegroom assigned to her. O most godly Emperor, what shall we do? It seems we now have gods who make husbands superfluous, and shall they see it come to pass that there will be no younger generation capable of taking command? Whence will come the renewal of Roman power? Whence shall the Roman army renew its strength? Will there be victorious women to bend the necks of the enemy into submission to your right hand, if we are not to have wives, if promised brides escape from us and we say nothing?"

Chapter XVI

He said quite a lot more in the same vein, until the senate was thoroughly acquainted with the details of this lamentable affair. Gallienus Augustus then decreed that Basilla should either accept her bridegroom or be put to the sword, that Eugenia should either sacrifice to the gods or be cruelly tortured, and he gave orders that anyone hiding Christians should be punished. Basilla

was summoned and told she must accept her spouse.

"I have the King of kings, Christ the son of God, for my spouse," was her reply.

No sooner had she said this than the sword transfixed her. Protus and Hyacinth were arrested and dragged to the temple but when they were led before the image of Jove and told to sacrifice to it, it fell down at their feet and broke into a thousand pieces, so that it was no longer in a condition to have sacrifices made to it. Nicetius, the city prefect, deemed that this was because of their magic powers, not because of the power of God, and ordered that they should be beheaded.

Chapter XXVII

He summoned Eugenia to appear before him and browbeat her about her magic arts. She was firm and fearless in her reply to him.

(Chapter XXVII (continued), Life of Eugenia, Book 1d
(Also Euphrasia further down this page)

"I promise you," she said, "that our art is much stronger than that. Our master has a Father but no mother, and a mother who knew not a father. For the Father begot him without help from any woman, and a mother brought him to birth who knew not a man. He has a virgin for his spouse, who daily bears him many sons, yes, countless sons does she bear, and daily he gives his flesh to their flesh. She enjoys his embraces unceasingly, their love for each other is everlasting, and exists in such integrity that their union becomes the source of all virginity, all charity and all integrity."

Chapter XVIII

Nicetius found all this quite baffling, and to save the Emperor from having to listen to all that if she were called before him, he ordered Eugenia to be taken to the temple of Diana, where a soldier threatened her with a spear.

"Get your life back, Eugenia," he said. "Return to your own inheritance and sacrifice to the goddess Diana."

Eugenia spread out her hands to heaven and prayed.

"O God, you know all the secrets of my heart. In your love you have

preserved my virginity unsullied, for you have found me worthy of being given your son, my Lord Jesus Christ, as my spouse. You have made your holy Spirit to reign in my heart. Be present with me now as I confess your holy name and let all those who worship this idol and glory in its images be put to shame."

As she was praying an earthquake occurred, and the foundations of the temple shook and the idol was overthrown. Nothing remained standing except the altar in front of the temple doors where Eugenia was standing. This all happened in the district of Lycaonia, in the presence of all those who had followed Eugenia in her trials. A vast crowd of Roman people collected amid a tumult of discordant shouts. Some protested her innocence, others branded her as a magician. The prefect was told what was happening and he made it known to the Emperor. The Emperor ordered her to be thrown into the Tiber weighed down with stones, but the stones became untied, and the blessed Eugenia floated over the surface of the water, so that it was obvious to all Christians that he who walked with Peter in the sea without sinking was with her to prevent her being drowned.

Chapter XXIX

They fished her out of the river and threw her into the furnace that heated the Severian baths, but the furnace immediately went out, its heat turned to cold, and all its burning fuel crumbled to nothing. Chaos broke out such as had never been seen before. They threw her into a dark dungeon and ordered that she be given no food for the next ten days nor allowed any light. But such great splendour was daily there with her that when she eventually emerged she radiated light. For the Saviour had appeared to her there, bringing her bread as white as snow and of the most exquisite tasting sweetness.

"Eugenia," he had said to her, "take this bread from my hands. I am your Saviour whom you have loved with all your heart and mind, and do still love. I will receive you into heaven on the same day in which I came down to earth."

Having said this he departed, and on Christmas day a gladiator was sent to kill her in prison, and her body was taken up by Christian relatives of hers and taken to the family estates not far from the city on the Latin Way, where the bodies of many saints were buried.

Chapter XXX

As Claudia her mother was grieving at her tomb, keeping vigil in the dead of night, Eugenia appeared to her clad in a garment of cloth of gold, accompanied by a host of virgins.

"Be glad and rejoice," said Eugenia, "for Christ has led me to share in the joyfulness of the saints, and has numbered my father amongst the patriarchs. And behold, this Sunday he will receive you into the everlasting joys.

Encourage your sons, my brothers, to keep the sign of the cross, that they too may come to share glory with us."

And as she spoke she was enfolded in a light so brilliant that human eye could not bear it, as the Angels came down singing a hymn to God in voices of a beauty beyond description, except that it was the name of Jesus Christ and his holy Spirit that resounded through their praises. Glory and honour to the Father, and to the Son, and to the holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages, Amen.

Life No 18

The Life of St Euphrasia, Virgin [Celebrated in the Roman martyrology on March 13]

by an anonymous author

Chapter I

At the time of the most godly emperor Theodosius, [Theodosius I, Emperor in Constantinople 379-395] there was a certain senator in the royal city called Antigonus. He was of the imperial family and a member of his closest circle, a man wise in deeds as well as in words, who governed the province of Lycia [A province of Asia Minor between Caria and Pamphylia] conscientiously according to Roman Law. He was a compassionate man, sensitive to the needs of others. The Emperor loved him not only as a relative and a senator but as a godly Christian who was always able to offer good advice. He was extremely wealthy; the royal city had no one else like him in respect of wisdom, good deeds and riches. He took a wife called Euphraxia, of his own nation and from the same imperial family, who feared the Lord deeply and spent much time in church offering her prayers and tears to God. She helped many to take part in the work of God by means of her many gifts to churches and monasteries. The emperor and Augusta his wife dearly loved her not only because she was of their family, but also for her upright morals, her honesty and her deep piety. They had one daughter who was also called Euphraxia, after her mother.

Chapter II

After their daughter was born, Antigonus said to Euphraxia one day:

"You know, Euphraxia, my sister, that this life is nothing, that the vanity of riches and this temporal existence is nothing. A human lifespan of eighty years is consummated in ruin, whereas riches laid up in heaven last for infinite ages of ages to them who fear God. We deprive ourselves of those riches if we are fettered by the standards of the world and held in thrall to the deceits of temporal riches, or if we pass our days in idleness, acquiring nothing useful to our souls."

"What are you suggesting we should do, my husband?" asked Euphraxia.

"God has given us one daughter, which should be quite enough for us. We don't need to conform any further to this unfortunate and miserable age."

Euphraxia sprang to her feet and raised her hands to heaven.

"Blessed be God," she said to her husband Antigonus with a sigh. "He has given you the grace to fear him, and lead you into a knowledge of his truth. To tell you the truth I have often prayed to God to illumine your heart and enlighten your mind on this very matter, though I did not presume to broach the subject myself. Shall I tell you who is the prime mover in this?"

"Tell me anything you like, my love."

"The Apostle bore witness many long ages since, you know, and said, 'We have but a short time. It remains that those who have wives should live as those who have them not' (1 Corinthians 7.29). All the desires of the world are doomed to perish. What use is our money and abundant possessions? None of it will go down with us into the grave. Let's make haste to act on your good advice and give much to the poor, so that the plan you have proposed will not be unfruitful."

Hearing this, Antigonus glorified God.

Chapter III

Having entered into this higher way of life and given a great deal to the poor, Antigonus lived only for one more year after renouncing his wife. He had died after conducting his life in this godly way for a whole year, and so was buried in peace. The Emperor and Augusta both mourned for him, not just because he was descended from the same family line, but because he had been upright and devout. They were very solicitous for Euphraxia's welfare, not just because of family ties, but also because she was now in the same position as a

young unmarried woman. Two years and three months only had she lived with a husband, one year of which they had abstained from each other and lived as brother and sister.

So once Antigonus was buried, Euphraxia received great support from them, to the extent that she felt able to take her daughter and hand her over into the care of the Emperor and Augusta. She fell at their feet, crying and weeping. "I commend this orphan into your hands and the hands of God," she said. "Be mindful of Antigonus who belonged to you, and take this child and care for her, and stand in the place of both father and mother for her."

Many of those who heard this shed many tears. Even the royal couple wept.

Chapter IV

A little while later, when mourning for Antigonus had subsided a little, the Emperor persuaded Euphraxia that her daughter should be betrothed to a certain rich senator. The betrothal was arranged in expectation of her arriving at full age, for at present she was only five years old. After some further time had passed, this senator began to entertain a desire to be united with Antigonus' widow. He begged for the support of various matrons, who persuaded Augusta that the senator should be allowed to exchange marriage vows with Euphraxia, without seeking permission from the Emperor. Euphraxia wept bitterly when told about this plan and complained to the women responsible.

"Woe to you in the life to come!" she cried. "In foisting this plan upon me, you are contriving to hinder the path of a woman who is striving to live for God alone. Leave me alone. In any case you have ensured that I no longer have any desire to be part of your circle."

They were left in some confusion, and told Augusta what had happened. The Emperor got to hear about it as well, and was furious with Augusta.

"Really, Augusta," he cried, "You have done something which is completely and utterly out of order! Is this your kind of Christianity, Augusta? Is this the way you fulfil your promise to God to govern in a godly manner? Is this the way you honour the memory of Antigonus whom we valued so greatly? You have done something completely at odds with the way we should be governing. Here is this woman who is still technically an infant, although she had lived with a husband for a year. By agreement they stopped sleeping with each other for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, and now you want to compel her to return to the way of the world? Have you no fear of God, to

perpetrate this wickedness? How am I going to persuade people that I did not authorise this? What you have done is bizarre! Indecent! You have flouted my imperial authority, and sullied the memory of my dearest and greatly loved Antigonus!"

Augusta was covered in confusion at this rebuke, and was struck dumb and as still as a stone for nearly two hours. Euphraxia, Antigonus' widow, had become the occasion of an enormous dissension between the Emperor and Augusta, and at that thought Euphraxia was very upset, and with downcast eyes she felt she might just as well be dead. She decided to leave the city entirely.

"We have large estates in Egypt," she said to her daughter, weeping bitterly, "so let's go there and visit your father's property. Everything I have is yours, my daughter."

So Euphraxia and her daughter left the imperial city, without telling the Emperor, and went to Egypt. They intended to stay there, and visited all their estates in quick succession, before going into the interior of the Thebaid, taking with them slaves and stewards to look after their luggage. They stayed in several monasteries both of men and of women, where they offered many prayers and gave considerable gifts of money.

Chapter VI

In one place there was a monastery of women which had a hundred and thirty architria. ['small cells', presumably small buildings with three domes] It was said that many notable virtues could be observed there. Nobody drank wine in that monastery, they ate no apples or grapes or figs or other fruits which the region brought forth in abundance. One of those women who had renounced the world denied herself the use of oil in her diet, and fasted daily from vespers to vespers. There were some who ate only every two days, some every three. None of them ever washed their feet. They poured scorn upon the very mention of a bath, judging it to be a word which was almost obscene, to which they ought to shut their ears. There was one of them who took her meagre allowance of sleep on the ground, with a covering of goatskin only one cubit wide and three long. Their outer garments were of goatskin right down to the tips of their toes. Each of them did as much manual labour as possible. If anyone fell ill there was no provision for medicine or ointments, but they accepted their illnesses as the greatest of blessings from the Lord, and bore their weakness in expectation of the medicine of the Sunday Eucharist. None

of them wandered outside the gates. There was a mature woman in charge of the gate, who was responsible for all communications inwards and outwards. She was one who dispensed a great deal of sound common sense.

Chapter VII

Euphraxia greatly valued the wisdom of these holy women, the fruit of their marvellous lives, and often went to the monastery where she offered incense and candles. One day she had a request to make of the abbess and her deputies.

"I hope you won't be too angry if I offer you a little gift of twenty or thirty pounds of gold, that you might pray for this little friend of yours and her father Antigonus."

"My dear good lady," replied the abbess, "Your servants have no need of any gifts and no longing for money. For we have left all, and scorned the things of this world in order to enjoy the blessings of eternity. We desire to possess nothing that we may not lose the kingdom of heaven. But I don't want to disappoint you, or send you away empty-handed, so just take a little lamp oil and incense to the oratory, and that will be ample reward for us."

Euphraxia did so, and begged all the sisters to pray for Antigonus and his daughter Euphraxia.

Chapter VIII

One day the abbess put the child Euphraxia to the test.

"Now then, Miss Euphraxia," she said, "how do you like our monastery and all the sisters?"

"Oh, I like you very much, ma'am," she replied.

"Well, if you like us so much, why not wear the habit as we do," said the abbess jokingly.

"If my mother has no objections," said the little girl, "I would be quite happy to stay here for ever."

"Whom do you love best, then, out of us and the man you are betrothed to?"

"I don't know him, or he me. I know you, and I love you. Tell me, whom do you love, me or him?"

"We love you, and we love our Christ."

"And I truly love you and your Christ."

Euphraxia the mother listened to all this and her tears flowed without restraint. The abbess was very moved by what the little girl said, to think that such a

small girl should come out with such things. For she was only seven years old, when this conversation was taking place.

"Come, daughter," said the mother with a sigh and a bitter tear, "Time to go home. It's evening already."

"I want to stay here with my lady abbess."

"No dear," said the abbess, "you can't stay here. Off you go home. No one can stay here unless they have given themselves completely to Christ."

"Where is Christ?"

The abbess pointed out an image of the Lord. Euphraxia ran up to it and kissed it, turned round and said:

"I truly vow myself to Christ and will not go home with my mother."

"My daughter," said the abbess, "it is not for you to stay here, you can't stay here."

"Where you are," she replied, "there shall I be."

It was already evening, but however much both mother and abbess urged her to go home nothing would persuade her to leave. Day after day both mother and abbess talked to her, but they were unable to make her change her mind and could not drive her out of the monastery.

"My daughter," the abbess said at last, "if you want to stay here you must be able to read, and learn the Psalter, and fast until vespers like all the other sisters."

"I can learn to fast and do everything, if only I can stay here."

"Well, my lady," the abbess said at last to the girl's mother, "Let the girl stay here. I perceive the grace of God alight in her, and I recognise that her father's virtue, and your honesty, and the prayers of both of you have given her a vision of eternal life."

Chapter IX

Euphraxia arose and took her daughter over to the image of the Lord, raising her hands to heaven with a loud cry and many tears.

"Lord Jesus Christ," she cried, "take this little girl who longs for you and has offered herself to you," and turning to her daughter, "Euphraxia, my daughter, may God who has laid the foundations of the everlasting mountains confirm you in his fear."

She handed her over to the abbess, and beating her breast and weeping, left the monastery. The whole congregation wept with her in sympathy.

Chapter X

A few days later the abbess took Euphraxia into the oratory, prayed over her, and clothed her in the monastic habit.

"O eternal King," she prayed as she stretched out her hands to heaven, "you have begun a good work in her; bring it peacefully to perfection, we pray. Grant that this little girl may ever walk according to your name, and be found faithful in your sight."

Euphraxia's mother also prayed, and said to her daughter:

"Is it your will, my daughter, to be clothed in this habit?"

"It is, mother. For I have learned from the abbess and from the sisters that this habit is the bridal dress which the Lord Jesus Christ gives to those who love him."

"May he to whom you are betrothing yourself, " said her mother, "make you worthy of his marriage bed."

With these words and prayers for her daughter, she said farewell to the abbess and the sisters, embraced her daughter, and left to resume her usual custom of moving about, supplying the needs of the poor.

Chapter XI

After a few days the abbess asked the girl's mother to come and see her privately.

"I have something to tell you," she said, "but don't be alarmed."

"Tell me, whatever it is."

"I saw in a dream Antigonus your husband standing in great glory, begging the Lord Jesus Christ that you might depart from your body and be with him from then on, and enjoy the glory which he enjoyed."

Like the religious woman she was, she went home not in the least perturbed but glad and joyful. She prayed that indeed she might be allowed to depart this life and be with Christ. She went to see her daughter.

"My daughter," she said, "my lady abbess has told me that Christ is calling me and the day of my departure is at hand. Everything belonging to your father and me I give into your hands. Distribute it wisely, that you may gain a heavenly inheritance."

"Woe is me," cried her daughter, "I am now a pilgrim and orphan!"

"My daughter, you have Christ for your father and your husband, so don't say you are a pilgrim and an orphan. And you have your lady abbess in place of a mother. So look to it that you carry out everything you have promised. Fear

God, honour all your sisters, serve them with all humility. Never entertain in your heart any thoughts that you are of the imperial family and therefore they ought to be your slaves. Be poor on earth that you may be rich in heaven. See now, everything is yours. Give lands and money to the monastery on your father's behalf and mine, that we may find mercy in the sight of God and escape the punishment eternal."

Three days later she died, and they buried her in the monastery's cemetery.

Life of Euphrasia (continued), Book 1d

Chapter XIII

When the Emperor heard that Euphraxia the wife of Antigonus was dead he summoned the senator to whom her daughter had been betrothed and told him the news, adding that the girl had joined a monastery. The senator begged the Emperor to send a letter by special messenger to the girl instructing her to come back to the city to be married. When Euphraxia received his letter she wrote back in her own hand.

"My Lord Emperor, are you really trying to persuade me to renounce Christ in order to unite myself to corruptible human flesh which to day is, and tomorrow will be food for worms? God forbid that your servant should do this thing. Therefore, my Lord Emperor, don't let that man trouble you any further. I have given my allegiance to Christ, and that it is impossible to deny. I beseech you that in your position of authority you bear in mind what my parents wanted, and gather together all my assets and distribute it to the poor and the orphans and to the churches. I know that you do remember my parents, especially my father, for I have heard that he was in constant attendance on you in the palace. Bearing in mind what you know about them, dispose of my money as you know they would wish. Free all our slaves and grant them legal rights. Instruct all my father's bailiffs to remit any debts incurred by tenants since the day my father died up until now. And so let me be found worthy to serve Christ unhindered, without having any responsibility

for all these worldly affairs. He knows I have commended my soul to him. May you and Augusta pray for your servant, that she may be found worthy to serve Christ as a servant of his."

She signed the letter and gave it to the special messenger who took it and brought it back to the Emperor. He opened it and read it privately with Augusta, shedding many tears and offering many prayers for Euphraxia. Next morning the Emperor summoned the whole senate, which included the father of Euphraxia's bridegroom, and ordered the letter to be read out loud to them all. The eyes of all filled with tears as they listened to it, and agreed together with one accord.

"Truly, my Lord Emperor, the daughter of Antigonus and Euphraxia is a true member of your family, a girl in whose veins runs noble blood. She is a true religious daughter of religious parents, a holy branch springing from a holy root."

And as if with one voice they all glorified God and prayed for the girl. The senator had no further chance of having his demands met.

Chapter XIV

Once the Emperor had disposed responsibly of Euphraxia's assets and distributed them well, he died and was buried in peace with his fathers. Euphraxia continued to flourish and prosper in the sight of God, increasing in her practice of fasting. She was now twelve years old and applying herself ever more strongly to the battle. At first she fasted from vespers to vespers, then she ate only every two days, then three days. She swept out the refectory, made the sisters' beds, and carried water for the kitchen.

There was a custom in the monastery that when any sister felt herself being tempted by the devil during sleep she would tell the abbess about it as soon as possible. The abbess would ask God in tears that the devil might depart, and direct that a layer of stones should be put under the blanket the sister slept on, and ashes sprinkled on the goatskin covering. She was to sleep like this for ten days. When Euphraxia was tempted by the devil one night, she sprinkled ashes over her bed. When the abbess noticed this she laughed.

"The girl is beginning to learn about temptation!" she said to one of the senior sisters. And she prayed to God:

"O God by whose will she was created, strengthen her in your fear."

She called Euphraxia to speak to her.

"Why didn't you tell me you were being tempted by the devil?"

"Forgive me, my lady," said Euphraxia as she fell at the abbess's feet. "I was too ashamed to tell you what it was about."

"Look, my daughter, you are now being called into the battle. Be strong, that you may conquer and win the crown."

Chapter XV

A few days later her temptations were renewed and she told another sister called Julia about it who was very fond of Euphraxia, and who was also deeply engaged in the battle.

"Euphraxia, my friend," said Julia, "don't hide this from the abbess, but tell her about it so that she can pray for you. We are all tempted by the devil, but we trust in the name of Christ that we shall conquer. So don't delay, my sister. Tell the abbess what it is all about, and don't worry."

"Oh, thank you, Julia," said Euphraxia. "God reward you, my sister, for helping me and strengthening my soul. I will go, truly, and tell my lady abbess what is happening."

"You do that, and she will pray for you and prescribe some sort of abstinence for you."

She went to see the abbess and told her about her troubles.

"Never be afraid, my daughter," said the abbess, "of all the attacks of the devil, who is always doing his worst against us. Struggle against him by trying to keep your mind still, and he won't be able to prevail against you. You are bound to be tested a great deal by him, but struggle, that you may conquer and win the victory and receive the crown from your bridegroom Christ, and as far as possible increase your practice of abstinence. The more you strive, the greater the gifts you will receive. How many days do you go fasting?"

"Three days, my lady."

"Add an extra day, then."

Euphraxia accepted this injunction gladly and departed.

Chapter XVI

By the time she had reached the age of twenty she had become strong and stable. She was very beautiful, as befitted a matron of imperial blood. When she was tempted anew she confided in the abbess.

"Fear not, my daughter," said the abbess. "God is with you."

Now there was a heap of stones in the courtyard of the monastery. The abbess

decided to test the ability of Euphraxia to be obedient to herself as mother.

"Come, my daughter," she said, "pick these stones up and take them over to the bread oven."

Euphraxia immediately began to pick up the stones. Some of them were so big that it would almost need two sisters to carry one of them, but she was young and strong, and she lifted them up on to her shoulders without any help from anyone. She did not ask the abbess to let her get help from another sister. She did not say, "These stones are too heavy. I can't do it". She did not say, "I am fasting and I am too weak to carry this heavy load." She simply did what she was told in obedience and complete trust.

Chapter XVII

Next day the abbess said to her:

"It's not the right place for those stones to be next to the furnace. Take them back to where they were."

With complete trust she again did what the abbess said. And the abbess kept this up for twenty days, in order to test her patience. All the sisters could see what was happening and were quite amazed. Some of the sisters scoffed, but others shouted, "Go for it, Euphraxia!"

This went on for thirty days. The next day, as Euphraxia was going off to carry stones after the morning offices were said, the abbess said to her, "Finish doing that work, my daughter. Instead get flour and water and bake bread for you to serve to the sisters this evening." These commands also she fulfilled with true gladness and joy.

Chapter XVIII

The devil tempted her again in her sleep, for she had a dream in which the senator to whom she had been betrothed came with a large band to snatch her out of the monastery and carry her off. She screamed out loudly as she lay in her bed, rousing the abbess and all the sisters in alarm at the terror of her voice.

"Whatever is the matter, my daughter?" asked the abbess.

She told the abbess of her dream, and the abbess directed that all the sisters should stand in prayer with her, which they did, right up to the third hour of the day. At the third hour, Euphraxia stood to lead the office while the others sat, after which Euphraxia carried out all the necessary tasks for the sisters. She swept out the refectory, made the beds, filled the water jars and carried

them to the kitchen, chopped wood and cooked pulses, kneaded flour and cooked bread in the oven. And while doing all this she did not miss the night psalmody, or the offices of the third, sixth and ninth hours, or vespers. It was not until vespers were over that she had any time to herself. Julia also helped her in all her tasks, for she was very fond of Euphraxia. [No sanctions there against 'special friendships', then!]

Chapter XIX

The devil again began to tempt her in her dreams and increased the intensity of the battle to the highest degree. Again she opened up her fears to the abbess.

"Euphraxia, my daughter," said the abbess, after praying for her, "this is a time of battle. Take care that you do not let the devil soften your resistance and bring to naught all the work you have done. After struggling with you for a while he may retire in defeat, but will always come back again!"

Julia also had some advice for her.

"If we can't keep fighting and winning now, how shall we be able to do so when we are old?"

The Lord lives, Julia my sister," replied Euphraxia, "and if the abbess agrees I shall begin to fast for a whole week at a time, until with the help of the Lord I shall overcome."

"If you can manage to do that on earth, how blessed you will be in heaven! There is no one in this monastery who goes without food for a whole week except our lady abbess."

Euphraxia went to the abbess again to tell her of the attacks of the devil in her sleep and asked for permission to go for the whole week without food.

"Do what seems possible for you, my daughter," said the abbess, "and may God who created you strengthen you and give you victory against the devil." So Euphraxia began to spend the week fasting, without missing any of the offices or the tasks she performed for the sisters. They were all astonished at how much such a young and beautiful girl could put up with.

"We have been watching Euphraxia for the last year," some of them said among themselves, "and we have not seen her sitting down day or night, except when she goes to bed at night. She never even sits down to eat her bread."

All the sisters loved her because she was so humble, and took pains to act as if she were the slave of all the sisters, even though she was a member of the

imperial family. So they all prayed for her very much, begging God for her salvation.

Chapter XX

One of the sisters called Germana, who was from the working class, began to feel quite hostile towards Euphraxia, and cornered her one day in the kitchen.

"It's all very well for you to be told by the abbess to eat only once a week, Euphraxia," she said, "but some of us don't feel we could do that. How would we go on if the abbess told us to do that?"

"Sister," said Euphraxia, "our lady abbess has said that each one of us must act according to her own ability. She did not impose this ruling on me without good reason."

"You are just a scheming poser. Is there anyone who doesn't know that you are being clever and carrying on like this, so that you can become abbess after this one goes? I hope in Christ that you would never be found a fitting person to fill this abbess's shoes."

Euphraxia fell at her feet.

"Forgive me, sister," she said, "and pray for me."

When the abbess got to hear of what had happened, she called Germana out in front of everybody.

"You are a wicked servant," she said, "and very far off from God. What harm has Euphraxia ever done you for you to be so keen on spoiling her good intentions? You are an outsider as far as the rest of the sisters are concerned, you are a disgrace to our profession, and you are excluded from Chapter meetings forthwith." [Aliena es a sororum concilio, indigna es a ministerio, et collegio sororum extranea. Both concilium and collegium carry the meaning of 'assembly' or 'association', but collegium here seems to have a more formal sense, which I hope justifies translating it somewhat anachronistically as 'Chapter meeting']

Euphraxia pleaded strongly that Germana might be forgiven, but the abbess was implacable, and remained like that for the next month.

Euphraxia seemed to be getting nowhere with her pleas, until on the thirtieth day she got together with Julia and some of the senior sisters in the monastery and went to plead with the abbess to be reconciled with Germana. The abbess again called Germana out in front of everybody.

"You decided in your own heart," she said, "to try and destroy the good work of this sister. Didn't it occur to you that although she is an aristocrat, and a

member of the imperial family she has nevertheless humbled herself and made herself the slave of all for God's sake?"

The pleas of everyone on behalf of Germana won the day and the abbess relented.

Chapter XXI

The devil did not let up in his assaults upon Euphraxia. He raved furiously against her and tried to bring her to her death. When she was at the well one day to draw water, the devil picked her up along with the bucket and threw her in. Euphraxia was appalled to find her head hitting the bottom of the well, but she came up to the surface of the water, and holding on to the well-rope she called out: "Christ help me!" Her voice was heard, and the abbess and the sisters, realising that she had fallen in, ran to the well and pulled her out. As she came out she laughed and signed herself with the cross.

"My Christ is alive!" she cried. "So you can never conquer me, you old devil. I give no ground to you whatsoever! Up to now I have been carrying only one bucket of water at a time from the well. From now on I will carry two!" And so she did.

Chapter XXII

When the devil realised that he had not succeeded in drowning her in the well, he followed her when she went out to chop wood. After she had chopped for a while with the devil standing there watching her, he jerked her arm as she was bringing the axe down on to the wood, so that she cut her foot at the base of the shin. She saw this gaping wound with blood pouring out of it and dropped the axe and fell to the ground in a faint. Julia came in great haste and shouted out to the sisters that Euphraxia had been struck by an axe and was dead.

Everyone cried out in alarm and ran to the scene, surrounding Euphraxia and weeping. When the abbess came she sprinkled water on Euphraxia's face, signed her with the cross and held her in her arms.

"Euphraxia, my daughter, how did you come to be so wounded?" she cried.

"Come back to us. Speak to your sisters."

Euphraxia opened her eyes.

"Lord Jesus Christ," prayed the abbess, "heal your servant who has suffered so much for you."

She bound Euphraxia's foot with strips of cloth, helped her up, supported her with her hands and began to lead her back to the monastery. But Euphraxia

saw the piece of wood still lying there that she had dropped.

"As the Lord lives," she cried, "I will not go back in until I have completed my set tasks."

"Don't be silly, sister," said Julia, "you won't be able to manage it. Leave it. I will pick it up. You go in and rest. You are hurt."

Euphraxia would not hear of it, but picked up an armful of wood to take in with her. Even then the devil did not spare her. She caught her foot in her tunic as she was going up the steps and fell forward on to the wood she was carrying, so that a splinter went into her face. It looked to the sisters as if it had gone into her eye.

"I told you you should have gone in to have a rest," exclaimed Julia, "but you wouldn't listen!"

"My eye is all right," said Euphraxia. "Just pull this splinter out."

As she did so, Euphraxia began to bleed, but the abbess anointed her with oil, prayed for her, and laid hands on her.

"You go and lie down," said the abbess. "I will get some of the other sisters to finish your work."

"As the Lord lives," said Euphraxia, "I will not lie down till I have finished my duties."

The sisters begged her to lie down and rest because of her injuries, but she would not, even though in her weakened state both wounds were still bleeding. She insisted on carrying out her usual services for the sisters; and she was just as insistent on attending the divine offices as she was in her serving duties. A modern monastic superior would condemn Euphraxia here as displaying inordinate pride in her disobedience to the abbess's orders. Instead, it is her endurance under suffering, comparable to the endurance of Christ under the attacks of the devil in his passion, which captures his attention here, in spite of his praise of her obedience as exemplified in her labours described in Chapter XVI above]

Chapter XXIII

On another occasion she was going up with Julia to the third solarium, [In classical Latin solarium means 'sundial'. Rosweyde explains it as simply meaning 'the highest part of the building exposed to sun', and wonders why there should have been three of them] when the devil seized her and threw her down to the bottom. Julia screamed and the sisters came running, but Euphraxia simply got up and greeted them. They took her to the abbess who

asked her if she had been hurt.

"As the Lord lives, my lady," replied Euphraxia, "I have not the faintest idea how it was I came to fall, or how I ever got up again."

The abbess was amazed that she was completely uninjured after having fallen from such a great height and she glorified God.

"Go back to your work, my daughter," she said, "and the Lord will be with you."

Chapter XXIV

Again the devil tried to kill her. It happened like this: She was pouring a boiling pot of cooked vegetables into another container, when the devil took her feet from under her. She fell backwards and the contents of the pot splashed all over her face. The sisters feared for her safety, but she simply got up and laughed.

"What are you worried about?" she said.

The abbess was relieved to see that she was uninjured. She looked in the pot and could see that what was left in it was still boiling hot.

"Amazing!" she said to Euphraxia. "It is just as if it were only cold water that fell over your face. God keep you, my daughter, and may he continue to grant you power to endure all things in his fear."

The abbess called a meeting of the senior sisters in the oratory.

"I suppose you realise that Euphraxia has earned special favours from God? As you know, she had a very great fall but was completely unharmed, nor did she suffer any injury from that scalding water."

"She truly is a handmaid of the Lord," they said, "and the Lord has a special care for her. In all these trials she has been preserved safely by the Lord."

Chapter XXV

Not only in the city but also in the whole province roundabout the custom had developed of bringing any sick children to the monastery, to these sisters who could work miracles. The abbess would receive them, take them into the oratory and pray for them to the Lord. Almost immediately their spirits would revive, and their mothers would receive them back healed, and they would all go forth glorifying God. [This next paragraph would seem more naturally to belong to the beginning of Chapter XXVII]

Now there was one devil-possessed woman in the monastery who had been imprisoned there from infancy for her own good. An unclean demon infested

her spirit. She frothed at the mouth and ground her teeth and screamed out loud, so that even if her hands were tied everyone who heard her was filled with fear. The abbess and the senior sisters had often prayed for her without success. No one was able to go near her, not even to take her food to her; bread or vegetables were put into a pot hanging from the end of a stick, and offered to her from a safe distance. Sometimes she would overturn the pot and throw it, stick and all, in the direction of whoever was bringing her food.

Chapter XXVI

One day the gatekeeper came to the abbess with an urgent message.

Chapter XXVI (continued), Life of Euphrasia, Book 1d

"My lady," she said, "there is a woman standing weeping outside the gate with her child of about eight years old, paralysed, deaf and dumb."

The abbess knew by the revelation of the Spirit that Euphrasia had been given the grace of the Lord against demons.

"Ask Euphrasia to come here," she said to the gatekeeper. And when she appeared she said to her:

"Go and take that child from his mother and bring him here."

She went out to the gate and when she saw the child, paralysed and trembling, she was overcome with compassion, heaved a deep sigh and made the sign of the cross over him.

"May he who created you heal you, my son," she said.

And she picked him up and took him to the abbess. While she was carrying him the boy was healed and began to cry for his mother, which gave Euphrasia such a start that she dropped the boy on the floor. The boy immediately got up and ran towards the gate, still crying for his mother. Meanwhile the gatekeeper ran to the abbess to tell her what had happened. The abbess called the mother of the child.

"Now look here, my sister," she said, "Have you come here simply to pay tricks on us?"

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, my lady," said the mother, "that child

has never walked or spoken a word until this present moment. But when that other sister picked him up he began to speak! She was so startled she dropped him on the floor, but the child got up immediately and ran to me, your servant."

"So then, he is completely restored to you!" she said. "Take him and go in peace."

Which she did, and departed glorifying God.

Chapter XXVII

The abbess again consulted the senior sisters.

"What is your opinion of Euphraxia?" she asked.

"She is a true handmaid of God," they replied.

The abbess called her.

"Euphraxia," she said, "I want you to go to this demented sister of ours, to see if she will take food from your hands, as long as you are not afraid of her?"

"No, I am not afraid," she replied, "as long as it is you ask me to do it."

So Euphraxia took a bowl with some pulses and broken bread and offered it to her, but she gnashed her teeth and howled, rushed at her and seized the bowl, threatening to smash it. Euphraxia grasped hold of her hand.

"As the Lord lives," she said, "if I can just manage to throw you down on the ground I will get the abbess's cane and give you such a whipping that you will never dare to try that again!"

This had the effect of intimidating her completely, and Euphraxia continued in a rather quieter vein, and spoke to her coaxingly.

"Sit down, now, sister," she said, "take some food and drink and just don't get excited."

And indeed she did sit down, and ate, and drank, and stayed quite calm.

From that moment onwards, food was always given to her under the threat of the cane. The sisters soon knew what Euphraxia had done, thanked the Lord for her, and if ever the sister showed signs of getting upset and violent, they would simply say to her:

"Calm down, sister, restrain yourself, or else sister Euphraxia will come and give you a whipping." And she was immediately quiet.

Chapter XXVIII

Germana, however, was still full of spite as hot as a raging furnace

"If it hadn't been Euphraxia," she said to the sisters, "why couldn't somebody

else have been the one to approach that sister with her food? I'm going to take some food to her myself."

Which she did.

"Here is some food for you to eat, sister," she said.

The possessed woman jumped on her, tore her clothes, grasped her and threw her to the floor, fell on top of her and began to tear at her flesh with her teeth. Germana screamed, but nobody was brave enough to come to her help. Julia ran to the kitchen to get Euphraxia.

"Hurry, sister," she shouted, "Germana is being torn to pieces by that woman!" Euphraxia ran as fast as she could, grabbed the possessed woman by her hands and neck and succeeded in dragging her off Germana, who lay there bleeding and torn.

"This is a fine escapade of yours," she said. "What did you think you were doing?"

The woman was still standing there, frothing at the mouth and grinding her teeth.

"From this time on, sister," said Euphraxia, "if you get violent towards the sisters, I shan't spare you, I will have no pity on you, but I will get my lady abbess's cane and beat you mercilessly!"

And at once she sat down, and ceased from her ravings.

Chapter XXIX

Next morning as they came out of the oratory after divine office, Euphraxia went to visit the possessed woman and found that she had torn her clothes to pieces and thrown them on the floor, where she sat picking up her own excrement and eating it. Euphraxia wept at the sight and went to tell the abbess about it. The sisters all came together, and found her still sitting there, naked, gathering filth and eating it. The abbess ordered that she be given another tunic to wear. Euphraxia took the tunic and a small dish of pulses and broken bread which she held out to her.

"Take this, sister, and get dressed," she said. "Why are you disgracing yourself like this?"

She accepted it, and ate and drank, and Euphraxia put her clothes on for her, and did not cease weeping and groaning for her all day until vespers. And after vespers she began with tears to pray to the Lord that this woman might be healed.

At dawn next day the abbess found her.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were offering prayers for this possessed woman? If you had told me I would have joined you."

"Forgive me, my lady," replied Euphraxia. "It was just that I saw her so vulnerable and acting so disgracefully that I was sorry for her."

"There is something I must say to you," said the abbess, "and that is that you must take care that the temptations of Satan do not result in you getting a bit above yourself! You must just accept that it is Christ who has given you power over the demons to drive them out."

Euphraxia poured ashes upon her head and prostrated herself on the ground

"I know that I am an unclean and unfortunate person," she cried. "Why should I be the one to expel such a powerful demon, when you have all prayed for such a long time without success?"

"My daughter," said the abbess. "The emergency of the moment found you with the strength to cope with it. Your reward will be great in heaven."

Euphraxia went back into the oratory and prostrated herself before the altar and prayed that through her prayers the possessed woman might be healed and help given her from on high. She got up from the floor and on the instructions of the abbess went back to the woman. The sisters all followed her, in some awe at what was being done.

"May you be healed," she said to the woman, "through my Lord Jesus Christ who created you." And she made the sign of the cross on her forehead, and a great cry came from her mouth, as all who were there can bear witness.

"Why should I depart on the orders of this impostor and deceiver, after having lived here for so many years? No one has ever been able to drive me out, so why should this filthy and abandoned person be trying to disturb me?"

"It is not I who am disturbing you," said Euphraxia, "but Christ the God of all."

"I am not going, you filth," cried the demon. "I do not accept that you have the power to drive me out."

"I know I am unclean and full of all kinds of wickedness," said Euphraxia, "as you yourself have just said. But it is the command of the Lord that you should come out of her, before I make use of the abbess's ring, which will torment you above measure!"

The demon still resisted and refused to go so Euphraxia held up the abbess's ring and cried:

"Go! before I put you to torture!"

"Why should I go? I can't go!"

Euphraxia began to strike her with the ring, and on the third strike she cried out:

"Depart from this image of God, you unclean spirit!"

"I can't go! Why are you tormenting me? Where can I go?"

"Into the outer darkness! Into the eternal fire! Into the unending torment prepared for you and for the devil your father and for all who follow him!"

The sisters were witnesses to all this but did not dare come too close, while Euphraxia just kept on struggling with the demon, who kept on resisting.

"Lord Jesus Christ," she cried, looking up to heaven. "Let me not be confounded in this hour! Let not this unclean demon have the mastery!"

And at last, with frothing at the mouth and grinding of teeth, he fled, and the woman was healed from that moment.

The sisters rushed towards her, glorifying God, and a great fear fell upon them all. Euphraxia lifted the woman up and washed her, and clothed her, and led her by the hand to the abbess, who together with all the sisters took her into the monastery and gave glory to God for the miracle they had seen done.

Chapter XXX

From that time on Euphraxia humbled herself even more, going without sleep for a whole night at a time, and maintaining her practice of fasting for the whole week. She continued to serve the sisters in menial tasks, and strove to live in gentleness, humility and joy.

One day the abbess had a vision which left her in a state of extreme distress.

The senior sisters noticed and began to question her about it.

"Tell us, my lady abbess, why you are going around groaning, and giving us such cause to worry about you."

"Don't press me on that until tomorrow."

"Trust us, my lady. If you don't tell us what it is, it will only make us more and more worried about you."

"I'm worried about something in the future, and I didn't want to tell you about it until tomorrow. But seeing you are pressing me, listen: Euphraxia is going to leave us. Tomorrow her life here comes to an end. But don't upset her by telling her that."

The senior sisters cried out in distress at what the abbess had to say, and continued to lament for quite some time. One of the sisters, as soon as she had heard this, ran to the bread oven where she found Euphraxia cooking bread along with Julia, her usual companion.

"Sister Euphraxia," she said, "You ought to know that the abbess and the senior sisters are in a terrible state of grief because of you."

Julia and Euphraxia were bewildered, and just stood there open-mouthed.

"Perhaps she has heard a rumour," said Julia, "that your former fiancé has persuaded the Emperor to order your removal from the monastery, and that is what she is upset about."

"As my Lord Jesus Christ lives," said Euphraxia, "not even if the foundations of the whole round world were shaken, could I be persuaded to abandon my Lord Christ. Do me a favour, sister Julia, while the bread is cooking, go and see if you can find out what the problem is and set my mind at rest."

Julia went and stood outside the abbess's door, and could hear her still talking about her dream.

"I saw two men in monastic habits," she was saying, "who came looking for Euphraxia, and they said to me, 'Bring her here. You must.' And then others came along and said, 'Take Euphraxia and bring her before the Lord.' So I summoned her, and hurried along with them, and we came to a gateway whose glory I couldn't begin to describe, and it opened to us of its own volition, and we went in, and we saw an indescribably beautiful heavenly palace, and there was a nuptial throne there, not made with hands. I was prevented from going any closer, but they took Euphraxia and offered her to the Lord. She fell down and kissed his immaculate feet, and I saw ten thousand Angels and a numberless multitude of Saints standing around looking on, and I saw, the mother of the Lord taking Euphraxia - truly! - and leading her to the nuptial couch, where there was a beautiful crown prepared, and I heard a voice saying to Euphraxia, 'Behold, your reward. Now hurry and come here in ten days' time, to enjoy these things for endless ages.' That was nine days ago, when I saw the vision, so tomorrow Euphraxia will die."

Chapter XXXI

As Julia listened secretly to the abbess's story, she began to beat her breast and face. She wept and returned to the kitchen, where Euphraxia was alarmed to see her in tears.

"For the sake of the Son of God, sister Julia," she cried, "tell me what you have heard and what you are crying about."

"I am weeping, dear sister, because today we shall be parted, so I have heard the lady abbess say. Tomorrow you will breathe your last!"

Euphraxia was shocked at hearing this, and sat down completely distraught.

Julia sat down beside her, weeping.

"Give me your hand, sister," said Euphraxia, "and help me to where the firewood is kept and leave me there. I will leave you to take the bread out of the oven and take it into the monastery."

This Julia did, saying nothing as yet to the abbess. Euphraxia lay down on the floor.

"Why, O Lord," she cried, "are you being so cruel to your pilgrim and orphan? Why are you angry with me? Now is the time when I ought to be doing battle with the devil, but you are demanding that I give up my soul. Have mercy on your handmaid, O Lord Jesus Christ. Spare me for at least a year that I may weep for my sins, for I have not sufficiently repented, I have not done penance. I cannot work out my salvation (Philippians 2.12), for no one can approach you from the lower regions. Once dead, there is no repentance, tears cannot prevail beyond the grave, for the dead praise not thee, O Lord (Psalms 6.5). It is the living who praise your holy name. Grant me just one more year, that I may do penance. Without your aid I am become as withered as the fig tree (Mark 11.21). "

One of the sisters heard her laments and told the abbess and the sisters that Euphraxia was lying in the woodshed, weeping.

"It is because she had heard that she was going to die," said Julia.

"Who was it told her?" exclaimed the abbess. "Causing such grief to her soul like that. Who told her and saddened her heart? Didn't I tell you to say nothing until her hour had come? Why have you done this and hurt her so deeply? Go, someone, and bring her here."

Several sisters went to where Euphraxia was.

"Come, sister," they said. "The abbess is calling for you."

She got up and went with them, crying and sobbing, and stood in front of the abbess, weeping and lamenting, and pouring forth heartrending groans.

"What has happened, my daughter," said the abbess, "to make you groan so grievously?"

"I am mourning for myself," she replied, "because you knew I was going to die, and you didn't tell me so that I might have time to weep for my sins, still embroiled in sinfulness as I am."

She prostrated herself and clasped the feet of the abbess, her who had been always been so prompt to give her good counsel.

"Have mercy on me, my lady," she cried, "and pray for me to the Lord that he might grant me one more year to do penance, for I know not what darknesses

may overwhelm me."

"As the Lord lives," said the abbess, "Christ your king surely counts you worthy of joining the heavenly choir."

And she told her all the details of the good things in store for her, and asked her to pray to the Lord that she also might be found worthy to share in those things. Euphraxia prayed, and she and the abbess together turned towards Christ in prayer that what one would enjoy the other might enjoy also.

Chapter XXXII

As Euphraxia lay at the abbess's feet she began to feel cold and stiff, then after a while became quite feverish.

"Pick her up," the abbess said to the sisters, "and let us all go into the oratory, for her time is come."

They put her in the oratory and kept vigil over her till vespers. After vespers it was time for the evening meal, and the abbess told everyone to leave the oratory, keeping only Julia with her so that Euphraxia would not be left alone. They closed the doors and remained with her till morning. Julia prayed to Euphraxia:

"My dear sister, do not forget me. Remember how closely we have always been united on this earth. Pray to God that I be not separated from you. Remember how I have shared in your battles. Pray to the Lord that he will release me from the burden of this flesh in sure hope that I may be found worthy of being with you."

When morning was come, the abbess noticed that Euphraxia was breathing and stirring a little.

"Go and fetch my daughters," she said to Julia, "so that they can say goodbye to her before she goes."

They all came in weeping to make their farewells.

"Remember us, dear sister Euphraxia," they said, "for your name is blessed of the Lord who loves you."

Last of all came in that woman who had suffered for so long from a demon and who had been healed by Euphraxia. She grieved like everyone else, and kissed Euphraxia's hands.

"How much these hands have ministered to me, an unworthy sinner!" she said.

"It was these hands that drove the demon out of me."

When Euphraxia made no reply, the abbess said to her:

"My daughter, can you not give this sister some comfort? Can you not just say

something to her, for she is so terribly upset?"

Euphraxia responded.

"Why grieve for me, sister?" she said. "Just let me rest in peace, for I am going fast. But you, just keep on blessing the Lord, and he will keep you safe. But pray for me, for there is a great battle going on in my soul at this moment."

The abbess prayed, they all responded Amen, and Euphraxia gave up her spirit. She was thirty years old, and they buried her in the same grave as her mother, glorifying God that they were privileged to have one of their sisters in the presence of God.

Chapter XXXIII

It was Julia who had taught her how to read and how to sing the psalms, and she had loved that pupil of hers who had belonged to the Emperor's family. She wept for three days without leaving Euphraxia's grave. On the fourth day, however, she felt quite happy and went to the abbess to tell her why.

"Pray for me, my lady," she said "for through blessed Euphraxia's intercession Christ is calling me."

She kissed all the sisters, and on the fifth day after Euphraxia's death her teacher Julia died also, and was buried in the same tomb as the blessed Euphraxia.

Chapter XXXIV

Thirty days later the abbess summoned the senior sisters.

"My daughters," she said, "you must choose someone else as a mother to take my place and preside over you."

"Why are you saying this, my lady? Tell us! You have never spoken to your servants like this before."

"The Lord is calling me," she said. "Sister Euphraxia has been praying very diligently for me, so that I too may merit a heavenly marriage bed. Julia also is sharing in what Euphraxia has been granted and has entered into that palace not made with human hands, and I too am hastening on the way to being found worthy of sharing that place with them."

The sisters rejoiced at hearing of the great glory which Euphraxia and Julia enjoyed, and prayed likewise that they all might deserve to be partakers of such a marriage. They chose one of the sisters called Theogenia to preside over them, whom the abbess called to her side.

"All the sisters have a good opinion of you, and give you the leadership, and the responsibility of handing on the divine rule and all that follows from it. In the name of the undefiled and consubstantial Trinity I urge you to take no thought for riches or possessions, nor engage the sisters in worldly concerns, but rather, despising temporal goods you may earn the right to eternal blessings."

Chapter XXXIV (continued), Life of Euphrasia, Book 1d
(Also Euphrosyna further down this page)

To the rest of the sisters she said:

"You have all witnessed the perfection of the life and conduct of Euphraxia. Imitate her that you may share with her where she is."

They all said Amen. She said farewell to them all, went into the oratory, and shut the door as she told them that no one else should come in until next morning.

Next morning when they went in they found her asleep in the Lord. They sang a hymn to the Lord and placed her in the same tomb as the blessed Euphraxia. And from that time on no one else was buried in that tomb.

Chapter XXXV

Many signs and healings were done at this memorable tomb, and demons screamed as they were expelled, for Euphraxia was strong for us after her death and looked after us.

This is the true life of the blessed lady Euphraxia who earned admission to the company of heaven. Let us all, brothers as well as sisters, make haste to imitate her manner of life and seek after humility, obedience, labour, gentleness, long-suffering, that we may be worthy of the Angelic life and with great joy be at one with our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 19

The Life of St Euphrosyna, Virgin [Celebrated in the Roman martyrology on January 1]

Chapter I

There was a man in Alexandria called Paphnutius who kept the commandments of God and was held in honour by all. He took a wife from a family of similar status to himself, who had many good points, except that she was sterile. This made him very unhappy, because he had no one to whom he could bequeath his possessions and who could manage his estates well after his death. Night and day he was very active in caring for the poor, and he spent a lot of time in church, fasting and praying to God to give him a son. His wife too was very sad at seeing how unhappy her husband was, and she too gave much money to the poor and to various oratories, and prayed that God would grant him his desire.

Paphnutius cast about trying to find some person beloved of God who might be able by his prayers to get him what he longed for. He visited a monastery where it was said that the father of the monastery had great influence with God. He gave them quite a large sum of money and regained much of his self-confidence from the abbot and the brothers.

Chapter II

After some time he confided in the abbot what it was that he longed for above everything else, and the abbot had compassion on him and prayed to God that he might be given a child. God heard their prayers and granted them a daughter, and Paphnutius was so impressed with the abbot's way of life, that he kept up a regular association with the monastery from then on. He also brought his wife to the monastery that she might be blessed by the abbot and brothers. Once the child was weaned and had attained the age of seven years, she was baptised and given the name Euphrosyna. She was a great joy to her parents, for she had been accepted by God, and was very beautiful.

Chapter III

When she was twelve years old her mother passed away from this world. It fell to her father to continue teaching her to read and write and learn about all the other things necessary for living in this world. The girl was diligent in her

studies and her father was astonished at how gifted she was. The reputation of her intelligence and good sense spread throughout the city, as did the beauty of her countenance which reflected the beauty of her soul. Many parents sought after her as a bride for their sons, but a definite agreement could never be reached because her father just kept on saying, "Let the will of the Lord be done." But one of them richer and more important than the others pressed him so forcefully to promise his daughter in marriage that at last he agreed.

Chapter IV

Much later, when she was eighteen, he took her with him to visit the monastery where he was so well known, and again gave a considerable sum of money to help with the monastery's needs.

"I have brought the fruit of your prayers with me," he said to the abbot, "that you might pray for her as I give her hand in marriage."

The abbot made arrangements for her to stay in the guesthouse, and had several conversations with her in which he encouraged her to be chaste and humble and patient in the fear of God. She stayed there for three days and joined in each day with the psalms. She saw something of the way of life and spiritual purpose of the monks, and was deeply moved.

"How blessed these men are, in this life living like Angels, and afterwards enjoying life without end."

And her heart began to yearn zealously after the fear of God.

Chapter V

After three days Paphnutius went to the abbot again.

"Come, father," he said, "so that your handmaid can give you thanks, and pray for her as we go back to the city."

When the abbot came the girl threw herself at his feet.

"Please pray for me, father, " she said, "that God may enlighten my soul."

The abbot stretched out his hands over her and blessed her.

"God, you know human beings before they come to be born. Grant your protection to this your handmaid, that she may merit your assistance and a portion in the kingdom of heaven."

They thanked the old man, and went back to the city, and whenever Paphnutius met one of the monks he would invite him back to his house to pray for his daughter.

The anniversary of the day the abbot founded the monastery occurred a little

later and he sent one of the brothers to Paphnutius with an invitation for him to come to the solemn celebration. He knocked at the door and asked for Paphnutius, but the slave replied that he was out.

Chapter VI

Euphrosyna heard what the slave said, came to the door herself and invited the brother inside and began to question him eagerly.

"Tell me, brother, how many brothers are there in the monastery?"

"Three hundred and fifty-two."

"Does the abbot accept anyone who comes wanting to join?"

"He receives them joyfully, mindful of what the Lord said, 'He that comes to me I will not cast out' (John 6.37)"

"Does everyone join in singing the psalms and fasting?"

"We sing the psalms in common, and each one fasts according to his ability, as he decides. Our practices are not rigidly imposed, but are freely chosen as spontaneous acts of will."

Euphrosyna thought for a moment about what the monk had said.

"I would like to leave here," she said at last, "and join this indescribable sort of life, but I am frightened of disobeying my father, who wants to hand me over to a husband, because it would suit his empty and fleeting business interests in this world."

"Sister, don't allow any man to stain your body and bring such beauty into defilement, but give yourself as a bride to Christ who can give you the kingdom of heaven and the company of Angels in exchange for every transitory delight. Leave without telling anyone, change your clothes into monastic garments and come to the monastery."

"I like that idea. But who will cut my hair off? I don't want any old layperson to do it, who would not see it as a religious act."

"Look, your father will be coming to the monastery to spend three or four days there. Get one of the monks to come to you and he will happily cooperate with you in anything you want to do."

Chapter VII

As they were talking thus, Paphnutius came back home.

"How is it," he said when he had greeted the monk, "that you have come to visit our humble dwelling?"

"The abbot has sent me because it is the anniversary of the monastery, and he invites you to come and share in the blessings."

This pleased Paphnutius very much, and he went back to the monastery with him in his boat. By the time he had got there, Euphrosyna had called one of her most reliable slaves to her.

"Go the monastery of Theodosius," she said, "go into the church, and ask any monk you meet there to come and see me."

By the mercy of God the slave met a monk as he was coming out of the monastery carrying his goods for sale, and asked him to come and see Euphrosyna, which he did.

"Pray for me, father," she said as she greeted him.

He said a prayer of blessing and they sat down.

"Sir," said Euphrosyna, "I have a father who is a Christian and a servant of God, and is very wealthy. He had a wife who gave me birth, but she is now dead. My father finds it convenient in his business affairs to hand me over into the toils of this wicked world. I don't want to be stained in that way, but I am frightened of disobeying my father, and I don't know what to do. I spent a sleepless night asking God to have mercy on my soul, and when morning had come I had the idea of sending to the monastery for one of the brothers to come and bring me a word of salvation and tell me what I ought to do. Father, I know you are sent by God. I beg you, as you hope for a blessing on your own soul, teach me the path of God."

"What the Lord says," he replied, "is 'Whosoever will not renounce father and mother and brothers and children, yes, and his own life also, cannot be my disciple'. I can't tell you any more than that. However, if you think you have the bodily strength to go through with it, leave it all, flee from the worldly riches of your father, who will have no difficulty in finding people to bestow it on - poorhouses, hospitals, hospices, monasteries, widows, students, pilgrims, the sick, prisoners - let him deal with his property as he will and as it pleases him. But you, think only of how to save your own soul."

"I trust in God and I trust in your prayers, that it is my task to labour for the salvation of my soul, God being my helper."

"Intentions like that must not be flouted. But there is still time to change your mind."

"No, I have troubled you for the very purpose that you may help me to fulfil my desires. Say your prayer of blessing over me and cut my hair off."

The monk prayed, cut her hair off and clothed her with the monastic habit.

"May God who leads all his saints to freedom preserve you from all evil," he prayed.

And he left her and went on his way rejoicing.

Chapter VIII

Meanwhile Euphrosyna took thought about what she would do next.

"If I go to a monastery of women, my father will be able to find me and drag me off to my promised bridegroom. So I shall go to a monastery of men, where no one would suspect me to be."

She shed her female clothing and dressed in male attire. She put five hundred solidi in her pocket and late that night stole out of the house, and lay low till morning. By the providence of God her father went out early in the morning to spend some time in church. Euphrosyna presented herself at the monastery where her father was so well known, and sent a message to the abbot by means of the gatekeeper.

"I am a eunuch from the palace standing at the gate and wanting to speak with you."

The abbot went out, Euphrosyna prostrated herself, the abbot prayed and they sat down.

"What is it that has brought you here, my son?" asked the abbot.

"I am one of the palace eunuchs, and I have a great longing to be part of the monastic life. The city nowadays holds the monastic life in high regard. I have heard of how good your way of life is here, and I long to share it with you. I have many possessions, and if my master releases me I shall hand them over to you."

"You are very welcome, my son. The monastery is here. If that is what you want to do, come and live with us. What is your name, my son?"

"Smaragdus." ["Emerald"]

"You are too young to live as a solitary. You need to have a teacher, so that you can learn the rule and customs of the monastery."

"Whatever you say, father, that I will do."

She put the five hundred solidi into the abbot's hand.

"Please accept these in the meantime," she said, "and if it proves that I am able to persevere in this life the rest will follow."

The abbot summoned a brother called Agapitus, a sober, [impassibilis.

Perseverance in monastic discipline was expected to bring about a state where one was no longer subject to the passions. One had become passionless,

impassible] holy man, and handed Smaragdus over into his care.

"From now on he will be your son and your disciple. Set your seal upon (consigna) him, that he may come to be even greater than his master."

Smaragdus knelt, Agapitus signed (consignavit) him with the cross and said a prayer, they all said "Amen", and Agapitus took him into his own cell.

Now when Smaragdus came into the church to join in the prayers, the beauty of his face proved to be such that many demons were encouraged to scatter evil thoughts among the brothers, so that they were indignant with the abbot for allowing such beauty into the monastery.

"Your face is disturbingly beautiful, my son," said the abbot to Smaragdus, "and the brothers are very weak, so I want you to remain alone in your cell, and sing the psalms there, and eat there, and not come out of it at all." And he instructed Agapitus to get a single cell ready for Smaragdus and leave him there. Agapitus did everything the father of the monastery told him and put Smaragdus in a solitary cell, where he gave himself night and day to prayers, and fasting, and vigils, serving God in simplicity of heart, so that Agapitus wondered, and told all the other brothers of his constancy. They all praised God that from their weakness had come such strength.

Chapter IX

When her father, Paphnutius, came home he went to his daughter's room, and was worried at not finding her there. He enquired anxiously for the serving men and women what had happened to Euphrosyna.

"We saw her last night," they said, "But when she did not appear this morning we thought that the father of her bridegroom must have come and taken her away."

He sent slaves to the bridegroom's house, but they did not find her there. The bridegroom and his father were very upset, and came back to see Paphnutius. They found him lying on the ground in a terribly distressed state.

"Someone must have abducted her and run off with her," they said to him.

He sent slaves on horseback throughout the whole of Alexandria, they boarded the ships in the harbour in their frantic search for her, they investigated the women's monasteries, the hermitages, the anchorites' caves, the houses of friends and neighbours. They did not find her and at last they began to mourn her as dead, father-in-law grieving for daughter-in-law, bridegroom for bride, father for daughter.

"Alas! Alas!" cried Paphnutius, "Alas, my beautiful daughter! Alas, the joy of

my eyes! Who has invaded my territory? Who has stolen my treasure? Who has despoiled my vineyard? Who has put out the light of my life, dispossessed me of my hope, violated my daughter's beauty? What wolf has snatched my precious lamb? There is no place where such beauty as hers could go unremarked. Where is the sea across which her regal appearance could have been led away captive? She has been a model of generosity, a comforter in time of trouble, a solace for those in distress, a harbour for those hard pressed. O Earth, Earth! Never may you receive my bones until I discover my Euphrosyna's fate!"

Inspired by these words of Paphnutius, and many more like them, the voices of all who heard him were raised in mourning and weeping. The whole city lamented Euphrosyna.

Chapter X

Paphnutius could not reconcile himself to his loss, he could find no comfort anywhere, so he went to his friend the abbot and fell at his feet.

"I beg you not to cease from prayer, that the labour of your prayer may bring forth fruit, for something has happened to my daughter and I do not know what."

The venerable old man was very sorry to hear this, and he called all the brothers together.

"My brothers," he said, "I am going to ask you to be so kind as pray to God that he may mercifully show us what has happened to the daughter of our friend Paphnutius."

They prayed and fasted for a whole week, but were given no revelation about Euphrosyna, such as they were usually granted when they prayed to God for someone else. Euphrosyna herself, of course, was praying to God day and night that he would not bring her life out into the open. When the abbot realised that there was not going to be any revelation from God either to him or anyone else, he did his best to comfort Paphnutius.

"Don't rebel against the Lord's discipline, my son," he said. "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens" (Proverbs 3.11-12). Remember that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father (Matthew 10.29), how much more your daughter! Nothing happens without his permission. Surely, since he has revealed nothing to us about your daughter he has something better in store for you. I am sure that if she has wandered into evil paths, which God forbid, God would never ignore such great labours as the brothers have been doing. I

have confidence in the Lord that he will in this life reveal her to you."

Paphnutius was comforted by his words, and prayed and gave thanks to God daily, while giving himself to good works and almsgiving.

Chapter XI

From time to time he kept on visiting the monastery, commending himself to the prayers of the brothers. One day he fell at the abbot's feet, and opened his heart.

"Pray for me, father, for I cannot stop grieving for my daughter, but more and more from day to day the wound is reopened and grows bigger and my soul is troubled."

The abbot could see how troubled he was.

"Would you like to talk to a very spiritual brother of ours who used to belong to the palace of Theodosius?" - not realising that he was talking about Paphnutius' daughter.

"Yes, I would," said Paphnutius.

The abbot summoned Agapitus.

"Take Paphnutius with you to the cell of Smaragdus," he said.

And so without any warning Euphrosyna found that her father was in her cell with her. Seeing her father in such sorrow her tears began to fall, which Paphnutius put down to her feelings of sympathy. He did not recognise her, for the beauty of her face had wasted away by reason of her abstinence and vigils and tears. Besides, her face was half hidden by her cowl, so that he could not see her clearly. They prayed and sat down. She began to speak to him about the future kingdom of blessedness and eternal glory, to which one could attain by humility and chastity, by a holy way of life, by almsgiving and charity, by contempt of the world and by not loving children more than God who has made us all. And she drew on holy scripture to show that tribulation encourages patience, and patience acceptance (Romans 5.3-4). And she had great compassion on her father, seeing him in such great sorrow.

(Also St Mary the Harlot further down this page)

Chapter XII

She was frightened of being recognised and making things worse for him, but she nevertheless wanted to bring him some comfort.

"I am quite sure that God is not turning his face away from you," she said.

"And if your daughter's soul had been lost, God would have revealed that to you, and would not blame you, or debar you from light perpetual, because of her soul being claimed by the devil. But I am confident that she must have chosen a better part for herself (Luke 10.42), as I have already said, in accordance with the Gospel where it says, 'Whosoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10.37). And 'Anyone who has not renounced everything he possesses cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14.26). But God is quite able to reveal her to you sometime in the course of this life. So until then, be content. Why destroy yourself by excessive grief? Just give thanks to God, doubting nothing.

"Now my teacher Agapitus has told me several times that someone called Paphnutius, a man abounding in good works, has been visiting us in great grief because he believes his daughter must be dead, without any idea of that has really happened to her, but in great sorrow because she was his only daughter. He has been falling at the feet of the abbot, begging that God will reveal the truth to him through the prayers of the abbot and all the brothers. So you pray to God also, as I will, unworthy though I am and aware of my many sins. I will pray that God will give you patience and longsuffering and that he will fulfil in you, as in your daughter, what it is best for you both. For that reason I would like to see you and talk to you more often, so that perhaps I may humbly be able to give you some consolation."

At this point she bade Paphnutius farewell, fearful that too prolonged a conversation might give her away. As Paphnutius moved away her soul was filled with compassion for him, her cheeks paled and tears flowed and she coughed up blood, weakened by fasting as she was, and not having eaten that day. But Paphnutius was greatly comforted, and went back to the abbot.

"That brother has really done my soul good," he said. "His words of comfort have brought me such happiness and grace from God that it is almost as if I had found my daughter again."

And commending himself to the prayers of the abbot and all the brothers he went back home magnifying God.

Chapter XIII

When Smaragdus had lived in her cell for thrifty-eight years she fell ill and died. A few days earlier Paphnutius had paid one of his usual visits to the monastery and after being greeted by the brothers and praying with them he said to the abbot, "With your permission, father, may I see Smaragdus, for I have a great longing to see him?"

The abbot called Agapitus and told him to take Paphnutius to Smaragdus' cell. Paphnutius went in and found him lying there mortally ill, burst into tears and embraced him.

"Alas, where are your promises now? Where are your sweet words promising me that there would come a time when I would see my daughter with my own eyes? I shall never see her, and not only that but you are leaving us as well, the only one who could give me some comfort. Woe is me! Who shall comfort me in my old age? To whom can I go? Who can help me? I am weighed down now by a double grief. It is thirty-eight years since I lost my daughter, without any news of her at all which I have prayed for day and night, and now another grief overwhelms me, for I have never found anyone like unto this brother. What hope have I left? Where do I find comfort? I shall go down in sorrow to my grave."

Smaragdus became aware of his tears and inconsolable grief.

"Why are you in such a turmoil and, killing yourself with worry?" she said.

"The arm of the Lord is not weakened. Is there anything that God finds too difficult? Put away your sadness. Remember how God revealed to the patriarch Jacob that Joseph for whom he had mourned was alive. But I have a request to make. Stay with me for three days without leaving my side."

So Paphnutius stayed for three days wondering within himself whether God was about to reveal to Smaragdus something about himself.

"I have waited as you asked, my brother," he said on the third day, "and have not gone off anywhere else."

Chapter XIV

Smaragdus, who was really Euphrosyna, knew that this was the day of her death

"Almighty God has taken up my wretchedness and fulfilled all my desires," she said to Paphnutius, "for he has defended me from the snares of the enemy, against whom I have striven manfully right up to the end, not in my own

strength but by his power. I have finished my course and there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4.8). I don't want you to worry any more about your daughter Euphrosyna, for I am she, and you are my father. So now you have seen me and have achieved your desire. But I would rather you did not tell anyone; don't let anyone else strip my body and wash it, but do it yourself. And I declared to the abbot that I had great possessions, and that if I proved able to persevere and endure in this place I would leave them all to him. So please fulfil what I have promised, for this place is worthy of respect, and pray for me."

So saying she gave up her spirit. It was the first of January.

Chapter XV

Paphnutius saw that she was dead, and his stomach heaved and he fell to the floor as if dead. Agapitus came in and saw that Smaragdus was dead and that Paphnutius was lying half dead on the floor. He threw some water in his face and picked him up.

"Are you all right, Paphnutius?" he asked.

"Let me be. Let me die on this spot," he said. "I have seen wonderful things here today."

He got up and gazed upon her face, while his own tears streamed forth.

"Woe is me, my most sweet daughter!" he cried. "Why did you not reveal yourself to me sooner, so that I could have willingly joined you here myself. Woe is me! Why did you hide? How is it that you have endured the snares of the enemy and the spiritual powers of darkness in this life and now have entered into life eternal?"

Chapter XVI

As Agapitus listened to him, he realised the wonderful thing that had happened and was amazed. He ran to tell it all to the abbot, who came and fell down before Euphrosyna.

"Euphrosyna, bride of Christ and daughter of the saints," he cried, "forget not your servants in this monastery and pray for us to the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may strive manfully to enter the gateway of salvation and receive our portions with him and his saints."

He assembled all the brothers and with all due honour he ordered her holy body to be buried. As they were all together as witnesses of this stupendous miracle, they glorified God who had worked such a great miracle even in the

weaker sex. One of the brothers who was blind in one eye tearfully kissed her face, and as soon as he touched her his sight was restored. All the brothers who were there and saw what had happened blessed the Lord and gave thanks to him from whom all blessings flow. Greatly strengthened and edified, they buried her in her family grave. Her father gave everything he possessed to the church, the hospice and the monastery, but the greater part to the monastery, which he joined, and dwelt in the same cell as that in which Euphrosyna had fallen asleep.

Paphnutius lived in this holy life for ten years before departing to the Lord, and the abbot and all the brothers buried him next to his daughter, glorifying God. The anniversaries of their departure to the Lord are celebrated to this present day, glorifying the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit. to whom be honour and glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 20

The Life of St Mary the Harlot, the niece of Abraham the Hermit

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on 29 October]

by St Ephraem the Archdeacon

translated into Latin from the Greek by an anonymous author.

This is the rest of Life of Abraham, begun in

Life No 7 in Book 1a

Chapter I

Beloved brethren, I would like to respond to your unanimous request that I should tell you about another admirable matter which this blessed man dealt with in his old age. For wise and spiritual men it provides an instructive example of humility and compunction. This is what it was all about:

Chapter II

The blessed man Abraham had a brother who died leaving a daughter seven years old. Her father's friends decided that as this girl had now lost both her parents, she should be immediately handed over to her uncle. The old man accepted this, and put her in the outer room of the cell. There was a little window in the wall between the rooms, through which he was able to teach her the psalter and the scriptures. She joined with him in praising God in the vigil services, and she strove to emulate her uncle in his practice of

abstinence. She readily accepted this regime and made great advances in all the virtues. The holy man unceasingly prayed with tears to the Lord that her mind should be freed from attachment to the affairs of this world, for her father had left her a large sum of money. But with her father now dead, and her uncle in charge, the servant of Christ ordered that the money be distributed to the needy and orphans. The girl daily asked her uncle to pray that she be kept safe from the divers snares and traps of the devil, and kept faithfully to the rule he had given her.

Her uncle gave thanks that he could see her unhesitatingly moving forwards in the practice of all the virtues, that is in tears, humility, modesty and silence, and what was even more wonderful, in a profound love of God. She had lived with him in abstinence for twenty years, as pure as a lamb and as unspotted as a dove, when the devil began to rage against her, and tempted her with his usual tactics. He sought to ensnare her in his nets, hoping to turn her mind away from God and give the blessed man great cause to worry about her.

Chapter III

There was a certain monk (a monk in name only) who was in the habit of coming to visit the holy man under the pretext of seeking for instruction. He could see that blessed woman through the window, and began to be stirred with desire for her. He sought pretexts for speaking with her, and the urgings of lust began to set his heart on fire. Over the space of a year he insinuated himself into her affections by degrees, until her thoughts were quite overwhelmed by the sweetness of his words, and at last she opened the window of her cell and went out to him. He immediately contaminated and polluted her in the wickedness of his sinful lust.

Afterwards, she was horrified at how wicked was the deed she had done. She tore the tunic she was wearing and lacerated her face with her nails. In her excessive grief, she wished she were dead. Her anxiety oppressed her like a dead weight, in her mental storm she could not see the prospects of any harbour, her fevered thoughts flew backwards and forwards and she bewailed her fate unceasingly.

"This feels like a wound unto death," she cried. "The labour of my days and my abstinence have gone for nothing, the work of my prayers, tears and vigils has been rendered completely worthless. I have grievously offended my God and have destroyed myself. What a miserable wretch I am, drowning myself in tears! I have inflicted the most bitter sorrow upon my holy uncle, my soul is

burdened with guilt, and I have simply become a bit of sport for the devil. What point is there in prolonging my miserable existence any further? Alas, what have I done? Alas, what shall I do now? Alas, what evils have I brought upon myself? Alas, how could I have ever sunk so low? How did my mind come to be so darkened? I could not see that I was doing wrong, I did not realise I was being despoiled, I cannot understand how my heart came to be hidden in a cloud of darkness. How is it that I did not realise what I was doing?

"Where can I hide myself? Where can I go? Where is there some ravine I can throw myself into? Where now are all the teachings of my most holy uncle? Where are the warnings of his colleague, Ephraem? They taught me to preserve my virginity so that I might offer an immaculate soul to my immortal bridegroom. 'Your bridegroom,' they said, 'is holy and ardent'. Alas, what can I do? I don't dare so much as lift up my eyes to heaven, for I know that in the eyes of both God and man I am as good as dead. I don't dare to go anywhere near his window. I am a sinner full of sordid uncleanness - how shall I even try to speak with my holy uncle? If I even dared to attempt it, wouldn't a blast of fire burst from him to burn me to ashes? Seeing that I am already dead and have no hope of gaining salvation, I had better leave here and go to some foreign land where nobody knows me."

Hastily, she left, went to a foreign land, changed her clothes and found employment in a brothel.

Chapter IV

This disaster which happened to her was revealed to the holy man by a vision in his sleep. What he saw was a terrifying, enormous dragon, hissing loudly and stinking most horribly, which burst out from somewhere towards his own cell, where it found a little dove, which it devoured and then returned to its own pit. He woke up in great distress, weeping bitter tears, interpreting the vision as an attack of the devil against the Church of God, turning many away from the faith and creating some schism in holy Church. He fell on his knees and prayed to God.

"O God, lover of men, nothing is hid from your sight. You know the meaning of this vision."

Two days later he saw the same dragon coming back to the cell in the same manner as before. With its belly torn open it lowered its head down at his feet, and he could see the dove which it had devoured was still alive in its stomach. He put his hand in and pulled it out alive. When he woke up he called out for

his blessed niece several times, thinking that she was still in her cell.

"What has been the matter with you, Mary" - for that was her name - "that you have not opened your voice to praise God these last two days?"

He got no reply, and since he had not heard her singing the psalms as usual for the last two days it began to dawn on him that the vision most certainly was about her. Then he groaned and wept bitterly, pouring out floods of tears.

"Woe is me! A wolf has carried off my little lamb and taken my daughter captive! O Christ, Saviour of the world, give me back my little lamb Mary. Bring her back to the fold, lest in my old age I depart this world in grief. Do not turn your ears away from my prayer, O Lord, but speedily send down your grace that she may be snatched unharmed from the mouth of the dragon."

The two days of the vision turned out to signify two years, during which his niece lived out her shameful life as if in the disgusting belly of the dragon. But the holy man never ceased at all times day and night from praying for her to God.

Chapter V

After two years, he found out where she was and what she was doing, and he asked someone he knew very well to go there and find out everything about her that he could. After having gone there and actually seen her, he came back and gave Abraham a full and truthful report. At Abraham's request he then lent him a soldier's uniform and a horse to ride. Disguised as a soldier, and wearing voluminous headgear to conceal his face, he opened his door, came out, mounted his horse, and hurried off, taking with him just one solidus. Anyone who ventures into any foreign country or city always assumes the dress of that country so that he won't be noticed; just so did Abraham wear aggressive clothing, to frighten off any possible attacker. Take a lesson, my beloved brothers, from this second Abraham. Just as the first Abraham went forth to do battle with kings and struck them down in order to rescue his nephew Lot (Genesis 13.12-16), so did this second Abraham sally forth to do battle with the devil, to conquer him and bring back his niece in triumph.

Chapter VI

When he arrived at the place where she was, he turned aside into the inn (stabulum) and looked about him carefully in all directions, hoping to catch sight of her. Having lingered there for the best part of an hour without having caught the slightest glimpse of her, he approached the landlord with a grin on

his face.

"I have heard, my friend," he said, "that you have a most beautiful girl here. I would gladly have a look at her, if you will allow me."

The landlord looked at Abraham's grey hairs, and thought to himself that this person could hardly have any thoughts of lust in his mind, considering his obviously advanced age.

"You have been told correctly," he replied. "She really is outstandingly beautiful."

And indeed it is true that Mary was of an almost preternatural beauty.

"What is her name?" he asked.

"Mary."

"I should be delighted if you would bring her in to me," he said, filled with joy at hearing her name. "Perhaps she might dine with me today, for I have heard great stories about this girl."

He called her in, and when her uncle saw her, dressed like a prostitute, a shudder of grief shook his whole frame, but he hid the bitterness of his soul with a smile of pleasure. He restrained himself from breaking out into tears, lest she recognise him and take refuge in flight.

Chapter VII

They sat down and had a drink, and this wonderful man then began to lead her on. She got up from her seat, put her arms around his neck and gave him a few gentle kisses. But as did so, the familiar scent of an abstinent body assailed her sense of smell, and the remembrance of the days when she lived in abstinence herself suddenly burst upon her mind. She cried out, as if pierced by a javelin, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Woe, woe is me!" she cried, unable to restrain the pain in her heart.

The landlord was shocked.

"What is the matter Mary?" he cried. "Why these cries of pain? You have been here two years and I have never heard you moan like this before. I don't understand what's bothering you."

"It would have been better for me if I had died three years ago!" she said.

Her blessed uncle, hoping not as yet to be recognised, said to her quite calmly:

"We were enjoying each other's company a moment ago. Could it be that the memory of your sins has just come into your mind?"

O Almighty God! How wonderful is the way you shed your mercy upon us!

Wouldn't you think that by now the girl was at least thinking to herself, 'What

a close resemblance there is between this man and my uncle!" But you alone are the lover of mankind, O God, from whom all goodness and wisdom flows; you so decreed that she did not recognise him and so run away in confusion. The only possible reason for this servant of yours, her uncle, being able to hold back his tears, must surely be that you intervened to make the impossible possible.

The holy man gave the landlord the solidus he had brought with him.

"Prepare the best meal for us that you possibly can," he said, "so that the girl and I can dine together. I have come a long journey for the love of her."

O loving wisdom of our God! O truly spiritual fount of knowledge! The wisdom of your saving ways is a perpetual cause for celebration. For fifty years of abstinence Abraham had tasted nothing but bread, and here he was now eating meat without hesitation, simply in order to save a lost soul. The choirs of Holy Angels looked on and applauded with exultation at the discretion this blessed man was displaying, for he was eating and drinking enthusiastically with no qualms at all simply in order to rescue a lost soul from the lowest depths O wisdom of the wise, O knowledge of the knowledgeable, O discretion of the discreet! You cannot but admire the simplicity of this man. Come, stand in awe of how this man, so perfect and wise and prudent and discreet, has made himself into something quite different, into someone ignorant and completely lacking in discretion, simply in order that he might snatch a soul from the mouth of the lion, and free an imprisoned and conquered soul from the chains and oppression of darkness.

Life of St Mary the Harlot (continued), Book 1d
(Also St Thais the Harlot further down page)

Chapter VIII

After they had eaten, the girl became quite provocative and suggested they go to the bedroom.

"Yes, let's go," he said.

As he went in he saw the bed in the corner and sat down on it without hesitation. However shall I describe you, you most perfect athlete of Christ? I really do not know how to put the right name to you. Do I call you continent, or incontinent? Wise, or idiotic? Discreet or indiscreet? For fifty years of your life you have slept on a hard bed, and here you are now boldly getting into a bed of this sort! But of course you have done all these things for the praise and glory of Christ. You have undertaken a long and tedious journey, you have eaten meat and drunk wine, entered a house of ill repute, and all for the sake of saving one lost soul. Yet we tend to draw back in diffidence when we should at least be saying some sort of constructive word to our neighbour.

Chapter IX

"Come, sir, let me take your shoes off for you," she said, as he sat on the bed.

"Shut the door first," he said, "and then you can take them off."

She wanted to take them off first, but he would not let her, so she went and shut the door and came back to him.

"Come closer, Mary," he said.

He took her by the hand, and she thought he was about to embrace her, but instead he took off the concealing headgear he was wearing and at last allowed the tears to flow.

"Mary, my daughter," he said, "don't you recognise me? You are my own flesh and blood. Wasn't it I who brought you up? O my daughter, what has become of you? Who has destroyed you? Where is the clothing of angels that you used to wear? Where is your continence, your tears, your vigils, your sleeping on the ground? How did you come to fall into this pit after dwelling in the heights of heaven, my daughter? If you had sinned, why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you immediately let me help? My beloved brother Ephraem and I would gladly have done penance for you. Why have you behaved the way you have? Why desert me and plunge me into such grief. After all, is there anyone who hasn't sinned, except God?"

As he was saying all this, and much more besides, she remained in his grip as still as a stone, transfixed as much by fear as confusion. But the blessed man kept on talking to her through his tears.

"O Mary, my daughter, haven't you got anything to say to me? Flesh of my flesh, can you not speak? Haven't I come all this way especially for your sake? Let your sin rest upon my shoulders, my daughter, that in the day of judgment I may stand in your place before God and make satisfaction to God for your

sin."

He went on till midnight pricking her conscience with such words and overwhelming her with his life-giving tears. Little by little she began to regain a little confidence, and answered him through her tears.

"I am so covered in confusion," she said, "that I can hardly bear you to look at me. But how could I possibly have poured out my prayers towards God, when I had been wallowing in such filth?"

"Let me bear the burden of your sin," said this most holy man. "Let God require your sin at my hands, if only you will listen to me. And come, and let us go to our own place. Look, there is that most loving Ephraem who has been most deeply upset because of you. He prays without ceasing for you to the Lord. Don't have any doubts, my daughter, about the mercy of the Lord.

Though your sins be as big as mountains, yet his mercy is greater than all creation. Don't we read about how the unclean woman came to him who was spotless without in the least contaminating him? By him she was cleansed, she washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7.38).

There is more hope of a spark setting the sea on fire than there is of your sins contaminating him.

"There is nothing new in falling down in the contest; the wicked thing is to keep on lying there. Be brave, retrace your steps. For as long as you go on lying down the enemy is laughing at you, but he knows that you will be all the stronger when you get up. Have pity on my old age. Give me some recompense for the labours I have undertaken in spite of my grey hair, I beg you. Leave here and come back with me to your cell. Don't be afraid, it is human nature to be in danger of falling. But even though a fall can happen quite quickly, by the help of God to rise again can be quicker still. For God does not will the death of a sinner but rather that he may be healed and live" (Ezekiel 18.23).

"If you are sure that I can do penance, and that God will accept my reparation," she said, "then, see, I am going to do what you say. You lead, and I will follow your holiness, and kiss your footprints, because you have grieved so much about me and drawn me out this unclean morass."

And she laid her head down at his feet and wept for the rest of the night, crying: "What shall I give to the Lord, as retribution for all my sins?"

Chapter X

"Come, daughter," said Abraham as soon as it was light, "let's go back to our

cell."

"I have a little money here," she replied, "and some clothes. What do you want me to do with them?"

"Leave them behind," said the blessed Abraham. "They are the wages of sin." So they arose and departed. He put her on his horse and walked in front of her. Just as a shepherd who has found his lost sheep puts it on his shoulders rejoicing (Luke 15.5), so did the blessed Abraham begin this journey with his niece rejoicing. When they got home he put her in the inner room which he had previously occupied, and he remained in the outer room. Wearing the monastic habit once more, she passed her days in humility of mind and body, her eyes bathed in tears, disciplining herself with the strictest abstinence, declaring unceasingly with untroubled confidence before the Lord that her tears were offered in sure hope of the forgiveness of her sins. She cried out for mercy so powerfully that he would be hard hearted indeed who would not have been overcome with compassion at the sound of her weeping. Who is there so devoid of mercy that would not have wept in sympathy with her in her lamentation? And who in true compunction of heart would not have given thanks to God?

Her penitence was beyond measure, compared to ours. So zealously did she pray to the Lord to pardon what she had done, that she was bold enough to ask God for a sign that her sins were indeed forgiven. And the most merciful Lord who wills no one to perish but rather come to repentance (1 Timothy 2.4), so graciously accepted her penances, that after three years salvation began to come to many other people through her prayers. For crowds of people began to flow eagerly towards her, begging that she might pray to the Lord for their salvation.

Chapter XI

The blessed Abraham lasted for a further ten years in this life, to witness the depth of her penitence and glorify God, until in his seventieth year he rested in peace. For fifty years he had been faithful to his profession with great devotion, humility of heart and charity unfeigned.

Chapter XII

He had shown favouritism to no one, as many are inclined to do, loving this person and despising that. He never relaxed his rule of abstinence, he never slumped into indolence, he was never careless, but lived each day as if it were

his last. The way of life of this most blessed Abraham, and the battles he endured, were such that he ever stood resolute in the face of the enemy and never retreated. In his struggles in the village, [In his earlier life he had been responsible for converting a pagan village, at the behest of his bishop. See chapter iv and following, in Life No 7 in Book 1a.] and in all his battles against the phantasies of the demons, he never relaxed his mind or quailed before anyone. A great and memorable battle he had in the matter of the most blessed Mary. With spiritual wisdom, prudence and innocence he rescued her from the carelessness and incontinence of a morass of iniquity. What a miracle! He ventured even into the lair of the dragon and trod him underfoot, snatching his prey from out of his very mouth. What agonies and sweat this blessed man endured.

Chapter XIII

We have written all these things for the comfort and devotion of all those who desire to govern their lives devoutly and zealously, and to the praise and glory of God whose grace has surrounded us abundantly at all times. I have described the rest of his virtues in another book. When he was lying in peace, having passed to the Lord, almost the whole city gathered. Each person approached his most pure body with the greatest devotion, tearing off bits of his clothing to obtain a blessing for themselves. And if they were ever ill, they only needed to touch the scrap they had torn off to be fully restored to health.

Chapter XIV

Mary lived for another five years, pursuing an extraordinarily strict mode of existence. Day and night she continually prayed to the Lord with great lamentation bathed in tears, so that the many people who came by night to hear the voice of her weeping were so affected by her complaints that they joined her weeping with their own weeping. And on the day of her falling asleep, when she was taken up out of this life, all who saw her gave glory to the Lord because of the shining splendour of her countenance.

Chapter XV

O what a wretch am I, my beloved brothers, compared with those who have already fallen asleep and passed to the Lord with such great faithfulness! Their minds were never preoccupied with mundane business, but centred solely in the love of God. But I, indeed, remain buried in self-will, stumbling

and unresponsive. My soul is wintry, an unending tempest leaves me bare, and despoiled of the hope of bringing any good work to perfection.

Chapter XVI

I am astonished at myself, my beloved brothers, because of the way in which I daily fail. I build for hours, then for hours I destroy what I have built. At night I say, 'Tomorrow I will repent', but in the morning when I get up I put it off for another day. Again towards evening I say, 'Tonight I will keep vigil and besiege the Lord with tears that he may look mercifully on my sins', but when nighttime comes I fall asleep. There are those who like me have been given a talent and have laboured day and night to trade successfully and gain the prize of being given power over ten cities (Luke 19.17), but I in my laziness have hidden my talent in the ground, and my Lord is hastening near and will strike fear into my heart, and I mourn for the days of my negligence, for I have not any excuse to offer.

Chapter XVII

O my God, have mercy upon me and save me, for you alone are without sin, you alone are merciful and kind, and apart from you I know no other, nor is there any other in whom I believe, Father most blessed, and only begotten Son incarnate for our sakes, and holy Spirit who gives life to all things. It is in your nature, O lover of mankind, both to keep me in mind, and to lead me out of the prison house of my sins. It is at your behest that I both came into this world and shall depart from it. Be merciful to me in my helplessness, and bring salvation to me, a sinner. Your grace is my helper in this world, my refuge and my hope of glory. Let it hide me under the shadow of its wings in that terrible and horrendous day. For you know the secrets of our hearts and minds, you know how many depravities and scandalous by ways I have scorned, you know how many shameless vanities and inclinations to heresy I have rejected. And all that not in my own strength but by your grace which has enlightened my mind. Wherefore I pray you, holy Lord, to save me into your kingdom and be graciously pleased to bless me along with all who are pleasing to you, for yours alone is the glory, the adoration and the magnificence, Father Son and holy Spirit. Amen.

The Life of St Thais the Harlot

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on 8 October.]

There was once a harlot called Thais who was of such great beauty that many young men were ruined because of the money that they spent on her. She provoked such jealous quarrels among her lovers that the blood of many a young man must be laid at her door. When she came to the notice of abba Paphnutius, he donned secular clothing, took a solidus with him and went to see her in the Egyptian city where she lived. He offered her the solidus as the price for her favours, which she accepted, and invited him to come inside. Immediately on going inside he could see a bed with most beautifully ornate drapery, obviously intended for use.

"Isn't there an inner room we can use?" he asked.

"If you are frightened that others might see you here, don't worry. No one will come into this outer room. But if it is God you are frightened of seeing you, there isn't anywhere hidden from the eyes of the Divinity."

"You believe there is a God then?"

"Yes, I have heard about God and the kingdom of the world to come and the torments laid up for sinners."

"If you know this, why have you brought so many souls to ruin? Don't you know that you will have to give an account not only of your own sins but also for theirs?"

Thais fell at the feet of Paphnutius the monk and besought him with tears to give her some penance to perform.

"I believe that if you will pray for me I might gain forgiveness," she said.

"Give me just three hours, and after that I will come to whatever place you say and do whatever you decide."

So while Paphnutius went off to prepare a place for her, she collected together all the beautiful things she had gained from her life of sin, went into the middle of the city, and as the people looked on, set fire to them.

"Gather round, all you people who have sinned with me," she cried. "See, I am burning everything you have given me." It was all worth about forty pounds of gold.

Chapter II

When all had been consumed, she went to the place which the abba had

prepared for her, which was a small cell in a monastery of virgins. He sealed up the door with molten lead, leaving only a small window through which she could be given food. He instructed the sisters to give her a little bread and water each day. As he was departing after sealing up the door, Thais called out to him.

"Where are you expecting me to urinate, each day?" she asked.

"In the cell, as you deserve." he replied.

"What sort of prayers should I offer to God?" she asked.

"You are not fit to talk about God. The name of God is not fit to be heard coming from your lips, nor should you lift up your hands to heaven, for your lips are full of iniquity and your hands are stained with iniquity. All you may do is to sit facing the East and repeat over and over, 'You who have moulded me, have mercy on me'."

Chapter III

After she had been enclosed for three years Paphnutius began to feel compunction about her, and he went to see abba Antony to ask him whether God had yet forgiven her sins or not. He gave him a full account of all the circumstances of the case, whereupon Antony called all his disciples together and decreed that they all should keep solitary vigil that night to pray that God might reveal to one of them the answer to the question that abba Paphnutius had come about. They all departed and began to pray without ceasing, till abba Paulus, Antony's chief disciple, saw a vision of a throne decked in precious drapery attended by three virgins with faces of shining splendour.

"This cannot be anything other than a symbol indicating my father Antony," thought Paul, but a voice came from heaven:

"It is not your father Antony, but Thais the harlot."

When abba Paulus came forward to tell what he had seen, abba Paphnutius went back home, confident that the will of God had been revealed. He went to the monastery where Thais was enclosed and broke the seals on her door. She had been expecting that she was to remain enclosed for ever, but as Paphnutius opened the door he said to her:

"You can come out, for God has forgiven your sins."

"I call God as witness," she said, "that since the moment I came in here I have kept all my sins in view as a great burden. My sins have not diminished, I have kept them all continually in remembrance."

"It is because you have kept the thought of your sins constantly in mind that

God has forgiven you. It is not because of the penances you have performed. " Fifteen days after taking her out of the prison, Thais rested in peace.

Life No 22, Book 1d

The Life of St Pelagia the Harlot

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on October 8]

by Jacob the Deacon

translated into Latin from the Greek by Eustochius

Prologue of Eustochius

Since the words of such a great priest could not be understood by Latin speakers, I, Eustochius, have translated them by the help of Christ. You who read them, be mindful of my labours and pour out your prayers to God for me.

Author's Preface

We ought always to give hearty thanks to God that he does not wish for the death of sinners, but rather that they repent and live. (1 Timothy 2.4). Listen, then, to this miracle which has been done in our time. It has seemed right to me that I, Jacob, a sinner, should write to you, my holy brothers, so that the knowledge of it might come to your ears, either by reading it, or by hearing it read, that you may obtain the greatest possible help and consolation for your souls. The merciful God who desires that no one should perish has demonstrated in our day that sins can be wiped out by making satisfaction for them, so that in the world to come when all shall receive according to their works the judgment shall be just. Pray now, keep silence, and listen to me with all the diligence of your hearts, for our story is redolent of the most fruitful compunction.

The Life

Chapter I

The most holy bishop of Antioch summoned his neighbouring bishops to a meeting to discuss certain matters. [The Synod of Antioch met in 341 to discuss certain theological difficulties still in dispute since the Council of Nicaea in 325] There were eight of them altogether, among whom was my bishop Nonnus, a most holy man of God, a most wonderful and effective

monk from the monastery of Tabennisi. He was taken out of the monastery and ordained a bishop simply because of his incomparably beautiful life. Once we had arrived at Antioch, the bishop directed us to the basilica of the blessed martyr Julian, where we found all the other bishops meeting in the porch.

Chapter II

Some of the other bishops asked my superior, Nonnus, whether he had any edifying comments for them, and without delay our holy bishop began to tell them something for the instruction and salvation of all who were listening. As we were all listening with enjoyment to his holy teaching, suddenly there passed by in front of us the foremost actress of Antioch, the star of the local theatre. She was seated on a donkey and accompanied by a great and fanciful procession. She seemed to be clothed in nothing but gold and pearls and other precious stones. Even her feet were covered with gold and pearls. The male and female slaves accompanying her were extravagantly clothed in costly garments, and the torcs round their necks were all of gold. Some of them went before, others followed after.

The worldly crowd could not get enough of their beauty and attractiveness. As they passed by us the air was filled with the scent of musk and other most delicious perfumes, but when the bishops saw her passing by so immodestly, with her head bare, and the outlines of her body clearly visible, nothing over her shoulders as well as her head, and yet the object of such adulation, they all fell silent, groaned and sighed, and averted their eyes as if being forced to witness some grave sin.

Chapter III

The most blessed Nonnus, however, looked at her long and hard, and even after she had passed by he looked after her for as long as she remained in sight. Not till then did he turn round and speak to the other bishops.

"Weren't you delighted to see such beauty as hers?"

They answered nothing. He leant his head down on to his knees and shed tears into the handkerchief which he held on his lap between his holy hands. He sighed deeply and turned again to the bishops.

"Weren't you delighted to see such beauty as hers?"

Again they answered nothing.

"Truly, I was extremely delighted. Her beauty pleased me very much, for God has preordained to bring her here into the presence of this worthy and eminent

bishop of Antioch as a judgment on us all personally as much as on our episcopacy. Think, my beloved brothers. How many hours did this woman spend in her dressing room, washing herself and dressing herself and decorating herself with the utmost care and attention, so that there might be nothing lacking in the beauty of her ornamentation, simply so that she would not disappoint all her various admirers, who are here today and gone tomorrow? But for us there is an almighty father in heaven, an immortal spouse who makes promises to those who serve him, who offers heavenly riches and eternal rewards which are beyond estimation, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet have entered into the heart of mankind, which God has prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2.9).

"What more can I say? We have his promise that we shall see the great and splendid and inestimable face of our bride, which Cherubim dare not gaze upon, but we do not take care to adorn ourselves, or purge ourselves of all the filthy thoughts of our wretched souls. We just let them lie there."

Chapter IV

Having said all this he took me, his sinful deacon, to the hospice where a cell had been assigned to us. He fell down and laid his face on the floor, beating his breast and crying.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me an unworthy sinner, for the decoration of a harlot lasting but a day is greater than the decoration of my soul. How can I show my face before you? What words can I offer to justify myself in your sight? But I will not hide my heart from you, for you know all our secret thoughts. Woe to me, an unworthy sinner, for I stand before your altar, and I do not offer the beauty of soul that you expect of me. That woman vows to make herself pleasing to men, and she succeeds. I vow to make myself pleasing to you, and I fail because of my slothfulness. I stand stripped bare before you in heaven as in earth, for I do not fulfil your commandments. I cannot put any trust in my own achievements. My hope lies solely in your mercy, by which I trust to be saved."

With these words, and a great deal of loud weeping, we celebrated the feast of the day.

Chapter V

Next Sunday, after we had completed the prayers of the night, the holy bishop Nonnus said to me:

"I must tell you, brother deacon, I have had a dream which disturbs me greatly, for I don't understand what it means. Standing near me on the edge of the altar, I saw a black dove, absolutely covered in filth. It flew all around me and I could hardly bear the stink of its unpleasant filth. After the deacon proclaimed 'Depart' [Catechumens had to depart after what we would call nowadays 'Ministry of the Word'. The offering and consecration of the sacred elements was for the faithful only] to the catechumens, it was nowhere to be seen. But after the Mass of the Faithful and the completion of the offering and the dismissal of the church, as we went out the door of the house of God, there was that dove again, still covered in filth and flying around me as before. I reached out my hand and caught it, and plunged it into the pool in the courtyard in front of the holy church. All the dirt covering it was washed off in the water, and it flew up out of the water as white as snow. It was carried away in its flight high up out of the sight of my eyes."

Having told me his dream, the holy bishop of God, Nonnus, took me with him to the great church with the other bishops, where we greeted the bishop of the city.

Chapter VI

As he went in he spoke a few words of encouragement to the people of the church as they sat in their seats, and after the canonical prayers and the reading of the holy Gospel, the bishop of the city offered the holy Gospel to the most blessed Nonnus and asked him to speak to the people. He opened his mouth and poured out the wisdom of God which dwelt within him. His words owed nothing to studied composition, nothing to philosophy, and yet there was nothing indiscreet about him. He was completely human, yet filled with the holy Spirit. He taught the people and warned them, speaking with sincerity about the judgement to come and the good things laid up for us in eternity. The people found the words he had spoken by the holy Spirit so moving that their tears flowed all over the floor.

Chapter VII

Now it so happened, by the guidance of the divine mercy, that there was present in the church that very harlot whom we have previously mentioned. The wonderful thing is that taking thought for her sins had never induced her to come to church as a catechumen before, but as Nonnus was instructing the people she was suddenly so overcome by the fear of God, that she fell into

complete despair and burst into floods of tears, which she could in no way restrain. She gave instructions to two of her slaves that they should stay there until the holy bishop Nonnus left, follow him, find out where he was staying, and come back and tell her. They did as their mistress instructed, and followed him to the basilica of the most blessed martyr Julian, where we had our cell. They came back and reported to their mistress that he was staying in the basilica of the most blessed martyr Julian, whereupon she sent tablets to the bishop by these two slaves containing the following message:

"O holy servant of Christ, I am a sinful woman and servant of the devil. I have heard that your God, who upholds the arc of the heavens, came down to earth not for the sake of the righteous but to save sinners. He upon whom the Cherubim dare not gaze humbled himself to be a friend of publicans, and talked with sinners. Now, even though you, my lord, who display such holiness, have never set mortal eyes on this same Lord Jesus Christ who showed mercy on the Samaritan woman at the well, nevertheless you are a true worshipper of him, as I have heard Christians tell. So if you really are a true disciple of Christ do not turn your face away from me, for through you I long to see the Saviour, through you perhaps I may get a glimpse of his holy face."

The holy bishop Nonnus wrote back:

"Whoever you are, you are known of God, and he knows both what you have done and what you want. But I have to ask you not to put too big a strain on my humility, for I too am human, a servant of God who is a sinner. So if you truly have a desire for God for virtue and faith, and want to see me, come, and see me in the midst of all the other bishops who are with me, for I could not allow you to see me alone."

The woman was overjoyed to read what he had written, and went to the basilica of the blessed martyr Julian, where she made her presence known to us. The holy bishop Nonnus called on all the other bishops who were there and asked them to meet with him. The woman came before the gathered bishops, threw herself on the floor before the blessed bishop Nonnus, and grasped his feet.

"I am asking you, my lord," she said "to imitate the action of your master the Lord Jesus Christ, and show your good will towards me by making me a Christian. For I, my lord, am an ocean of sins and a sink of iniquity. I ask to be baptised."

Chapter VIII

The holy bishop Nonnus bade her rise and stand in front of him.

"The priestly canons," he then said, "do not allow harlots to be baptised unless they can provide guarantors to see that they do not fall back into their former sins."

She threw herself down once more upon the floor and grasped the feet of holy Nonnus, washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7.38).

"You will have to give an account to God for my soul," she said, "and I shall lay at your door all the iniquities of my misdeeds, if you put off baptising me, wicked and repulsive though I am. You will not be given your portion with the saints in the presence of God unless you now cut me off from all my evil doings. You would be denying God and worshipping idols if you do not today give me new birth as a bride of Christ and offer me to God."

All the bishops and clerics who were there were deeply moved at the sight of this woman speaking out in such a way because of her desire for God. Never had they witnessed such faith and desire for salvation as this harlot was demonstrating. And they sent me, a sinful deacon, straight away to the bishop of the city, to tell his blessedness everything that had happened and to ask that he send back one of the deaconesses with me. [In the early church one of the duties of deaconesses was to clothe the female candidates in a white baptismal gown.] His reaction was one of great joy, and he had this message for the holy Nonnus.

"Well done, reverend father. Carry on with what you are doing. I am aware that you are acting on my behalf."

And he immediately instructed the lady Romana, the chief deaconess, to come back with me. When she came in she found the woman still at the feet of the holy bishop Nonnus, who had great difficulty in persuading her to get up.

"You must get up, my daughter," he said, "and be exorcised. And first, confess all your sins."

"If I were to scrutinise everything I know to be in my heart, I would not be able to find any good deeds at all. But I know my sins are more numerous than the sands of the sea. The ocean is miniscule compared with the extent of my sins. But I trust in your God that he will relieve me of the burden of my sins and look kindly upon me."

"Tell me your name," said the holy bishop Nonnus.

"Pelagia was the name given to me by my parents, but the Antiochenes call

me Margarita (Pearl), because of the masses of jewellery I had earned through my sins. I used to be the devil's jewel, and reckoned to be part of his work force."

"But your proper name is Pelagia?"

"Yes, my lord."

Upon this the holy bishop Nonnus exorcised her, baptised her, signed her with the cross of the Lord, and gave her the body of Christ. The chief deaconess, the lady Romana, became her spiritual mother, and took her into the place reserved for the catechumens, where we also gathered together.

"I tell you, brother deacon," the holy bishop Nonnus then said to me, "today we are rejoicing in the presence of the Angels of God, so let us have oil today with our food, contrary to our usual custom, and drink a little wine to celebrate our spiritual joy at the salvation of this young woman."

Chapter IX

As we were drinking the wine, we suddenly heard a great shriek like that of a man suffering great violence. It was the shout of the devil.

"Woe! Woe! Why should I be suffering because of this decrepit old man?

Weren't you satisfied with the thirty thousand Saracens whom you snatched from me, baptised and offered up to your God? Weren't you satisfied with Heliopolis, which used to belong to me along with everyone in it, which you have snatched from me and offered up to your God? And now you have taken from me the one in whom I had placed my greatest hope. O, how I suffer from this damnable man! Cursed be the day in which you were born. Her tears have flooded out over the floors of this hospice and all my hope has been cut off from me."

All these things he shouted out, lamenting outside the doors. Everybody there could hear him. And he continued, addressing himself to the neophyte.

"And you have done this to me, my lady Pelagia? Thinking to imitate my beloved Judas, were you? As one of the chosen apostles he had a place of glory and honour, and he betrayed his master. You have done the same thing to me!"

"Cross yourself and renounce him," the holy bishop Nonnus said to her. She signed herself in the name of Christ and breathed upon the demon, and at once he disappeared.

Chapter X

On the second day, the devil appeared by night to Pelagia, the handmaid of the Lord, as she was asleep in the cell of her holy mother Romana, and woke her up.

"Just answer me this, my lady Margarita," he said. "Weren't you plentifully supplied with gold and silver? Wasn't it I who decorated you with gold and precious stones? Tell me, what have I done to upset you? Tell me, so that I can put things right. Don't make me a laughing stock for these Christians."

Pelagia, the handmaid of the Lord, crossed herself and breathed at the demon.

"My God has snatched me out of your very jaws," she said, "and led me into his bridal chamber. He it is who fights for me."

And the devil was suddenly no more to be seen.

Chapter XI

On the third day after her baptism, Pelagia had some instructions to give to the slave that looked after her possessions.

"Go to my wardrobe," she said, "and make a list of how much gold and silver I have, and how much richly decorated clothing I have, and bring it all back here."

He did as he was asked and brought back everything she possessed. She asked her holy mother, the lady Romana, to ask the holy Nonnus to come and see her, and gave him everything she possessed.

"These riches, my lord," she said, "are the rewards that Satan has given me. I want to give them freely to your holiness, to do with as you think best. It is my task now to seek for the riches of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The bishop summoned his chief steward, and in Pelagia's presence handed everything over to him..

"I want you to swear by the indivisible Trinity," he said to the steward, "that none of this goes either to the bishopric or to the church, but rather disbursed to widows and orphans and the poor, so that what has been gathered by evil can be distributed for good purposes, and so the riches of a sinner can become the treasury of the righteous. And if this oath is broken either by you or by anyone else who takes any of it for himself, let him be anathema and all his house, and let them be as those who cried out, 'Let him be crucified'".

Pelagia called together all her slaves, male and female, and freed them, taking their golden torcs off with her own hands.

"Make haste and free yourselves likewise from this wicked world, full of sin," she said, "so that as we have been together in this world, so also we may be

together in that blessed life where pain is no more."

Chapter XII

On the eighth day, when she was required to divest herself of the white baptismal garment, she got up at night without telling anyone, clothed herself in a coarse tunic which the bishop supplied her with, and from that day onwards she was nevermore seen in the city of Antioch. The holy Romana wept bitterly, but the holy Nonnus comforted her with these words:

"Don't weep, my daughter, but rather rejoice with great joy, for Pelagia has chosen that good portion just like Mary, whom the Lord in the Gospel preferred to Martha" (Luke 10.42).

Pelagia went to Jerusalem and built a cell for herself on the Mount of Olives, the place where the Lord prayed.

Chapter XIII

A little while later the bishop of the city dismissed the bishops and they went back to their own places. After three or four years, I, Jacob the deacon, had a desire to visit Jerusalem in order to pay my devotions to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I asked permission of the bishop and he let me go with these words:

"My advice to you, brother deacon, is that when you get to Jerusalem, you make enquiries there about a certain brother Pelagius, a monk and a eunuch who has been enclosed in solitude there for many years. Visit him. I am sure he will be of great benefit to you."

Of course he was really talking about the servant of God Pelagia, without actually saying so.

Chapter XIV

When I got to Jerusalem I worshipped the holy resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and next day made enquiries about the servant of God. And I went up the Mount of Olives and found him there where the Lord prayed, in a tiny cell completely enclosed except for a small window in the wall. I knocked on the window and it opened to me. Pelagia recognised me, but I did not recognise her. How should I have recognised her,

Chapter XIV (continued), Life of Pelagia, Book 1d

(Also St Mary of Egypt further down this page

when that face which had once been of such marvellous beauty had withered away through severe fasting, and her eyes were sunken in her cheeks?

"What have you come for, brother?" she asked.

"My bishop, Nonnus, told me to seek you out," I replied. "He told me to ask you to pray for him for you are a true saint of God."

Pelagius immediately shut the window and began to sing the third hour. I joined in the prayer from the other side of the wall, and went away quite uplifted by having seen such an angel. Returning to Jerusalem, I began to visit the monasteries and make the acquaintance of the brothers.

Chapter XV

Brother Pelagius had a great reputation in the monasteries, such that I decided to visit him again in order to have the benefit of his teaching. I went back and knocked on his window, and even presumed to call out to him by name, but there was no response. I did the same the next day and the day after, calling out to Pelagius by name, but no one answered. I said to myself that either there was no one there at all, or else that the monk who was there had departed this life. Inspired by a nudge from God, I began to think that I really should take seriously the possibility that he was dead, so I pushed open his little window and looked inside. I could see that he was indeed dead. I shut the window and tried to make the best I could of the situation by going back to Jerusalem bearing the news that the holy monk Pelagius, worker of miracles, was dead.

The holy fathers, together with monks from various monasteries, came and opened up the cell and brought the holy body outside with as much care as if it were gold or precious stones. As soon as the holy fathers began to anoint the body with myrrh they of course discovered that it was a woman. They tried to keep such a wonderful thing secret but it proved impossible to hide it from the people, who cried out loudly, "Glory to our Lord Jesus Christ who has hidden

so many riches upon earth, not only among men but also among women". As the news spread further among all the people, all the monasteries of virgins came from Jericho as well as from Jordan where the Lord was baptised, carrying tapers and torches and singing hymns, following the holy fathers who were carrying the holy body to its final resting place.

So there you have the life of this harlot, a holy life of one who had been without hope. May the Lord have mercy upon her and upon us in the day of judgment, for to him belong honour and glory, power and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 23

The Life of St Mary of Egypt

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on April 2.

by Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem [A Syrian from Damascus who became bishop of Jerusalem in 634]

translated into Latin from the Greek by Paul, deacon of the church of Naples

Preface of Paul the deacon

To our most glorious and most celebrated Lord, King Charles. [Charles I, King of Naples 1266 - 1285]

In the knowledge that your most glorious majesty delights in divine wisdom and in the exemplary lives of outstanding saints, I offer to you, my lord, this little book about the conversion of St Mary of Egypt, along with a book about the penitence of a certain deputy governor which was formerly lost, but which in obedience to your commands I have now restored. It has been my task and my pleasure not only to provide the story of remarkable matters, but also to add other things worthy of note, namely the venerable decisions and acts of the leaders of the Roman Church, with the worthy use of which your Majesty is well acquainted. Your servant has undertaken to produce this brief compendium in order that your serenity, burdened by affairs of state, with no leisure for studying a great number of books, may be able to have a convenient summary of church customs in handbook form. I do know that you, my lord, make it part of your kingly care always to have a particular regard for appealing to unimpeachable authority in everything that you say and do, so that you diligently learn and enquire what is to be retained in divine

worship and what is to be rejected. It is to be hoped therefore that this little book of divinity which I have put together may be a help to you in your task of elucidation which you carry out so assiduously, and that you may be able to bring everything to a successful outcome.

Author's Prologue

It is good to conceal the secrets of a king, but honourable to make known and celebrate the works of God (Tobias 12.7). So said the Angel to Tobias after his father's blindness turned into glorious illumination, and after his deliverance from all sorts of dangers developed his devotion to God. For it is indeed harmful and dangerous to reveal the secrets of a king, but harmful to the soul to keep silent about the glorious works of God. I was hesitating about whether I dared speak about the things of God, but I feared to incur the same judgement as that pronounced against the slothful servant who received a talent from his lord and hid it in the ground instead of putting it to work by trading. So therefore I can in no way remain silent on the subject of this holy tale which I now offer to you. And let no one be incredulous of the things I am going to write about, or think that I am lying because of their extraordinary nature. Far be it from me to lie about holy things, or adulterate accounts of what God has done.

But I do not anticipate any danger from anyone of little intelligence, who unworthily belittles the greatness of the God who took human flesh, and does not believe those who tell of such things. If there is anyone like that who reads what I have written and refuses to give credence to such a glorious marvel, may the Lord have mercy on him and make him capable of understanding words of holiness, lest when he is shown any of the miracles which God has prepared for his elect, he thinks that the glorious things which are told about those holy people are impossible, simply because he cannot imagine anything higher than the weakness of his own human nature.

It is with that in mind that I take up this story about something which I have learned has happened in our own time, as told by a holy man well versed in being able to understand and teach about the things of God. As we have said, let no one be incredulous, or think that it is impossible for such great miracles to occur in our generation, for the grace of God is given to holy souls in all generations, inspiring the prophets and other friends of God, as Solomon himself has said (Wisdom 7.27).

It is time to begin my sacred story, the story of the great and courageous battle of the venerable Mary of Egypt, carried out through the extent of her life.

The Life

Chapter I

There was a man called Zosimas, [Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on April 4] of exemplary life and doctrine, who from his youth up had been thoroughly trained in monastic life and discipline in a monastery in Palestine. Don't let anyone confuse him with that Zosimas accused of teaching the erroneous doctrines of another sect. Although they both have the same name there could not be a greater difference, the one from the other. From the very beginning our Zosimas spent all his life in a monastery in Palestine, embracing all elements of the monastic discipline, becoming well practised in all aspects of the work of abstinence. Every precept of the rule handed on to him by those who had been educated in it from infancy he kept blamelessly with perfect monastic discipline. Indeed, he did more than the rule required, eager as he was to subdue the flesh to the spirit. He was never a cause of scandal to anyone else, for he carried out all his monastic duties perfectly, to the extent that many people came to him both from local monasteries and from monasteries at some distance, in order to learn from his example and teaching how to imitate his abstinence and govern themselves much better than before.

Chapter II

Along with all that, he was constantly meditating on the sacred scriptures, for whether he was resting on his bed, or getting up, or working with his hands, or taking food when necessary, he never ceased from his accustomed good work of silently reciting the psalms, and meditating on their sacred wisdom. It was quite often said about him that he had become worthy of being given visions from God, and that is not really remarkable or unbelievable. As the Lord said, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5.8). How much more then, shall not visions of the blessings prepared in the future life be set before the eyes of those who purify the flesh, maintain sobriety and whose souls are ever vigilant.

Zosimas also said that he had been taken from his mother's arms, so to speak, into this monastery, where he had pursued the monastic life up to his fifty-third year. At that time, however, perfect though he was in all those things,

and not needing to be taught by anyone else in any matter at all, he began to have certain nagging thoughts.

"Isn't it possible that there may be some other person, among those who lead a life of solitude, who is better than I am in everything he does?"

As these thoughts passed through his mind, someone stood before him and spoke to him.

"O Zosimas, you have striven well to the utmost of human capability, and have achieved the highest levels of monastic life. However there is no one who can claim to be perfect, and you know nothing about some much greater battles being waged even now than anything known in the past. If you want to know more about how many different ways to salvation there are, leave these thoughts of yours behind in your own land, and go forth like Abraham our famous father (Genesis 12.1) to the monastery near the river Jordan."

Chapter III

He carried out what he had been told, left the monastery where he had lived since infancy, and went to the Jordan, that holiest of all rivers, where the angel who had spoken to him guided him to the monastery which God had directed him to visit. He knocked at the door and spoke to the doorkeeper who announced his visit to the abbot. The abbot received him, noting from his dress that he was a man of religion, and, as the monastic custom is, bent the knee and said a prayer before beginning a conversation.

"Where are you from, brother?" asked the abbot. "And why have you come to visit us humble monks?"

"I don't think it is necessary, to tell you where I am from," said Zosimas, "but the reason for my coming is a desire to learn more. I have heard great and praiseworthy things about you, and that you can bring my soul closer to God."

"God alone, brother, is able to bring healing to our souls. May he instruct both you and me in the divine commandments, and guide us all into doing what is right. One human being cannot succeed in bringing enlightenment to any other human being unless each of them is considerate to each other, and does whatever he can, trusting in the help of the Lord. However, since you say that the love of Christ has led you to visit us humble monks, stay with us if that is why you have come, and may the good shepherd feed both of us with the grace of his holy Spirit. He it is who has laid down his life for our freedom, and calls his own sheep by name" (John 10. 11-15).

So saying, they bent the knee again and prayed, and Zosimas said Amen, and

stayed with them in the monastery.

Chapter IV

He found there that these old men not only looked like splendid people but also that they matched their deeds to their appearance, fervent in spirit, true servants of the Lord. The singing of psalms was so organised that it took place during the whole of the night, manual work was always in progress, the words of the divine psalms were always on their lips. There was never an idle word among them, they took no thought for silver or gold or any other material goods. They spent all their time meditating on the limits of this temporal existence full of sorrows. No single person stood out from the others, but each one had one single aim. Before becoming alive in the monastic life each one had had to die to the world and to those who are in the world. Now each one strove to die to the needs of body. They had a plentiful supply of divine wisdom; they sustained their bodies with nothing but bread and water, so that they might all the more effectively present themselves before the divine mercy.

Chapter V

Zosimas took note of all those things and was greatly helped towards his own aim of perfection in making his own path more fruitful. He found he was in the company of many fellow-workers, striving to rebuild a divine paradise. After he had been there for a few days the time was approaching for Christians to celebrate the traditional season of fasting, and to purify themselves through the passion and the saving resurrection. In order that the monks could go about their tasks without the risk of being disturbed, the doors of the monastery were never opened but stayed shut. They were opened only if some monk arrived on necessary business. The monastery was in a very isolated spot, and most of the people in the neighbourhood either did not frequent it very much, or even did not know it was there. The rule they followed however was one which they had used from the very earliest times, which was the reason, in my opinion, why God had led Zosimas to this particular monastery.

Chapter VI

Now let me give you some idea of what the tradition of this monastery was like. On the first Sunday in Lent they celebrate the divine Sacrament as usual

and each one partakes of the spotless life-giving body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. After taking a little food they gather together in the oratory, and having prayed on bended knee they greet each other, and then each one kneels before the abbot and embraces him, praying for the help of his prayers and fellowship during the coming Lenten battle. They then all walk right out of the monastery as they sing together The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear; the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27), leaving only one or two behind, usually, not for the sake of guarding the property (for there was nothing there that a thief would look twice at) but so that the oratory would not be left without anyone to sing the solemn offices.

Each one of them was stocked up with provisions, according to his individual capacity and wish. Some took sufficient bread for their bodily needs, another figs, another dates, another lentils steeped in water, others nothing except their bodies and the clothes they stood up in but relied on satisfying the needs of nature by gathering herbs in the wilderness. For the rule was that each one should decide for himself on those matters without any argument, and that no one should busy himself about the abstinence or actions of his fellow monk. Crossing over the Jordan they walked away in different directions, each one completely by himself, reckoning that the desert itself was his city. If anyone saw someone else walking towards him in the distance he would turn off from his path and walk away in another direction. Each one lived alone with God, singing psalms frequently, and taking food according to his own rule.

Having kept the whole of Lent like that they came back to the monastery a week before the life-giving feast of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that is, on the Sunday which the holy church observes with branches of palm. When they came back each one witnessed in his own inner conscience to the way he had spent his time, and what fruit the seeds of his labour had brought forth. And no one cross-examined anyone else about the results of his labour and strife.

Chapter VII

So there you have the rule of the monastery, which they observed exactly and in the best possible way. For each one sought through solitude to achieve union with God, and fought his own battles with the intention of pleasing not any other human being but God alone. For what people do at the behest of other people, or with the intention of pleasing other people, not only often

turns out to be unprofitable, but even leads to the making of many mistakes, resulting in consequent condemnation.

Zosimas, then, crossed over the Jordan also, in obedience to the accustomed rule of the monastery, taking with him nothing but a little food to sustain his body, and the clothes he stood up in. He observed the rule with joy, wandering through the desert, observing meal times as a necessity of nature, lying at night upon the ground to rest a little and take a little sleep wherever he found himself when evening came upon him. At daybreak he would keep on going, always burning with a desire to go further into the desert in the hope of finding someone who would be able to provide him with a great example, as we have said. He seemed to be journeying on unswervingly as if going to meet some definite person.

On the twentieth day at about the sixth hour he stopped to have a rest, turned towards the East and said the usual office. It was his custom to break his journey at the appointed times of the day, standing to sing the psalms and bending the knee to pray. As he was singing and looking up intensely to heaven, he saw out of the corner of his eye something like the appearance of a human shape. He was quite frightened at first, and trembled, thinking that he was seeing some spiritual phantom, but he made the sign of the cross and put aside his fear. He had come to the end of his prayers, so he turned around and saw that it really was someone, or something, coming towards him. It was in fact a woman he was looking at, her skin blackened by the heat of the sun. What hair she had was as white as wool, falling down to her shoulders.

Chapter VIII

With a gleam of joy rising in his heart, Zosimas wondered whether what he had been longing for was what he could see in front of him, and he began to run in that direction. He was rejoicing with great joy, for during the whole twenty days he had not so far seen any human being, or animal, or bird, or beast. He wanted to find out what sort of a creature it was he was looking at, while hoping that it was someone greater than himself. But she saw Zosimas coming and took flight towards the lower desert. Forgetting how old he was and with no thought of how hard he would have to run, he chased after her as fast as he could in his desire to get a proper look at this creature. He kept on running, but so did she. Zosimas proved the faster, and he gradually began to overtake her. When he saw that he was getting so close that his voice could be heard he cried out:

"Servant of God, why are you running away from me? I am only a decrepit old sinner. Listen to me, whoever you are, for the sake of the God in whose name you have come into this desert. Listen to me, though I am but weak and unworthy. Listen to me for the sake of the rewards which you are hoping to gain from your labours. Stay where you are and offer a prayer and a blessing to an old man, in the name of God who never rejects anyone who calls on him."

While he was tearfully pouring out these pleas they came to a place which was actually a dried up watercourse, but in which Zosimas thought there were flowing waters. It so happened that a mirage was occurring here, as so often happens in that country. She, in the course of her flight, went down into the watercourse and up the other side. Zosimas however cried out in alarm and dared not go any further, for he felt that he was standing beside a raging torrent. He added more tears to the tears already shed, his sighs became louder and louder, so that the noise of his distress might be better heard above the noise of the imaginary torrent.

Chapter IX

Then a voice was heard coming from the frame of the fugitive:

"Abba Zosimas, in the name of God you must forgive me, but I cannot turn round to face you, for I am a woman, and my whole body is quite innocent of any clothing, as you can see for yourself. Even the shameful parts of my body have no covering. But if you really want to offer a prayer with this sinful woman throw me the cloak you are wearing so that perhaps I may turn towards you and accept your prayers with my female weakness concealed."

Zosimas trembled with a great fear, while his mind almost jumped out of his body. He was a very seasoned man, most knowledgeable on the nature of the gifts of God, and he knew that nobody could address him by name who had never seen him or even heard of him, unless it had been revealed by the manifest grace of providence. Hastily he did what she had asked, took off the cloak he was wearing and threw it behind her. She picked it up and succeeded in covering those parts of her body which ought to be covered, and turned round towards Zosimas.

Chapter IX (continued) Life of St Mary of Egypt, Book 1d

"Why, abba, should you want to look at this sinful woman?" she said. "You have not been slothful in great labours yourself. What do you think to see in me that might teach you anything?"

He threw himself on the ground asking for a blessing in the usual way. She did likewise, so that both of them were lying there, asking for each other's blessing!

Chapter X

After quite some time, the woman said to Zosimas:

"Abba Zosimas, it is for you to give the blessing and offer the prayer, for you have had the honour of the presbyterate conferred on you, and have stood at the holy altar for a great number of years, searching into the secrets of the gifts of Christ's divinity."

These words struck great fear into Zosimas' heart, and caused him to struggle and tremble even more, as great drops of sweat broke out upon him.

"It is obvious from your vision, O spiritual mother," he said, almost bereft of strength, and breathing with difficulty, "that you have come close to the Lord, and that the greater part of you is dead to this world. More than anything else it is obvious that grace has been given to you, in that you called me by name whom you have never seen before. And, you know, grace is given to people not according to their status, but according to the capacity of their souls to receive it. So then, you give the blessing in the sight of God, and offer the prayer in accordance with your state of perfection.

She was overcome by the way the holy old man stood firm.

"Blessed be the Lord, who brings about the salvation of souls," she said.

"Amen", said Zosimas, and they both got up from the ground.

"Why, abba," she asked, "have you sought this poor sinner out? But perhaps the grace of the holy Spirit has guided you here so that you may do me some service suitable to my bodily weakness, so tell me, how do the Christian congregations fare today? How do the Emperors go on? How is the flock of the holy Church being fed?"

"Mother, God has blessed your holy prayers by giving us peace and stability, but provide some comfort also for this unworthy monk, and pray not only for

the whole world but for me a sinner, that my laborious journey and pilgrimage may be blessed by some of the fruits gained from your way of such great solitude."

"Abba Zosima, you have been given the honour of priesthood, as I said before, and so it is your task to pray for all people and for me, for it is to that that you have been called. However since we are bound to be obedient, I will agree to do what you ask me."

So saying she turned to the East, and lifting up her hands and eyes to heaven she prayed almost silently, her lips moving but her voice so quiet that it could not be understood what she was saying. Zosimas kept on standing, however, unable to catch the words of her prayer. He was trembling, eyes downcast, saying nothing. But when he realised that her prayer was going on and on, he ventured to raise his eyes from the ground a little, and he swears, God being his witness, that he saw her lifted up about a cubit's length from the ground, hanging in the air as she prayed. This sight absolutely terrified him, and he threw himself on the ground, bathed in sweat, panic-stricken, not daring to say anything except 'Lord have mercy on me!'

Chapter XI

Lying there on the ground, his mind became filled with a suspicion that this was really a spirit, and that the prayer was a pretence. But the woman turned towards him and pulled him to his feet.

"Why are you getting so worried and suspicious in your mind, abba," she said, "thinking that I am a spirit and that my prayer is a pretence? Be assured that I am only a little female sinner, albeit blessed by sacred Baptism. I am no spirit, but dust and ashes, flesh completely, and no spiritual phantasy has ever taken possession of my mind," and she signed herself with the cross on her forehead, eyes, lips and breast.

"May God keep us safe, abba Zosimas," she continued, "from the attacks and hostility of the devil, for his spite towards us is great."

The old man prostrated himself and grasped her feet.

"I beg you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who deigned to be born of a virgin," he said through his tears, "tell me how it is that you came to go naked in this place, and how you have chastised your body. Don't miss out anything - who you are, where you came from, when you came here, why you have made this wilderness your home. Tell me everything about you, that the mighty works of God may be made manifest. Wisdom that is hidden and treasure that

is hoarded up, what profit is there in either of them (Ecclesiasticus 20.30)? Tell me everything for the sake of the Lord. You won't be saying anything by way of boasting or ostentation, but simply in order to satisfy me an unworthy sinner. I believe that the God for whom you live and in whom you have your being has guided me here into this wilderness for this very purpose, to bring out into the open everything about you. It is not right for us to resist the judgments of God. If it had not been acceptable to Christ our Lord for you and your strivings to become known, he would not have allowed you to be seen by anyone, and he would not have given me the strength to make this journey. I would not have succeeded in getting here, I would never even have been able to leave my cell."

Chapter XII

The woman again pulled him to his feet.

"Forgive me, abba," she said, "I should be ashamed to tell you all the disgraceful things I have done. But since you have seen my naked body I shall lay bare my deeds also, that you may know how full my soul is of shameful lust and disreputable confusion. As you have realised, I have no desire to tell my story for the sake of gaining glory. What have I got to glory in? I was simply the devil's chosen vessel. If I do tell you my story I believe you will want to get as far away from me as possible, as you would from a serpent in front of you, because of my outrageous deeds, such that you would want to prevent your ears from hearing. But I will tell you, omitting nothing, but telling you the whole truth, begging only that you will not cease from praying for me that I may find mercy in the day of judgment."

And the old man felt the tears rising, and he wept. And the woman began to tell her story.

Chapter XIII

"I was born in Egypt, father. In a fit of rebellion against my parents, who were both at that time still alive, I went to Alexandria at the age of twelve. I blush to tell you about how I lost my virginity there, and how I gave myself up to a life of unending and insatiable lust. That would be rather a long story, but I mention it to start off with, so that you may understand the insatiable eagerness with which I indulged a love of vice. For seventeen years and more I carried on publicly adding fuel to the fire of my lust. I didn't accept payment for losing my virginity; I have never accepted money from anyone who

wanted to pay me. It was just that I was on fire with such a burning eagerness for sex that it was easier for me to get it if I did not charge for the satisfaction of my wicked and disgusting desires. And don't think that I did not ask for payment because I had plenty of money. I lived either by begging or quite often by spinning flax. But my desires, as I have said, were insatiable, so I wallowed in an unending sea of filth. And I enjoyed it. I thought that was real life, if only I could go on indefinitely doing injury to my own nature.

"As I was in the middle of living this sort of life, one summer I saw a crowd of Libyans and Egyptians gathering at the harbour. I approached a passer by and asked him where they were all hurrying off to.

"'They are all going to Jerusalem,' he replied, 'for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which is due in a few days' time.' [This feast was held in commemoration of the dedication by the Emperor Constantine in 335 of a basilica on the site of the Holy Sepulchre, not to be confused with the later feast of the same name still held on September 14, celebrating the exposition of the true cross at Jerusalem in 629 by the emperor Heraclius after his recovery of it from the Persians into whose hands it had fallen in 614]

"'Would they take me with them, do you think, if I wanted to go?'

"'No one could stop you if you had your passage money.'

"'To tell you the truth, brother, I have neither passage money nor living expenses. But I will board this ship that is taking them there, anyway. If they want to put me off I will offer them myself. They might well accept the idea of having my body as fare for the passage.'

"Besides which I fancied the idea of going with them because of the opportunities it would give me (forgive me, father) of being able to indulge my passions with as many people as possible."

Chapter XIV

"I hope you will forgive me for what I have told you so far, father. Don't ask me to tell you any more about my mixed up life. God knows it makes me tremble. What I have been saying pollutes the very air."

"For the sake of God, mother," replied Zosimas, as he watered the ground with his tears, "keep on talking. Don't miss anything out from the rest of this story of salvation."

So she continued with what she had been saying:

"The youth to whom I had been talking just laughed and turned away. I threw away the spindle I was carrying (I had chosen to have been doing some

spinning at that time), and hurried down to the quayside, where I saw about ten young men standing on the shore, strong and healthy-looking, and what was more to my liking obviously well off. There were others like that also who had already boarded the ship. In my usual cheeky manner I stepped up into the midst of them and made them a proposition.

"How about taking me with you where you are going? You won't find me unable to please."

"With a few other obscene suggestions I reduced them all to laughter. They took a good look at my shameless manner and accepted me with them into the ship.

"O man of God, how can I tell you of all our doings after we had set sail? What tongue could tell, or ear desire to hear, the deeds done during our journey on that ship, or how I persuaded many poor wretches to do things even when they did not really want to? I can't tell you all the unspeakable ways in which I coached them in pornographic evil. Believe me, I am astonished, now, that the sea did not revolt against my unbridled lusts, or that the earth did not open up and swallow me alive into hell, for having led so many other souls down into death. All I can think is that God, who wants no one to perish but desires all to be saved (1 Timothy 2.4), intended repentance for me. For he desires not the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live (Ezekiel 18.23).

"We soon arrived in Jerusalem, several days before the celebration of the feast in that city, and we passed the time in similar disreputable activities, or even worse - for not content with my companions in crime on board ship during the journey I drew many other pilgrims and citizens into the pollution of my wicked deeds."

Chapter XV

"When the day came for the celebration of the exaltation of the precious and sacred cross, I was still in the process of seducing and soiling the souls of the young men. However, when I saw everyone with one accord going at dawn to the church, I went along too, flowing with the tide, and we all came at last into the courtyard of the church. When the time for the exaltation of the divine cross came, I pushed forward, and was pushed forward from behind, but was somehow or other unable to make much progress as I tried to get into the church with the rest of the people. I had great difficulty in getting near the door. When at last I did get there and tried to enter, some divine power

prevented me, although everyone else went in unhindered. I was repulsed, thrown out and driven back, and I found myself standing in the courtyard alone. Thinking that perhaps it was because of my woman's weakness that this was happening, I tried once more to join the others by forcing myself forward to go in, but it was all in vain.

Chapter XVI

"As soon as my feet touched the threshold, I alone was unable to go any further, unlike the rest of the crowd who went in without any difficulty. It was as if some armed force had been charged with the responsibility of denying me access, a sudden force drove me back, and again I found myself back in the courtyard. A third and a fourth time I tried, but with no success, until I despaired of ever being able to get there, besides which my body was badly bruised by the pressure brought to bear upon me.

"I retreated, and stood in a corner of the church courtyard, scarcely able to make any sense in my mind of why it was that I was prevented from seeing the life-giving cross, when a saving thought suddenly touched my mind and heart, and I recognised that it was all the squalid wickedness of my deeds that was preventing me from entering in. I was shaken to the core, and wept, and beat my breast, sighing deeply from the bottom of my heart. As I groaned and sobbed, my eyes fell upon an image of the holy birthgiver of God above the place where I was standing. I turned towards her and reached out purposefully to her.

"'Lady virgin,' I cried, 'who gave birth to God according to the flesh, my eyes have been so polluted by filth that I know it cannot be right and proper for me to contemplate your image and adore you. You must have always known that you were a chaste virgin, immaculate in body and soul. It would be only right if you were to abominate me in my lustfulness, and thrust me out of the presence of your most immaculate purity and chastity. But I have heard that God was able to become human because you alone were worthy to give him birth, that sinners may be called to repent.

"'Come to my aid! I am alone with no one to help me. Take my confession to your heart. Open the doorway to the church and give me permission to enter in, so that I may not be excluded from the sight of the precious cross to which was fixed our God-in-human-form. You, a virgin, conceived him and gave him birth. He gave his blood to win my freedom. O Lady, I know I am unworthy,

but I beg you open the door that I may come into the presence of the cross of the Lord, and I swear a most solemn oath to you who were found worthy to give birth to Christ that I will never again let my flesh sink into a horrid mess of promiscuity. From the moment I set eyes on the cross of your son, O holy Virgin, I renounce the world and all its works and everything in it, and in fulfilment of my oath I will immediately go wherever you lead me.'

Chapter XVII

"As I spoke, a feeling of warmth, which I could only believe came from the compassionate heart of the birthgiver of God, reassured me that my faith was accepted. I moved from the place where I had been praying and joined those who were going in to the church. This time there was nothing driving me back, nothing to prevent me approaching the doorway to the church. I was seized by an ecstatic trembling which shook every bone in my body. I came to the doorway which I had been prevented from entering before, and went in without the slightest hindrance. It felt as if the same power which barred my entrance beforehand was now actively working to draw me in.

"And so I found myself in the holy of holies, and was found worthy to adore the mystery of the precious and life-giving wood of the cross. And then I understood the promises of God, and what he had done to make the acceptance of sinners possible. I threw myself down and kissed the holy ground, then came out and ran back to stand before her who had given me faith. In the very place where I had sworn my solemn oath I bent the knee before the face of the holy Virgin birth-giver of God and poured out my prayer to her.

"O most gentle Lady, you are always ready to show forth your loving mercy. You have not despised my unworthy prayers. I have seen a glory which sinners do not deserve to see, the glory of the almighty God who accepts through you the penitence of sinners. What more can I, a miserable sinner, put on record and describe? The time has come to fulfil what I have promised; may my faith be acceptable to your loving faithfulness.

"Now, tell me where you want me to go. Be a saving guide to me and lead me into truth. Go before me in the way which leads to penitence.'

"And I heard a voice as of someone crying out a long way off,

"If you cross the Jordan you will find an answer to your prayer'.

"Listening to the voice, I believed that it came especially for my benefit, and in tears I cried aloud to the image of the birthgiver of God.

"O Lady, Lady, Queen of all the world, through whom salvation came to the human race, never let me go from your care."

"I left the church courtyard and hurried off, and as I was going someone saw me and gave me three nummi, saying 'Please take these, lady', which I did and bought three loaves with them. I took it that they were given to me by way of a blessing on my pilgrimage. I asked the man selling the bread the way to the Jordan, and he directed me to the city gate leading in that direction, and I went on my way weeping tears of joy.

Chapter XVIII

"I walked on for the rest of the day. It had been about the third hour that I was found worthy to see the precious, holy cross; it was only as the sun was beginning to set that the church of the blessed John Baptist came into view by the side of the Jordan. I went in to the church to pray, and then immediately went down to the Jordan where I washed my hands and face in its holy waters. I received the life-giving and spotless Sacrament of Christ the Lord in that aforesaid Basilica of the Forerunner, John Baptist, ate half of one of my loaves, drank water from the Jordan, and slept on the ground for the night. By the light of the dawn I crossed over to the other side, and again begged my guide to direct me where she would. And so that is how I came to be in this wilderness. From that day to this I have fled far away, waiting on my God who can save both small and great who turn to him."

"How many years, mother," said Zosimas, "have you been living in this wilderness?"

"I reckon it is forty-seven years since I left the holy city."

"But what have you found to eat?"

"I had two and a half loaves with me when I crossed the Jordan, which after a while dried up and became as hard as stone, but I passed some years eating them bit by bit."

"And how have you managed to live for a such a long time without coming to grief? Have you not suffered from the weather with all its sudden changes of temperature?"

"Oh, don't ask me about things which I would tremble to speak about. If I were to enumerate all the dangers I have endured or the thoughts which have beset me on every side, the very memory of them would, I fear, cause me great distress."

"Don't hide anything from me, mother. Tell me everything. Now that I have

met you, you are brought out into the open, and it would be only right for you to enlighten us without holding anything back."

Chapter XIX

"Believe me, abba, for seventeen years I struggled with the wild beasts of my irrational longings. When taking a little food I longed for meat, remembering with regret the meat and fish which I used to eat in Egypt. I longed for the wine that I used to love so much, for I used to enjoy a lot of wine and drank it often just to get drunk. My desire for it was just as great as it had been before I left the world. Here, however, I often had hardly any water, and burned with thirst, and was at risk for the lack of it. I was filled with a longing for all the bawdy songs which I had learned in the world. They troubled my mind and filled it with a desire to sing all those songs of the devil. And then with tears and beatings of my breast I would recall to mind the oath I had sworn as I entered this wilderness. I would stand in thought before that image of the holy birthgiver of God, who bore me up by her faith. I would beg her to drive out the thoughts afflicting my most miserable soul. After an overwhelming bout of weeping and beating of my breast I became aware of a light surrounding me on all sides and at once I became somehow stable and serene.

"As for all the thoughts of fornication which oppressed me again, how can I tell you about them? Forgive me, father. A raging fire inwardly set my whole body alight, burning in every part of me, dragging me down with a desire for sex. When these thoughts filled my mind I would prostrate myself, and flood the ground with my tears, hoping that she who accepted my oath would truly stand before me. In my raging madness I felt threatened with the punishment due to anyone who broke faith. The imminent penalty for treachery was to be put to death at the point of the sword. And I would never rise from the ground until that most gentle light illumined me as before, and put to flight the thoughts which had been troubling me. Always, unceasingly, I lifted up the eyes of my heart to my protector, begging her to help me in my solitude and penitence. And always she who gave birth to the source of all chastity has been my helper and guide. And so for seventeen years I lived through many a contest (and even today I am still beset by many dangers). But from then on, the birthgiver of God has been the constant helper by my side, guiding me through all and in all."

"But did not you not have any food and clothing?"

"Well, I spun those loaves out over seventeen years, as I told you, after which

I ate what herbs I could find in this wilderness. The clothes I was wearing when I crossed the Jordan eventually wore out and fell to pieces with old age. I had no choice but to bear with icy cold and summer heat. I was burned to ashes by the heat of summer, and shivered and froze in the times of terrible frost and cold. Often I would lie motionless on

Chapter XIX (continued), Life of St Mary of Egypt, Book 1d
(Also St Marina, Virgin, further down page)

the ground with all the life knocked out of me, beset by a mountain of various demands and temptations.

"But through it all, in all sorts of ways, the power of God has kept my miserable body and soul together right up to this present moment. When I think of all the evils that the Lord has freed me from, I know that I have been fed by the food which does not perish (John 6.27); the hope of salvation which I possess is a feast which completely satisfies. I am fed and clothed by the covering of the word of God in whom all things consist. Man does not live by bread alone (Deuteronomy 83 & Matthew 4.4), but those who have not so much as a hole in the earth to hide in, and who have stripped off the covering of sin from themselves, are surrounded by the protection of the Lord."

Chapter XX

Zosimas wondered at the way she used scriptural quotations from the books of Moses, Job and the Psalms.

"So you have read the Psalms, mother," he asked, "and other books of the sacred Scriptures?"

She gave a little smile.

"You must believe me that up to today I have not set eyes on any other human being since I crossed the Jordan, nor wild beast or any other sort of animal since the time I came to live in this wilderness. I never learnt to read at any time of my life, nor have I ever heard anyone singing psalms or reading the Scriptures. But the Word of God is alive and powerful, penetrating to the depths of the human mind (Hebrews 4.12).

"But this is the end of my story. And by the incarnation of the Word of God, I beg you to pray for me in my lustfulness."

The old man lost no time in bending the knee and prostrating himself.

"Blessed be the Lord God who alone does great marvels (Psalms 72.18)," he cried aloud, "glorious and stupendous things without number. Blessed are you, Lord God, who have showed me how you shower your gifts upon those who fear you (Psalms 31.19). Truly you have not hid yourself from those who seek you."

But she reached out to him, unwilling to let him prostrate himself before her.

"In the name of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, I charge you to tell no one what you have heard from me until such time as I am loosed from the bond of mortal flesh. If you are happy to agree to that, I will appear to you again in a year's time from now, and you will see me, by God's all-enveloping grace.

And for the sake of the Lord, do what I am now asking you to do; don't cross over the Jordan at the time of the sacred fast next year, as is the custom of the monastery."

Zosimas was astounded to hear her talking about the rules of the monastery as if she knew everything there was to know about them - another thing which proclaimed the glory of God, who ever gives more than those who love him ask for.

"Stay in the monastery, abba, as I have asked," she said. "You won't be able to leave it even if you want to. On the evening of the feast of the most sacred Supper of the Lord, place a portion of the divine body and life-giving blood in a vessel suitable for such a great mystery, and wait for me on your side of the Jordan, where I shall come to receive the life-giving gifts. Before I crossed the Jordan I received Communion in the church of the most blessed Forerunner, since when I have never communicated again, never shared in these sanctifying gifts. So I beg you, don't reject my request, don't fail to bring me the divine and live-giving mysteries in that hour when the Lord shared his divine supper with his disciples. You will have to tell this to John, the abbot of the monastery. Look to yourself and your own flock - there is much that needs amendment. But I don't want you to say anything of this to John until the Lord allows it."

So saying, she asked for a prayer from the old man, and ran off quickly into the inner desert.

Zosimas prostrated himself and kissed the ground on which her feet had stood, and giving glory and great thanksgiving to God he turned back, praising and blessing Jesus Christ our Lord and God.

He lived out the remainder of his journey into the desert and when he returned to the monastery he joined in their accustomed routine. He said nothing for the whole of the year, not daring to say anything about what he had witnessed, but he longed to gaze upon her face once more and kept on praying to God silently that this would again be granted to him. He sighed at how slowly the year seemed to pass.

When the first Sunday of the sacred fast came round again, all the others went out singing psalms in the usual way, but he was suffering from a slight fever, and had to stay behind in the monastery. Zosimas remembered how that holy woman had said to him, 'You won't be able to leave it even if you want to'. He recovered from his sickness after a few days, but stayed in the monastery.

When the brothers all returned for the feast of the Lord's Supper he did as he had been asked. He put a portion of the spotless body and precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in a small chalice and packed a basket containing a few figs and dates and some lentils steeped in water. Late in the evening he went down to the banks of the Jordan where he sat down waiting for the holy woman to arrive. Although that blessed woman was a long time coming, he did not go to sleep, but gazed into the desert, longing to see her.

"Perhaps she has already come and gone away again, not finding me here," he wondered, and wept. He lifted his eyes up to heaven and prayed to God.

"You allowed me to see her once. Do not prevent me from seeing her again. Let me not go away unrewarded, cursed as a punishment for my sins."

Chapter XXII

As he prayed thus in tears, other thoughts came into his mind.

"Suppose she does come, what will she do? How will she cross the Jordan, seeing there is no ferry? She won't be able to come over to me, wretch that I am! Alas, how unfortunate I am! Alas, who can have prevented her appearing to me?"

As he was going over all these things in his mind, behold, she appeared! There she was, standing on the other side of the river. Zosimas was delighted at seeing her, and he rejoiced and glorified God. But then the thought that she would not be able to cross the river came back into his mind. However as he looked closely he saw her making the sign of the cross over the waters of the

Jordan. The darkness of night was lit up by the splendour of the moon, which was at the full at that time. As soon as she had made the sign of the cross she stepped into the water and walked across the top of it as if it were dry land. Zosimas was awe-struck., and made as if to prostrate himself, but she cried out to prevent him.

"What do you think you are doing, abba! You are a priest and you are carrying the divine mysteries!"

At once he obeyed, and she came up out of the waters.

"Bless, father, bless," she said.

He hastened to comply, although he had been rendered almost speechless by the effect of such a glorious miracle.

"God has promised that the pure shall be like him," he said, "and truly God does not lie. Glory to Christ our God. Through your handmaid you have shown me how far short of true perfection my own thoughts have been."

The woman asked him to say the Creed and the Lord's prayer. When it was finished she offered the old man the kiss of peace, as is customary, and then received the gift of the life-giving mysteries.

"Now, O Lord, let your servant depart in peace," she cried, as she sighed, wept and raised her hands to heaven, "for my eyes have seen your salvation."

And to the old man she said,

"Forgive me abba, but I hope you will fulfil another request for me. Go back to your monastery, secure in the peace of God, but next year come through the river and journey to the place where you first spoke with me. Above all, don't forget, but come for the sake of God, and you shall see me again, as God wills."

"I wish I could come with you," he exclaimed, "just to have the joy of gazing at your wonderful face. But please, mother, grant one little request to an old man and accept this food I have brought with me."

And he showed her the basket he had brought. With the tips of her fingers she picked up three grains of the lentils and ate them, saying that the grace of the Spirit was sufficient to keep her soul alive.

"Pray for me, in the name of the Lord," she said to him, "and be mindful always of my unworthiness."

He touched her holy feet and prayed in tears, begging her also to pray for the Church and the Emperor and for himself, and so let her go, with tears and crying. Indeed, he did not dare try and detain her any longer, for he knew he would not be able to even if he wanted to.

Chapter XXIII

She once again signed the Jordan with the cross, and walked back across the water in the same way as she had come. The old man went back, overflowing with a mixture of joy and fear. And he regretfully reproached himself that he had not asked her what her name was, but hoped he might do so when they met in the following year.

Chapter XXIV

After the year had run its course, everything was done as usual, and he went into that vast desert, hastening to the place where he had first seen that glorious sight. But as he walked through the desert he could not find any signs of how to find the place he wanted. He looked right and left and glanced about everywhere, surveying the scene like a swift hunter searching for the sight of a favourable prey. But he could see no sign of any movement anywhere, and he began to be overcome by tears.

"Show me, O Lord, I pray," he said, lifting up his eyes, "the physical presence of your Angel, above compare in all the world."

Chapter XXV

After that prayer, he came immediately upon the place which looked like a raging river, and as he looked down on to the far side he saw a shining light, and the body of the holy woman lying dead, facing towards the East, with her hands crossed in the proper way. He ran down and bathed the feet of that most blessed woman with his tears, not daring to touch any other part of her body. He wept for some time, and sang the psalms proper to such an occasion, and said the prayers for the dead.

"I hope this is what the holy woman would have wished me to do," he mused, but hardly had he said this when he noticed some writing scratched in the sand.

"Abba Zosimas, give burial to the body of Mary, miserable sinner, and pray for me in the name of the Lord. The month of Pharmuthi, according to the Egyptians, April according to the Romans, on the ninth day, that is five days before the April Ides, at the time of the sacred passion, after receiving the communion of the divine and sacred supper."

Chapter XXVI

As the old man read these words his first thought was who could have written them, for she had said that she had never learned to read. But at the same time he was overjoyed that he had learned her holy name. Then he thought how she must have arrived at this place to die at exactly the same hour as she had partaken of the mysteries at the river Jordan. The journey which had taken Zosimas twenty laborious days, she had accomplished in less than an hour before passing at once to the Lord! Zosimas glorified the Lord and washed the body with his tears.

"It is time to do what has to be done," he said. "But what shall I do?

Unfortunately I have nothing to dig with. I have neither mattock nor hoe, nothing but my hands."

But even as he spoke he saw a piece of timber lying nearby and he began to dig with that. The earth was terribly hard and resisted all his efforts to dig into it. The task was not made any easier by his weakness after fasting, not to mention the fatigue brought on by his long journey. But he laboured on, with great long sighs, covered in sweat, and groaning deeply from the bottom of his heart. Suddenly he became aware of a huge lion standing near the holy woman's body licking her feet. He trembled with fear at the sight of how big this wild beast was, especially since he remembered that the holy woman had told him that she had never seen any wild beasts in those parts. He summoned up his courage and signed himself all over with the cross, believing also that the power of the one lying there would protect him from harm. The lion looked in his direction and bowed its head several times

"Since an animal so extremely large as you has been sent by God," Zosimas then said to the lion, "let us do what is required of us and commit the body of this servant of God to the ground. I am so weakened by old age that I cannot dig, and in any case I have not got any tool suitable for such work, besides which I have just made such a long journey that I have not got the strength to bring to the task. It is for you to carry out this task with your claws at God's command, so that we can commit to the ground this holy little body."

Chapter XXVII

Immediately, in response to the old man's words, the lion hollowed out the ground with his paws to a sufficient depth to bury the saint's small body. He washed her feet with his tears, pouring forth many prayers that she might pray for all people and especially for him, and with the lion standing by, laid her body in the ground as naked as the day he first met her. She possessed nothing

except the cloak he had taken off and thrown to her, with which she had covered her body.

They both then departed, the lion to the inner desert, as gentle as a lamb, and Zosimas, blessing and praising God and singing hymns to Christ our Lord, back to the monastery, where he told them the whole story right from the beginning. He missed nothing out of what he had seen and heard, so that everyone who heard about these mighty works of God might be filled with wonder and fear and love, and celebrate with great faith the passing to God of this most blessed saint. Abbot John took heed of what the holy woman had said and found that there were some monks who were lacking, whom by the mercy of the Lord God he corrected in their ways.

Zosimas stayed in that same monastery and reached the age of a hundred before departing to the Lord in peace. Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ, together with the Father and the life-giving and worshipful Spirit, to whom be all glory and honour and power, now and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Life No 24

The Life of St Marina, Virgin

There was a certain man who left his small daughter in the care of his parents in order to fulfil his desire of taking up a monastic life. He joined a monastery thirty-two miles from the city, where he took note of the way everything was done, and soon discovered that the more he was obedient and faithful the more the abbot looked on him with approval. Now he had not been there long, before he began to think lovingly and regretfully of his daughter whom he missed very much. For several days he looked so sad that the abbot could not fail to notice.

"What is the matter, brother, that you look so sad?" asked the abbot. "Tell me all about it, and God will console you and come to your aid."

The brother fell weeping at the abbot's feet, but not wanting to tell the abbot that the child was a girl, he said,

"I have a small son whom I left behind in the city and I think about him a lot and miss him."

Now this brother was proving to be an asset to the monastery, and the abbot did not want to lose him, so he said,

"Well, if you love him so much go and get him and bring him back here and let him stay with you."

So he went and fetched the girl, whose name was Marina, but he changed her name and told the abbot it was Marinus, and in the monastery he taught her to read and was with her always. None of the brothers knew she was girl; they always called her Marinus. When she was fourteen the father began to teach her the way of the Lord.

"See to it, my daughter, that no one ever finds out your secret right up to the end of your life and beware of the wiles of the devil. Don't let him lead you astray and bring ruin upon this holy monastery. Strive in the sight of Christ and his holy Angels to win the crown, and be saved from eternal damnation with the wicked."

And every day he taught her many other things concerning the kingdom of heaven.

Chapter II

When she was seventeen her father died, and she remained alone in her father's cell, observing in every respect her father's teaching. She was obedient to everyone in the monastery, so that she found favour with the abbot and everyone else.

Now the monastery owned a pair of oxen and a cart, for there was a market three miles away on the sea coast, where the monks bought whatever the monastery was in need of.

"Brother Marinus," the abbot said one day, "why not go with the brothers and help them?"

"Whatever you say, father," she replied.

So brother Marinus began to help the brothers with the cart quite often, and if sometimes it got a bit too late for them to get back to the monastery, there was a lodging house in the market where they would stay.

Chapter III

Now by the wiles of the devil it so happened that the owner of the lodging house had a virgin daughter. A visiting soldier slept with this daughter and she became pregnant. As soon as her parents realised this they began to harass the girl.

"Tell us who the father is," they urged.

"It's that monk called brother Marinus," she said. "He forced me and I got

pregnant."

Her parents went straight to the monastery and complained to the abbot.

"Look here, father abbot. See what your monk Marinus has done and how he has ruined our daughter."

"Just wait a minute," replied the abbot. "Let's see if what you are saying is true."

He summoned Marinus to come to him.

"Marinus," he said, "is it you who are responsible for this wicked deed with their daughter?"

She stood there, thinking, for quite some time, groaning inwardly.

"I have sinned, father," she said at last. "I repent of this sin. Pray for me."

The abbot was very angry and ordered that she be punished by a severe beating.

"I tell you this," he added. "Because you have done this wicked deed you may not stay in this monastery any longer."

And he ordered that Marinus be thrown out the door. But still she did not reveal to anyone the secret of her sex. She lay down in front of the monastery gates, doing penance, punishing herself as if she really were guilty, and begging a few mouthfuls of bread from the monks as they went in and out.

This went on for three years. She refused to go away.

Meanwhile, the girl gave birth to a son, and when he was weaned the girl's mother took him to the monastery and put him down in front of Marinus.

"There you are, brother Marinus," she said as she walked away. "Feed your own son in whatever way you can."

That holy virgin accepted him as her own son and fed him from the pieces of bread she was given by people going in and out of the monastery. She carried on doing this for a further two years, feeding somebody else's son.

Chapter IV

By this time the sight of Marinus was making some of the brothers feel sorry for him and they began asking the abbot to take him back inside the monastery.

"Can't you forgive brother Marinus, abba," they asked, "and take him back inside? He has been doing penance lying outside the monastery gate for five years and has not made the slightest attempt to go away. Accept his repentance, as our Lord Jesus Christ commanded."

Chapter IV (continued), Life of St Marina, Book 1d
(Also St Fabiola further down this page)

He did not need much persuasion. He called Marinus back inside.

"Your father was a holy man, as you know," he said to Marinus, "and brought you into this monastery as a small child. He never did such an evil thing as you have done, nor has anyone else ever done in this holy monastery. But now you have come back in, along with the son of your adultery. The grievous sin you have committed requires that you continue to do penance. So my instructions are that you alone are to do all the daily cleaning jobs in the monastery, fetching water as necessary and acting as a servant to all the others. If you carry that out, you will win back my approval."

The holy woman gladly accepted all this, and did whatever she was told.

Chapter V

After a few days, however, she fell asleep in the Lord.

"Brother Marinus is dead," the monks said to the abbot.

"Just see how great his sin must have been, brothers," said the abbot. "He wasn't even allowed to live out his penance. However, go and wash his body and bury it somewhere well away from the monastery."

And of course when they did so they knew that brother Marinus was in fact a woman. And they began to cry out, beating their breasts.

"What holy patience she showed in her life! She was punished by all because no one knew her secret."

And they came to the abbot in tears.

"Abba, come and look at brother Marinus," they cried through their tears.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked.

"Come and gaze upon the wonders of God," he replied, "and think of what lies at your door in this matter."

Somewhat alarmed, he hastened to the body. He lifted the sheet covering her, saw that she was a woman, and fell to the floor, beating his head on the ground, shouting loudly.

"I beg you, by the Lord Jesus Christ, do not condemn me in the sight of God for the way I have treated you. I did not know what I was doing. You never revealed your secret, lady, and truly I just did not have the faintest inkling of the holiness of the way you decided to live."

And he ordered that the body should be placed in the monastery chapel.

Chapter VI

On that very same day, the girl who had been deceived by the devil came to the monastery, confessed her sin and named the father of the child. On the seventh day, the girl was liberated from the demon, there in the chapel where the holy body was lying. When the people in the market and in the neighbourhood heard about all these astonishing events, they came to the monastery with crosses and candles, singing hymns and psalms and blessing God. They came right into the chapel where the holy body lay and blessed God the more. Right up to the present day, Christ continues to do many miracles there through the prayers of the holy virgin to the praise of his name. Who with the Father and the holy Spirit lives and reigns, God unto the ages of ages. Amen

Life No 25

The Life of St Fabiola, Virgin and Martyr

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on December 27.]

It is several years now since I counselled that venerable woman Paula [See Life 26, below] while her sorrow for the death of Blesilla was still fresh. [Blesilla was Paula's daughter. Under the guidance of Jerome she had made a vow of chastity after she was widowed, but died four months later in 389] Four summers ago I wrote to bishop Heliodorus with an epitaph for Nepotianus, doing what I could to express my grief at his loss. Hardly two years ago I wrote a letter, which was quite brief, to my friend Pammachius on the subject of the sudden loss of his wife Paulina. [Paulina was another of Paula's daughters] I felt unable to say very much to such an accomplished person as that, for although I was only offering comfort to a friend by way of providing a sounding board for his own thoughts, it might have looked as if I was trying to teach something to someone already perfect.

But now, my son Oceanus, you are laying a task on me which I gladly fulfil, and would even have done if you had not asked me. It is on the same sort of

subject as before, but I must fashion it in a new sort of way, as befits the new occasion. In those earlier letters I was dealing with the affection of a parent, the mourning of an uncle, or the longing desire of a husband, and I offered the medicine of different texts of scripture according to the different needs of each person.

And now you are offering me Fabiola, praised by Christians, regarded as miraculous even by the heathen, mourned by the poor, and lamented by the monks she used to cherish. Where should I begin? Anything I might say is overshadowed by what I might say next. Shall I praise her fasting? Her almsgiving was greater. Should I extol her humility? It was exceeded by the ardour of her faith. I could mention her search for lowliness, and her rejection of silken robes in favour of the kind of dress worn by the lower classes; but it is a much bigger thing to change your attitude to life than it is to change your clothing. It is much more difficult to renounce an inner feeling of superiority than to go without gold and jewels, for once we have renounced these things we are often so fearful of this kind of lowliness, however glorious it might be, that we then try to flaunt our poverty in order to make a public impression. A hidden virtue, however, cherished secretly in our own conscience, seeks no judge except God.

So now that I am required to offer yet another eulogy, let me do without the rhetoric, and talk about the simple facts of her penitence and general way of life. Others might prefer me to start with Quintus Fabius Maximus,

and describe all the battles of the whole Fabian clan, and show how all their victories contributed to the nobility which Fabiola inherited, and thus demonstrate that the virtues evident in the branch would not have been possible unless they had been present in the root. But I am a devotee of the inn at Bethlehem and the stable of the Lord where a virgin gave birth to an infant who was God, so I shall describe Fabiola, the handmaid of the Lord, not in terms of springing from a long line of noble history, but as nourished by the humility of the church.

Chapter II

But first, let me begin by dealing with a criticism which is often made of her - a criticism as hard as a rock and as furious as a storm - that she took a second marriage after renouncing her first. I shall not praise her later conversion without first absolving her of guilt. It is common knowledge that her first

husband had so many vices that not even a prostitute or a common slave would have been able to put up with them. If I were to list them all, I would not be doing justice to her courage in preferring to take all the blame herself for the separation, rather than expose all the vices of him who was one flesh with her and bring him into disgrace. What I am going to say will be quite enough to vindicate her as a thoroughly chaste Christian woman. For the Lord says that a wife should not be divorced except for fornication (Matthew 5.32), and if she has been divorced she should remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7.11). Now these injunctions for men must apply equally to women. If it is all right for a man to divorce an adulterous wife, you can't say that a wife must at all costs remain with a fornicating man. If a man is joined to a harlot he becomes one flesh with her (1 Corinthians 6.16); in that case a woman who is joined to an immoral fornicator becomes one flesh with him. The laws of Christ are different from the laws of the Romans. Papinianus enjoins one thing, our Paul another. Among the Romans the curbs on licentiousness are relaxed for men. Incest and adultery only are condemned; brothels and the abuse of young female slaves are widely condoned, as if a man is only to be blamed if he sins with someone of high rank. Among us, what is forbidden to women is also forbidden to men; they are all equally bound by the same laws. Yes, Fabiola has put away a vicious husband, as everyone knows, guilty of this crime and that crime. (I had almost mentioned the crimes which the whole neighbourhood knows about, but about which his wife alone said nothing!) But if you argue that after leaving her husband she should have remained unmarried, perhaps I might agree that that was a fault, although I could just as easily argue that it was a necessity. For the Apostle says it is better to marry than to burn (1 Corinthians 7.9). She was only a young woman; to endure perpetual widowhood was beyond her. She was well aware of another law in her members fighting against the law of her mind, leading her inexorably towards sexual intercourse (Romans 7.23). So she thought it better to acknowledge openly her weakness under the cloud of a somewhat disreputable second marriage, than take to being promiscuous while maintaining the reputation of being the wife of only one husband. Similarly, the Apostle enjoins the young women to marry and bear children so that they give no occasion to the devil to smear their name (1 Timothy 5.14). And he goes on to explain the reason for this: that some of the women had already turned aside after Satan (ibid.15). So Fabiola was perfectly convinced that she was right to divorce her husband. Granted, she was not at that time aware of

the rigour of the Gospel which forbids women to marry again during the lifetime of their husbands. But by falling unknowingly into one fault she avoided a multitude of other attacks from the devil.

Chapter III

But why go on delving around in matters which are past and done with, when she has already joined the ranks of the penitent? Who would have believed that after the death of her second husband she would not have indulged in the usual careless behaviour of widows freed from the yoke of obedience - acting lasciviously, frequenting the baths, idling about in the public squares, carrying the look of a harlot about with them? Who would have believed that she would don sackcloth and publicly acknowledge the error of her ways? Yet in full view of the whole city of Rome she took her place among the order of Penitents. [The convenience of the confessional box was unknown in the early church. It was the custom in the early church for penitents to make public reparation before being readmitted to Communion.] on Easter Eve in the basilica which used to belong to that Lateranus who perished by the sword of Caesar. [A senator who conspired against Nero and was put to death. His palace on the Aelian Hill was eventually donated to the church by Constantine. The basilica of St John Lateran stands on the same site to this day] The bishop, the presbyters and all the people wept in sympathy with her, as she stood there with unkempt hair, pallid lips, and unwashed neck.

What sins are there which such mourning cannot purge? What stains cannot be found washed away by such lamentation? Peter wiped out his triple denial (John 18.17-27) by a triple confession (John 21.15-17). The prayers of Aaron's brother made amends for his sacrilege in fashioning gold into the head of a calf (Exodus 32.30-32). David's seven day fast atoned for his adultery and the murder of a holy and innocent man. He lay on the ground, poured ashes on his head, oblivious of his regal dignity, seeking for light in the darkness. He looked only to him whom he had offended, proclaiming with tears, 'Against you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight' (Psalms 51.4), and, 'Give back the joy of salvation to me, and strengthen me with your creative spirit' (ibid.12).

The lesson from the virtues displayed in these examples is that however firmly I stand it is possible that I may fall, and also that even though fallen it is possible through penance to rise again. Who is there so ungodly among the kings as Ahab, of whom Scripture says, 'There was no one like Ahab who sold

himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord"? The prophet Elijah accused this man of being guilty of the blood of Naboth, saying, 'You have killed, and robbed, and behold I will bring evil upon you and wipe out your posterity'. 'And Ahab rent his garments and covered himself in haircloth, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and walked with his head cast down. And the word of Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Have you not seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Therefore, because he has humbled himself for my sake, I will not bring evil upon him in his days"'.

Chapter IV

O blessed penance, which draws down the eyes of God, which turns aside the wrath of God when error is confessed! We learn exactly the same lesson from reading about Manasseh in 2 Chronicles (ch.33), and the king of Nineveh in Jonah (ch.3), and the publican in the Gospel (Luke 18.13). the first of these not only received forgiveness, but was counted worthy to receive the kingdom, the second turned aside the anger of God, and the third beat his breast and dared not lift up his eyes to heaven. And the publican went away justified by his humble confession of sin, rather than the Pharisee with his proud boasting of his virtues. This is not really the place to preach about penance, as if I were writing a treatise against Montanus and Novatus, [Heretics who denied the power of the church to absolve persons who had fallen into sin] I will simply remind you that the 'sacrifice which is pleasing to God is a troubled spirit' (Psalms 51.1), and, 'I prefer the penitence of a sinner rather than that he should die' (Ezekiel 18.32), and, 'Arise, arise, O Jerusalem' (Isaiah 60.1), and many other trumpet calls from the prophets. And this one thing also I will say, for it may be useful to my readers, and is very relevant to the matter we have been dealing with. Fabiola was not ashamed of the Lord on earth, therefore the Lord will not be ashamed of her in heaven (Mark 8.38). She exposed her wounds to all, and Rome in tears gazed upon the disfiguring scars in her flesh. She uncovered her limbs, she bared her head and closed her mouth. She had no longer been entering the church of the Lord (Leviticus 13.46), but had been sitting separately outside the camp with Miriam the sister of Moses (Numbers 12.10-14), waiting till the priest who drove her out should admit her back in again. She 'came down from her throne of delights, she took the millstone and ground flour, she took off her shoes and waded through rivers of tears' (Isaiah 47.1-2). 'She sat upon coals of fire and these came to her aid' (ibid.14 Vulgate). She disfigured that face which had

once delighted her second husband, she despised her jewels, she could not bear even to look upon fine linen, and she put away all her ornamentation. She grieved as if she had committed adultery, and by making use of many medicines she sought to be cured of her one wound.

Chapter V

We have dwelt at some length upon her penitence, but have now come ashore out of the deep, in order to enter into a wider space where we may begin to describe her praises freely. Having been received publicly back into the fellowship of the church, what did she do? In her day of good fortune she did not forget the days of evil; after the shipwreck she had no desire to commit herself again to the dangers of the deep. Instead she preferred to carve up all her various properties and sell them (her properties were considerable, as befitting to her rank), and having gathered together a large sum of money she put it to work for the benefit of the poor.

The first thing she did was to set up a *nosochomeion* [Greek word meaning "hospice" or "hospital"] into which she gathered sick people from off the streets and provided relief for the needy and nursed those suffering from various ills. Need I describe all those various human disasters - the broken noses, the eyes put out, the feet half withered, the hands covered in sores, the distended bellies, the thin shanks, the swollen shins, the diseased and decaying flesh swarming with maggots? How often did she bear upon her shoulders people infected with jaundice or filth? How often did she wash the wounds oozing with pus which most people could not bear even to look at? She prepared food with her own hands, and moistened the lips of the dying with sips of liquid.

I know many rich and religious people who are quite happy to bring this sort of relief to people by being generous with their money, as long as somebody else is actually doing the work. They have not the stomach to do it with their own hands. But I don't blame them. A natural repugnance does not necessarily indicate a lack of faith. But while I may forgive them their weakness of stomach, I cannot fail but offer praises to heaven for the fervour of a mind which has perfectly banished such scruples. It was her great faith which enabled her to overcome.

I know what reward was meted out to the proud rich man clothed in purple who failed to do anything for Lazarus (Luke 16.23). The person whom we might despise, whom we can hardly bear to look at, to care for whom would

make us vomit, is only another person like us, formed like us out of the same clay, built up out of identical elements. Anything that happens to him could just as easily happen to us. If we were to reckon the wounds of others as our own, then our own hard-heartedness towards others might be broken down into a realisation of our own need for mercy. If I had a hundred tongues and a hundred lips and voice like a trumpet, I still would not be able give you the names of all the diseases that Fabiola treated. She brought so much comfort to these wretches that many people even began to be envious of the poor! She exercised a similar liberality towards clerics, monks and virgins. What monastery has not been given a share in her alms? What scantily clothed or bed-ridden person has Fabiola not provided with clothing? Are there any needy persons upon whom she has not poured forth her immediate and unstinted bounty? And she found that even Rome was too narrow a sphere for her pity.

Chapter VI

She extended her influence throughout the islands in the Etruscan sea, and into the province of the Volsci. Either in person, or by the hands of trustworthy holy men, she distributed her alms among the communities of monks to be found in these winding shores. Then suddenly, against everyone's advice, she decided to go to Jerusalem, where she avoided meeting crowds of people by making use for a short time of our own hospice. [Jerome spent the latter part of his life at Bethlehem, where he completed his translation of the Bible into Latin] When I think about our meeting I seem to see her there now, as vividly as I did then.

Good Lord! [Jesu bone!] What eagerness and zealous ardour she showed in reading my books of divinity! She devoured the Prophets, the Gospels and the Psalms as if she was trying to satisfy a raging hunger. She questioned and discussed, and locked the fruits of her enquiries in the safe keeping of her own heart. Nor did what she had learnt satisfy her desire to hear more; by increasing her knowledge she also increased her sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1.18). As if by fuel added to the fire, her zeal became all the more ardent.

One day we were looking at Numbers, written by Moses, and she somewhat diffidently asked me what she was to make of the great number of names to be found in it, and why each of the tribes were associated with various different places, and how it came about that the soothsayer Balaam prophesied more clearly about the Christian mysteries than any other prophet (Numbers 2.15-

19). I replied as best I could, and seemed to satisfy her curiosity well enough. Then as she unrolled the book she came to the place where there is a list of all the stopping places of the children of Israel as they made their way out of Egypt to the river Jordan (Numbers 33). She wanted to know the reason for each one. Some I was doubtful about, others I dealt with quite firmly, about some I confessed my ignorance. This made her urge me on all the more, as if I should not be allowed to remain in ignorance of these matters about which I knew nothing, and at the same time she protested that she herself was unworthy to delve into such great mysteries. What more can I say? She shamed me into having to confess my ignorance, and made me promise to produce a work on these matters specially for her own use [In Letter 78 of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, op.cit, dedicated to Fabiola but not completed till after her death, Jerome fulfils this promise, and sends it to Oceanus along with this letter.]. Up to the present time, as I now see it, it has been God's will for this project to be deferred, so that now I can dedicate it to her memory. In a previous volume I clothed her in priestly garments; [In Letter 64 to Fabiola, Jerome expounds the high priestly garments of Aaron described in Exodus 28] Let her now rejoice that she has reached the land of promise.

Chapter VII

Let me continue with the task I have begun. We had started looking out for some little place for her to live, something like Mary's inn, but suitable for such a great lady, where she might find the solitude she was looking for, when suddenly the whole Eastern region was shaken by the news from various messengers that the hordes of Huns were pouring forth from distant Maeotis. [The Sea of Azov] They had been living there between the icy Tanais [The Don] and the fierce tribes of the Massagetae, [An Asiatic people to the East of the Caspian Sea] where the gates of Alexander hold back the wild people behind the Caucasian mountains. But now they were making lightning raids on their fleet-footed horses, filling the whole region with slaughter and terror at a time when the Roman army was not there, as they were busy in Italy with civil wars. [A revolt by Eugenius, against Theodosius I, Emperor of the East, in 392]

Chapter VII (continued) Life of St Fabiola, Book 1d
(Also St Paula further down this page)

Herodotus [A Greek historian, sometimes known as the Father of History, c 484 - 425 BC] tells us that this people ruled the East for twenty years at the time of Darius, king of the Medes, and exacted a yearly tribute from Egypt and Ethiopia. May Jesus keep the city of Rome safe from these beasts!

They came upon everyone unawares, their speed ensured that they arrived before anyone had news of their approach, they had no respect for religion, for rank or for age, and had no pity even for the screams of infants who were put to death before they had had a chance to begin living. Some children, not realising their own danger, were smiling as the enemy picked them up, and were still smiling as the weapons struck. There seemed to be general agreement that they were aiming at Jerusalem, hurrying to that city because of their great greed for gold. The walls, which had been neglected during the time of peace, were put in order. Antioch was being besieged. The people of Tyre all went to their ancient island in order to get away from the land. We ourselves were driven to take ship and lie off shore, fearful of the arrival of the enemy. No matter how hard the winds might blow we were more afraid of the barbarians than the possibility of shipwreck, not so much for the sake of our own safety but for the preservation of the virgins' chastity.[At this time Jerome was the head of a large religious establishment, consisting of a church, a pilgrim's hospice, and monasteries of both men and women]

At that time there were great controversies among Christians, [The writings of Origen were much under discussion at this time] and our internal disagreements took on an even greater importance than the invasions of the barbarians. For myself I had a deep-seated love of the holy places and had no desire to move. But Fabiola possessed nothing except what she could carry with her, she was always a stranger and pilgrim in whatever city she lived. She returned therefore to her native land, where she who had once been rich lived in poverty, lodging in another's house instead of being hostess to many guests. Without overemphasising the point let me just say that she now distributed to the poor what was left of the properties which all Rome knew she had sold. I could not but grieve that the holy places had lost the presence of a most precious ornament, but our loss was Rome's gain, and the insolent and evil tongues of the heathen were silenced by the testimony of their own eyes. Let others praise her compassion, her humility or her faith; I rejoice

rather in the keenness of her mind.

Chapter VIII

She knew by heart the letter which in my youth I had written to Heliodorus [Letter 14 in Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, op.cit.] urging him to the life of the desert, and as she looked about her at the walls of Rome, she lamented at being shut in by them. And yet, forgetful of her sex, unmindful of her weakness, she was already there in the solitude which her soul so much longed for. The advice of her friends was not able to dissuade her; she was eager to burst out of the city as if to shed her chains. She came to feel that it was a sign of infidelity that she was still in a position to be able to distribute money and make provision for the future. And she did not entrust to others the task of almsgiving; she shared it out equably among the poor herself, hoping that for Christ's sake she would soon be in a position to need support from others. She set about this so briskly, so impatient of delay, that you would have thought she was about to set out immediately on her last journey.

Chapter IX

Death would never have been able to find her unprepared for she was always ready. As I sing her praises the image of my dear Pammachius rises up before me. When Paulina fell asleep he was left to keep vigil. She went before her husband so that he might remain as a servant of Christ. He was his wife's heir, and others now possess that inheritance. [i.e. the poor] The man and the woman vied with each other, [i.e. Pammachius and Fabiola] as was prefigured when the tent of Abraham became a place of refreshment (Genesis 18), for there was a competition between them as to who should show the more generosity. Each of them won and each of them was beaten. They both spoke of themselves as both victor and vanquished; what one of them wanted the other brought to perfection. They joined forces, their intentions were united, and far from rivalry leading to dispute, their mutual agreement could only flourish.

With them it was a case of no sooner said than done. They bought a hospice, which was soon filled with people. 'There was no labour in Jacob, nor grief in Israel' (Numbers 23.21), for the seas brought those seeking refuge on land, and from Rome issued a stream of people seeking a welcome resting place before setting sail. What Publius did for one apostle (and also, lest anyone should find fault with my accuracy, for one ship's crew,) in the island of Malta

(Acts 28.7) these two did frequently for many people. Not only have they supplied the wants of the destitute, but have been generous to all, providing help even for those who had no lack. The whole world knows that a guest house has been established at Rome's sea-port, and Britain learned by that summer what Egypt and Parthia had known in the spring.

As it is written. 'All things work together for good to those who fear God' (Romans 8.28), and the death of this great woman has proved no exception to the rule. Having a premonition of the future, she had written to a number of monks asking them to come and relieve her of the great burden under which she was labouring. She was making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, in order that they might receive her into everlasting mansions (Luke 16.9). They did come, and became her friends, and so she fell asleep in the way she wanted, laying down at last her burden that she might rise the more easily to heaven.

Chapter X

The miracle of Fabiola's life was displayed even more in her death. Hardly had she paid the debt of her soul to Christ, than the news spread rapidly, stirring up deep mourning for such a great person. The whole population came to her funeral. Psalms were sung; the chanting of heartfelt alleluias raised the roofs of the golden temples.

The choirs of young and old in sacred song sang the praises of this woman. There had been no triumph like it since Furius conquered the Gauls, Papirius the Samnites, Scipio the Numantians, or Pompey the people of Pontus. I can hear even now the crowds in the front of the procession, and the multitude of people teeming on behind like a mighty flood. the streets were full, as were the balconies; there were not enough vantage points along the rooftops to accommodate all the people who wanted to catch a glimpse. Rome saw all her people gathered together into one; each person there felt the better for the life of this glorious penitent. No wonder that people were rejoicing in the conversion of this one person when the Angels also were rejoicing in heaven. So I offer you this gift from my aging powers, Fabiola, as a sort of sacrifice offered for the departed. We offer praises to all virgins, widows and matrons, dressed in white vestments, who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes (Revelations 14.4). Happy the reward of those whose whole life is stained by no spot of sin. Let malice depart, let envy be banished. If the father of the household is good, why is our eye evil (Matthew 20.15)? She who fell among

thieves is carried on Christ's shoulder (Luke 10.34). In my father's house there are many mansions (John 14.2). Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more (Romans 5.20). She who was forgiven much has loved much (Luke 7.47).

Life No 25

The Life of St Paula of Rome, widow,

[347 - 404. Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on January 26]

by Jerome, presbyter and divine

(a letter written to Eustochium, Paula's daughter)

Chapter I

If every member of my body were turned into a tongue, resonating with every art the human voice is capable of, I still would not be able to praise sufficiently the virtues of the holy and venerable Paula. She came of a noble family, but was even more noble in her holiness, powerful once because of her wealth, but now famous because of her poverty for Christ's sake. She was of the family of the Gracchi; the Scipios also were her ancestors [Prominent military and political families in Rome from the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC.] ; she was the heir of Paullus whose name she bore [Not the Apostle Paul but the Roman general Paullus who fell in battle in the year 216 BC.] She was a true blood-related descendant of Marcia Papiria, [Paullus' wife.] the mother of Scipio Africanus, but she preferred Bethlehem to Rome, she exchanged the glittering gilded ceilings for a lowly mud hut. Let us not grieve that we have lost such a person, let us rather give thanks that she has lived among us, and indeed is among us still. For all things are alive in God, and whatever or whoever goes back to God is still reckoned to be part of his family.

For as long as she was in the flesh she was absent from the Lord (2 Corinthians 5.6), ever complaining in tearful voice, 'Alas that my pilgrimage is prolonged. I dwell among the inhabitants of Khedar, and my soul is much estranged' (Psalms 120.5). Nor is it to be wondered at that she should complain about living in darkness (for so is the word 'Khedar' to be interpreted), for she in her purity lived in the midst of evil (1 John 5.19). As dark as is the world, so is the brightness of her light; her light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not extinguish it (John 1.5). She was led to cry out all the more eagerly, 'I am a stranger and pilgrim as were all my fathers' (Psalms 39.12), and again, 'I had rather depart and be with Christ' (Philippians 1.23). Whenever she was troubled by the weakness of her body

(which was caused by her incredible abstinence and redoubled fasts), her only response was, 'I subdue my body and bring it into subjection, lest having preached to others I be myself a castaway' (1 Corinthians 9.27), and, 'It is a good thing not to drink wine or eat meat' (Romans 14.21), and, 'I have humbled my soul with fasting' (Psalms 35.13), 'and taken to my bed in weakness' (Psalms 41.3), 'and have been greatly distressed when smitten with grievous wounds' (Psalms 32.4). Whenever she was suffering from pain (which she bore with wonderful patience) she would cast up her eyes to heaven and say 'Who will give me the wings of a dove that I may fly away and be at rest?' (Psalms 55.6)

I call Jesus and his saints and her own guardian angel to witness that nothing of what I am saying is mere ingratiating flattery. Whatever I shall say about her can never do justice to what she deserves. The whole world sings her praises, the priests stand amazed, the choirs of virgins regret her departure, the crowds of monks and poor people weep. Would you like a brief list of her virtues, dear reader? She was poorer than all the poor that she cared for and left behind. She numbers among her friends and family men and women who used to be slaves, but whom she has changed into her brothers and sisters. And she has left us her devoted virgin daughter Eustochium, for whose consolation these words are being written, in a land far distant from her noble family, rich only in faith and grace.

Chapter II

So then let us begin our story. Others may begin at an earlier stage by going back to her cradle and childhood playthings, citing her mother, Blesilla, and her father, Rogatus. Whereas the former owns the Scipios and the Gracchi as forebears, the latter is descended from a family noted among the Greeks for its eminence and wealth right up to the present day. For it is Agamemnon himself whose blood he is said to have shared, he who destroyed Troy after the ten year siege.

But for our part, we shall praise only what is uniquely hers, that which springs from the purity of her own holiness. In the Gospels, when the apostles asked the Lord and Saviour what should they receive who had given up everything for his sake, he said that they would be given a hundredfold in this life and eternal life in the world to come (Matthew 19.27 & Mark 10.30). From which we are to understand that there is nothing praiseworthy in possessing riches, but rather in despising them for Christ's sake, not in piling up worldly

honours, but in counting them as nothing compared to faith in God. And what the Saviour promised to his servants and handmaids has been brought to pass at this present time.

For she who despised the glory of one city has been raised up high in the opinion of the whole world. She hid herself in Bethlehem, but has become the wonder of the whole Roman world and the barbarous lands beyond. Is there any nationality not represented among those who have visited the holy places? Is there anyone in those holy places more admired by people than Paula? Among many bright jewels there is always one more precious that shines more brilliantly than the others. just as the radiance of the sun puts to flight the little brightnesses of the stars and hides them. And so it is that in her humility she outshone the virtues and qualities of everyone else. She became the least of all, that she might become greater than all, for the more she cast herself down, the more she was raised up by Christ. She was hidden and was not hidden. By flying from glory she was given glory. For glory follows virtue as its shadow, and ignoring those who seek it, is given to those who despise it.

But what am I thinking of, neglecting to get on with my story! By over-emphasising one particular point I am not doing justice to the rules of narrative.

Chapter III

Being then of such high parentage, she married Toxotius who was of the Julian family which traces its ancestry to Aeneas. Hence his daughter Eustochium, a virgin for Christ, also bears the name of Julia, just as Toxotius has the name of Julius, a name handed down from the Iulus the great. [Iulus was the son of the legendary Aeneas, a Trojan who escaped from the ruins of Troy and founded a city on the banks of the Tiber, which later became the city of Rome]. I mention this not because the bearing of such a name is of great importance, but rather to show how wonderfully such a name has been proved to be of no importance. Worldly people look up to those occupying positions of privilege, but we praise those who despise them for the sake of the Saviour. It may seem rather strange that we should belittle those who bear such illustrious names and praise those who would rather not have them. Paula has won approval first from her husband, then from her relations, and finally from the whole world, not because of her noble ancestry but because of her chastity and fruitfulness. She bore five children:

Blesilla, at whose death I offered her some comfort when I was at Rome;
Paulina, who left behind her holy and venerable husband Pammachius as the heir not only of her property but also of her way of life, about whose death I have also written a little piece;
Eustochium, who now wears the precious necklace of virginity in the holy places of the Church;
Ruffina, whose early death gave such grief to the caring soul of her mother;
Toxotius, after whom she had no more children, from which you may gather that having satisfied her husband's desire for male offspring, she no longer had any wish to fulfil her conjugal duties.

Chapter IV

After her husband's death her grief was so great that she nearly died herself, but then she gave herself so completely to the service of Christ that it might almost have looked as if she had been glad of his death. For how can I adequately describe how almost all of the riches of that noble and distinguished family were distributed to the poor and needy? How tell of her kind and compassionate generosity to all, and even to those whom she had never seen? What needy person on his deathbed was not wrapped in blankets which she had supplied? What bedridden person was not supported by her gifts? She searched keenly throughout all the city and thought it a loss to herself if there was anyone weak and poor who was supported by anyone other than her. She did all this at the expense of her own children, and when her relations objected replied that she was leaving them a much greater legacy, the mercy of Christ.

It was not long before she found that she could not bear much more of the social round of associating with the noble families of the highest class in this world. She was embarrassed by her own reputation, and sought how to escape from the flattery heaped upon her. At that time an Imperial summons had drawn bishops to Rome from both East and West in order to discuss certain controversies in the church, [There was a synod in Rome in 382 to discuss the views of the heretic Apollinaris, Damasus being pope and Theodosius and Valentinian being Emperors of East and West respectively.] which enabled her to meet certain distinguished bishops of Christ, Paulinus of Antioch, and Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus, or as it is now called, Constantia. Epiphanius indeed was her guest, and although Paulinus was staying with someone else she became as friendly with him as if he were staying with her.

It was partly through her admiration of their virtues that she began to think more and more about leaving her native land. She forgot about her home, her children, her possessions, her position in society; she could think of nothing but going to visit the desert of Antony and Paul, unaccompanied, if possible. When at last the winter was over and the sea was favourable and the bishops were returning to their churches, she longed to go with them. She did not put off going for much longer. She too went down to the harbour, accompanied by her brother and other friends and relations, and, what is more, by her children, all eager to dissuade their loving mother by demonstrating their affection for her. But the sails were set, and the oars drove the ship out into the high seas. The infant Toxotius held out beseeching hands to his mother. Ruffina already of marriageable age tried to suppress her sobbing as she begged her mother to wait at least until she was married. But Paula looked up to heaven dry-eyed, overcoming the love of her children by her love of God. She no longer allowed herself to be a mother but only a handmaid of Christ. Although her emotions were in a turmoil, and it felt as if her whole body was being torn apart, she fought down her grief. Her love of family had been very great; all the more admirable then was her victory, which was apparent to all. There is nothing more cruel than to see children by dire necessity separated from their parents and taken by the hands of the enemy into slavery. But against the laws of nature she endured this kind of separation in the fulness of her faith, indeed it was something that her joyful heart sought after, her love for God putting her love for children into second place. But she did have Eustochium still, who was of one mind with her and accompanied her on her journey. The ship ploughed on, with all those on board looking back to the shore except her. She turned her eyes away from what she could not bear to look at without being tormented. I am quite sure that no one could have loved her children more. Before she set out she had put them in charge of all she possessed, renouncing her inheritance on earth that she might gain an inheritance in heaven.

Chapter V

They put in at the island of Pontia, celebrated as the place where that most famous of women, Flavia Domitilla, had suffered exile under the emperor Domitian, for having confessed to being a Christian. As Paula viewed the small cells in which that lady had spent her long martyrdom, her faith took wings, and she longed more than ever to see Jerusalem and the other holy

places. But the winds were fitful, and progress was slow. She passed between Scylla and Charybdis and entrusted herself at last to the Adriatic Sea and had a calm passage to Methone, where she refreshed her weary body by stretching out her tired limbs along the shore, before sailing past Malea and Cythera, the scattered Cyclades and the straits with numerous lands on every side.

They went past Rhodes and Lycia and came at last to Cyprus, where she fell at the feet of the holy and venerable Epiphanius and stayed with him for ten days. She did not use this time as recreation, as he thought she ought to, but as it turned out, used it for the work of God. For she visited all the famous monasteries on that island, and as far as her means would allow gave alms to the brothers whom the love of that holy man had attracted there from all quarters of the world.

From there it was but a short journey to Seleucia, from where she went up to Antioch where she was entertained for a time by the holy confessor Paulinus. Here, this noble woman, who had once been carried about in a litter by eunuchs, travelled about sitting on an ass, warmed by the ardour of her faith even in the middle of winter. I will say nothing about her travels in Coelo-Syria and Phoenicia (for it has never been my purpose to itemise her complete itinerary), but will mention only such places as are named in the sacred books.

Chapter VI

Leaving behind the Roman colony of Berytus and the ancient city of Sidon, she came to Sareptha, where she worshipped the Lord in Elijah's upper room (1 Kings 17.19). She went on by way of the sands of Tyre, where Paul had once knelt (Acts 21.5), and arrived at Coth, which is now called Ptolemais. From there she went through the plains of Megiddo where Josiah had been slain (2 Kings 23.29) and entered the lands of the Philistines. Here she admired the ruins of Dor, at one time a most powerful city, and by way of contrast, the tower of Strabo, rebuilt by king Herod of Judea and renamed Caesarea in honour of Augustus Caesar. Here she saw the house of Cornelius (Acts 10.1), now turned into a Christian church, and the humble dwelling of Philip and the rooms of his four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21.8-9). She next arrived at Antipatris, a small half-ruined town named by Herod after his father, and Lydda, now known as Diospolis, famous for the healing of Aeneas and the resurrection of Dorcas (Acts 9.32-41).

Life of St Paula Chapter VI (continued), Book 1d

Not far from there is the little village of Arimathæa, the home of Joseph who buried the Lord (Matthew 27.57), and Nob, formerly the city of the priests, where now their slaughtered bodies still rest. Joppa also is quite near here, the port to which Jonah fled (Jonah 1.3), and also (if I may introduce something from the fables of the poets) the place where Andromeda was turned into a rock.

Taking up her journey again, she came to Nicopolis, formerly called Emmaus, where the Lord was known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24.30). The house of Cleopas there has been dedicated as a church by the Lord. From there she went up to both lower and upper Bethoron (2 Chronicles 8.5), cities founded by Solomon, but later destroyed by several devastating wars; to the right she would have looked out over Ajalon and Gibeon (Joshua 9&10), where Joshua the son of Nun fought against five kings and commanded the sun and the moon to stand still, and where he ordered that the Gibeonites should be hewers of wood and drawers of water as punishment for their treachery. At Gibeon also, now completely ruined, she stayed a while, meditating on the sin of the killing of the concubine, and how she was cut in pieces, and how three hundred men of the tribe of Benjamin were saved (Judges 19&20), thus ensuring that the apostle Paul might be called a Benjamite (Romans 11.1)

.Chapter VII

But let us move on. Leaving on the left the shrine of Helen, queen of the Adiabene, who sent corn to the people in the time of famine, she arrived at Jerusalem, that city of three names: Jebus, Salem and Jerusalem, rebuilt from its dust and ashes by Aelius Hadrianus and renamed Aelia. [Jerusalem was razed to the ground by the Roman army in the year 70, and rebuilt by Aelius Hadrianus in 131.] The proconsul of Palestine knew her famous family, and ordered his stewards to prepare his residence for her, but she preferred a humble little cell. She went round visiting all the holy places with such zeal and devotion that she could hardly have been persuaded to leave any of them if it had not been for her desire to visit the others. She prostrated herself in front of the cross, and adored it as if she could really see the Lord hanging

there. She went into the sepulchre and kissed the stone of the resurrection which the Angel had rolled away from the door of the tomb. And like a thirsty person seeking water, she laid her mouth on the place where the Lord's body had lain. All Jerusalem can testify to the tears she shed there, the sighs she uttered, the grief which consumed her.

Coming out from there she ascended Mount Sion, a name which signifies either "citadel" or "watchtower". David captured this city and built it up. Of this city it is written, 'Woe, woe to the city of Ariel (that is, the lion of God), the most strong city, which David besieged' (Isaiah 29.1). And on the subject of its rebuilding, 'Her foundations are upon the holy hills; the Lord has loved the gates of Sion above all the tents of Jacob' (Psalms 87.1-2). Not those gates which we see today reduced to dust and ashes, but the gates against which Hell shall not prevail, and into which enter the hosts of those who believe in Christ (Matthew 16.18). She was shown the pillar, stained with the blood of the Lord, to which he was bound before being whipped. It now supports the doorway of a church. She was shown the place where the holy Spirit came down upon the souls of a hundred and twenty believers (Acts 1.15 & 2.3), fulfilling the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2.28).

As far as her means would allow she distributed money to the poor and her fellow servants, before going on towards Bethlehem. On the right hand side of her route she stopped at Rachel's tomb. Here, as she lay dying, Rachel wished to call her son Benoni, that is, "son of my pain", but his father in a spirit of prophecy called him Benjamin, that is, "son of my right hand" (Genesis 35.18). She went into the Saviour's cave, and saw the Virgin's sacred inn and the stable where the ox knew his owner, and the ass his master's crib (Isaiah 1.3), in fulfilment also of the saying of that same prophet, 'Blessed is he who sows upon the waters, where the ox and the ass do tread' (Isaiah 32.20). I have heard her say very emphatically that as she looked on these places with the eye of faith she could see the infant wrapped in rags crying in the manger (Luke 27), the Magi worshipping as the star shone overhead (Matthew 2.11), the virgin carefully nursing the child, the shepherds coming by night to worship the word made flesh (Luke 2.15). Even then those shepherds were declaring the beginning of John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was made flesh' (John 1). She also saw the savagery of Herod in the slaughter of the innocents (Matthew 2.16), as Joseph and Mary fled into Egypt. Mingling joy with her tears, she proclaimed:

Chapter VIII

"Hail, Bethlehem, 'house of bread', in which was brought forth that bread which came down from heaven (John 6.33). Hail, Ephrata, land of fruitfulness and plenty. Your fruit is the Lord himself. As the prophet Micah said, 'You, O Bethlehem, house of Ephrata, are not the least among the thousands of Judah. For out of you shall come a ruler in Israel whose goings forth have been from the beginning, and from everlasting days. Therefore you will give them up until the time when she will bring forth. And when she has brought forth, the remainder of the brethren shall be turned back to the sons of Israel' (Micah 5.2-3). And again, 'In you a ruler has been born, begotten before the daystar' (Psalms 110.3, Vulgate), born of the father before all ages. And the springs of the tribe of David continued in you until the virgin brought forth, and the remnant who believed in Christ turned back to the children of Israel and freely proclaimed, 'It was right to preach the word of God to you first, but since you rejected it and shown yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we have turned to the Gentiles' (Acts 13.46).

"For the Lord has said, 'I am not come except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15.24). At that time the words of Jacob also were fulfilled, 'A prince shall not be lacking in Judah, nor a leader born of his loins, until he shall come for whom it has been prepared, and he it is for whom the Gentiles wait' (Genesis 40.10). Truly did David swear, truly make a vow: 'I shall not go up into the tabernacle of my house or go into my bed, I shall not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, or rest to the temples of my head, until I search out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob' (Psalms 132.3-5). And immediately with the eyes of prophecy he spoke of the consummation of his desires, foretelling the coming of him whom we believe now to have come: 'Behold we heard of him in Ephrata and found it in the woods' (ibid 6). The Hebrew word, *vau*, used here, as I learn from your lessons, [Jerome had taught her Hebrew] does not mean her, that is, Mary the mother of the Lord, but him. Therefore he speaks confidently, 'We shall go up into his tabernacle, we shall worship in the place where his feet have rested' (ibid.7),

"And I, miserable sinner that I am, have been found worthy to kiss the manger in which the infant Lord lay, to pray in the cave where the virgin was and brought forth the Lord. 'Here is my rest, for it is the land of the Lord. Here shall I dwell, for it is the choice of the Saviour (ibid. 14). I have prepared a lamp for my Christ' (ibid 17, Vulgate). 'My soul shall live for him and my seed

shall serve him' (Psalms 22.30)."

Chapter IX

At a short distance from here she then went to the tower of Ader, that is, "of the flock", where Jacob pastured his sheep (Genesis 35.21), and the shepherds at night were found worthy to hear 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to people of good will' (Luke 2.14). As they went about the task of keeping their sheep it was given to them to find the Lamb of God, with the pure white fleece which was filled with the dew of heaven while the earth round about remained dry (Judges 6.38), and whose blood takes away the sin of the world, and stayed the hand of the exterminator in Egypt when smeared on the doorposts (Exodus 12.23).

With eager steps she then set out on the old road which leads to Gaza, where she was able to meditate silently on the power and resources of God, whereby the Ethiopian eunuch, as a forerunner of the people of the Gentiles, changed his allegiance, and from reading the old Testament discovered the wellsprings of the Gospel (Acts 8 27-38). Moving off to the right she came past Bethsur to Escol, which means "cluster of grapes". It was from here that the spies brought back a wonderfully large cluster of grapes as proof of the fertility of the land (Numbers 13.24-26), and as a symbol of him who said, 'I have trodden the winepress alone and there is none with me' (Isaiah 63.3). Not long after this she came to the home of Sarah and saw the birthplace of Isaac and what was left of Abraham's oak, under which he saw the day of Christ and was glad (John 8.56). Going on from there she went to Hebron, formerly Kiriath-arba, or the City of the Four Men, that is, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the great Adam, whom the Hebrews suppose (from the book of Joshua son of Nun) to be buried there (Joshua 14.15). [The Vulgate here has "Adam", which in Hebrew is the same word as "man", which is what AV has in this place] There are others, however, who think the fourth man to be Caleb, and he is commemorated by a monument at one side.

After seeing these places she was unwilling to go on to Kirjath-Sepher (which means "city of letters") for, despising the letter that kills, she had found the spirit that gives life. She much preferred to admire the upper and lower springs which Othniel the son of Kenaz the son of Jephona took possession of, to adjoin the southern land with no water (Judges 1.13-15). By these means he watered the previously dry fields of the old covenant, typifying the redemption from sin to be found in the waters of Baptism.

Next day soon after sunrise she stood on the brow of Caphar Baruca (which means "house of blessing"), the place where Abraham bargained with the Lord (Genesis 18.23-33). Spread out before her was the desert land which had once been Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, and she beheld the balsam vines of Engeddi and Segor, which is the place of the heifer of three years old (Isaiah 15.5). It was formerly called Baia, which translates into Syrian as Zoar, that is, "little". She called to mind the cave in which Lot found refuge, and with tears in her eyes warned the virgins who were with her against wine which gives rise to lust, from which arose the Moabites and Ammonites (Genesis 19.30-38).

Chapter X

I linger longer in this land of the noonday, where the bride found her bridegroom resting (Song of Songs 1.7), and where Joseph drank with his brothers (Genesis 43.34). [Rosweyde gives this Biblical reference in the margin, but the drinking session in Genesis 43 takes place in Joseph's house in Egypt. Some confusion here on Jerome's part!] Let us return to Jerusalem by way of Tekoa, the home of Amos (Amos 1.1), and gaze upon the glittering light of the Mount of Olives, where the Saviour ascended to the Father (Acts 1.9). Here each year a red heifer was sacrificed to the Lord and its ashes used to purify the people of Israel. According to Ezekiel it is also where the Cherubim flew up out of the temple and founded the Church of the Lord (Ezekiel 10.18-19). After going in to the tomb of Lazarus she saw the welcoming house of Mary and Martha, and also Bethphage, "the house of the priestly jaws". Here it was that a lusty colt, signifying the Gentiles, accepted the bridle of the Lord, and covered with the garments of the apostle, offered its back for him to sit on.

Taking up her journey she went down to Jericho, turning over in her mind the story of the wounded man in the Gospels, the hardness of heart of the priest and the Levite who passed him by, and the compassion of the Samaritan who put him, half-dead, on his own donkey and carried him off to the safety of the Church. She visited also Adomin, which means "The Place of Blood", so called because of all the blood shed there in the frequent attacks from robbers. She saw also Zachaeus' sycamore tree (Luke 19.2-10), signifying the good work of repentance, whereby he trod underfoot his grievous sins of bloodshed and rapine, and saw the most high Lord from a place on high. And at the side of the road there was the place where the two blind men received their sight

(Matthew 20.30-34), foretelling the two peoples who would believe in him.
[i.e. Jews and Gentiles]

Then entering Jericho she saw the city which Hiel founded in his firstborn, Abiram, and whose gates he set up in his younger son, Segub (Joshua 6.26 & 1 Kings 16.34). She looked on the fortresses of Gilgal and the hill of foreskins (Joshua 5.3), and the mystery of the second circumcision (Romans 2.28-29). There also were the twelve stones carried up out of the riverbed of the Jordan (Joshua 4. 3&20), which became symbols of the foundation stones of the twelve apostles (Revelations 21.14). She also saw the spring which had formerly been bitter and tainted, the symbol of the old law, which Elisha had seasoned with his wisdom and made sweet and fruitful (2 Kings 2.21). The night had not quite passed when she approached the Jordan with burning eagerness. At sunrise she reflected on the rising of the Sun of righteousness, and how the priests had walked on dry land in the midst of the raging torrent. (Joshua 3.13-17). She thought also of how Elijah and Elisha commanded the waters to divide in two (2 Kings 2.8) to make a pathway for them, and how the Lord by his Baptism purified the polluted waters of the flood, stained by the death of the whole human race.

Chapter XI

It would be tedious if I were to tell of the valley of Achor, (which means "trouble"), and the 'trouble and crowds' by which theft and avarice were condemned (Joshua 7.11-26), or of Bethel, "the House of God", where Jacob, poor and naked, slept upon the naked earth with a stone for a pillow (Genesis 28.11). That is the stone which is described in Zechariah as having seven eyes (Zechariah 2.9), and in Isaiah as a corner stone (Isaiah 28.16). And this is where Jacob saw a ladder stretching up to heaven, with our Lord standing above it, reaching out his hand to those who were going up, while the wicked were falling down to the depths. She venerated also the two sepulchres in Mt Ephraim, directly opposite one another, the one being the tomb of Joshua the son of Nun, and the other of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. The one was in Timnath-Serah, on the north side of the hill of Gaash (Joshua 24.30), and the other in Gabaath which belonged to Phineas, Eleazar's son. She was quite surprised to find that he who had had the responsibility of dividing up the land had chosen for himself a portion which was mountainous and rocky.

What shall I say about Silo, where an overturned altar is still on view today, commemorating how the tribe of Benjamin anticipated the rape of the Sabine

women by Romulus of Rome? (Judges 21.21). Passing by Sichem (not Sichar, as many wrongly say), which is now called Neapolis, she entered the church built on the side of Mt Gerizim around the well where the Lord was sitting, feeling hungry and thirsty, and was refreshed by the faith of the Samaritan woman (John 4.5-30). She had rejected five husbands, by whom are represented the five books of Moses, and also the sixth who was not her husband, representing the heretical sect of Dositheos, [The founder of a Samaritan sect something like the Essenes] in order to find the true Messiah and true Saviour.

Going on from there she saw the tombs of the twelve patriarchs, and Samaria, which Herod renamed Augusta, or in Greek Sebaste, in honour of Augustus. Here are buried the prophets Elisha and Obadiah, and John the Baptist (than whom there has been none greater born of woman). And here she saw many strange marvels which almost frightened her out of her wits. For she saw demons screaming under various tortures in front of the tombs of the saints, howling like wolves, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like serpents, bellowing like bulls. They twisted their heads backwards till they touched the ground; there were females hanging upside down with their skirts around their faces. She felt great pity for them all and shed tears over each one, begging Christ to have mercy on them. In spite of her weakness she clambered up the mountain to the two caves where Obadiah the prophet hid a hundred prophets during a time of famine and persecution, and fed them on bread and water (1 Kings 18.4).

Her journey then took her quickly to Nazareth, the home village of the Lord, and Cana and Capharnaum, famous for their miracles. She saw Lake Tiberias, sacred because the Lord sailed over it, and the desert where many thousands of people were fed from a few loaves, and twelve baskets representing the tribes of Israel were filled with the fragments left over (John 6.13). She gazed at Mt Thabor, where the Lord was transfigured (Matthew 17.1-9), and saw Mt Hermon in the distance above the wide plains of Galilee where Sisera and his army were laid low by Barak (Judges 4.16). Here the river Kishon divided the land into two parts. Quite near at hand was the city of Naim, where the widow's son was brought back to life (Luke 7.11-16). I would not have the time, let alone the words, to describe all the places through which this venerable Paula wandered with her incredible faith.

Chapter XII

I will pass on to Egypt, pausing a little on the way between Succoth and the spring of water which Samson obtained from the hollow of the donkey's jawbone (Judges 15.19). Here I shall moisten my dry lips and go on, refreshed, to see Morasthim, formerly the tomb of the prophet Micah and now a church. Leaving aside the Hittites and Gittites, Mareshah, Edom and Lachish, I shall travel into the vast expanses of the desert through shifting sands swallowing up the traveller's tracks, until I arrive at the river Sior (that is, "turbulent") in Egypt, where I shall travel through the five cities where the language of Canaan is spoken (Isaiah 19.18), Goshen and the plains of Taphneus where God did marvellous things, the city of No which afterwards became Alexandria, and Nitria, where the pure nitre of the virtues daily washes away the grime of many.

As she came in sight of it, she was met by the holy and venerable bishop and confessor, Isidore, together with a numberless crowd of monks, among whom were many of both the priestly and Levitical class, [i.e. presbyters and deacons] to whom she gave due respect. She gave glory to God at the sight of them, while confessing that she was quite unworthy of being given such honour. What can I tell you about Macarius, Arsenius and Serapion, [Famous names among the Fathers of the desert] and all the other pillars of Christ? Was there one of them whose cell she did not visit, or at whose feet she did not worship? She believed that she saw Christ in each one of them, and she rejoiced that whatever gift she was able to give them she was giving to Christ himself.

What marvellous zeal! What endurance, scarcely credible in a woman! Forgetful of her sex and the weakness of her body, she longed to dwell, along with the virgins who were her companions, among these thousands of monks. They all seemed willing to accept her, and perhaps she might have carried this desire into effect, had not the attraction of the holy places been greater. Escaping from the excessive heat she sailed from Pelusium to Maioma with the speed of a bird. Not much later she took up her permanent abode in Bethlehem, and lived for three years in a tiny little house until such time as she was able to build a monastery, and cells, and guesthouses for the many pilgrims who came seeking shelter by the side of the road where Mary and Joseph found no shelter.

Chapter XIII

Having now finished describing the journeys which she made in the company

of her daughter and many other virgins, I am free to describe her own special virtues, and in doing so, as God is my judge and witness, I solemnly declare that I will exaggerate nothing, nor pile on excessive praise. I will rather exercise restraint, lest I should be thought to make claims which no one could believe. I will give no occasion to my detractors and backbiters to accuse me of dressing her up in fine feathers like Aesop's crow.

Humility, the greatest of Christian virtues was the one she sought after most eagerly. If you had never seen her before, and you had managed to see her because of her famous name, you would never have believed who she was, but would rather have thought she was the lowest type of servant girl. If you saw her in the midst of her community of virgins, you would think she was the least distinguished in clothing, in speech, in demeanour, in the way she walked.

From the time that her husband died to the day of her death she never took food in the company of any man, even if she knew he were a holy man, not even if he were the most celebrated of bishops. Only if she were dangerously ill would she consent to take a bath. Even when suffering from a severe fever she never slept on a soft mattress for her bed, but rested upon goatskins laid upon the unyielding earth, that is, if you can call it rest, when she practised continuous prayer day and night, in fulfilment of the psalm, 'Every night I wash my bed and pour out my tears upon my resting place' (Psalms 6.6). You would have thought her tears were a sort of fountain; she wept for her trivial sins as if she had been guilty of some terrible crime. We often urged her to have pity on her eyes and use them rather for reading the gospel.

"But it is right for my face to be disfigured," she would reply, "to make up for all the times I painted it with rouge and white lead and antimony. It is right to afflict my body, for it had once been used to enjoying all sorts of pleasant sensations. But now I am making up for my former years of raucous laughter by perpetual weeping, and I have exchanged the softness of linen and expensive silks for the roughness of a hair shirt. Where once I sought how to please my husband and the world, I now desire only to please Christ."

Chapter XIV

It would be superfluous for me to draw attention to her chastity, among such a great list of her virtues, even if I had wanted to, for even when she was still living in the world she was an outstanding example to all the matrons of Rome. She so conducted herself that even the most inveterate of gossips could

never find anything evil to say about her. There was no one more kind-hearted than she, no one more easy with the lower classes. She did not court the favour of the powerful, nor yet did she shun those who were proud, or eager to flaunt their own little bit of glory. She gave aid to the poor, she exhorted the rich to give alms. Her liberality was the only extravagant thing about her. She often preferred to take out a loan and pay interest on it, rather than refuse a request for help.

Chapter XIV (continued), Life of St Paula Book 1d

Here I must confess my mistake, for I reproved her when I saw her overdoing her generosity. I quoted the Apostle to her: 'Don't let your generosity to others result in being overburdened yourself. Let there be equality between you, so that your abundance meets their need, and their abundance meets your need' (2 Corinthians 8.14). And I also mentioned what the Saviour says in the Gospel: 'If you have two coats, give one of them to him who has none' (Luke 3.11). I told her that she should be a bit more careful, because if she kept on being so liberal there would come a time when she would have nothing left to give. However much more I kept on telling her, she simply turned aside all my reproofs with gentleness and winning words, calling God as witness that it was in his name that she was doing everything, and that it was her wish to die a beggar, and to leave not so much as a single nummus to her daughter, and that she should be buried in a shroud provided by somebody else.

"If I have to beg," she finished up by saying, "I shall find many who will be prepared to help me, but if this beggar gets nothing from me, when I could give him something if I borrowed from somebody else, and then he dies, from whom will his soul be required?"

I wanted her to be a bit more circumspect about her family properties, but her faith was so ardent, so totally given to the Saviour, that poor in spirit she followed the Lord in his poverty, giving back to him what she had received, so that she too became poor for his sake. She obtained what she wanted, for she left her daughter with huge debts by which she is still burdened, trusting not in her own resources but in the mercy of Christ for them to be redeemed.

Chapter XV

Many matrons have the habit of paying their own publicity agents well, and are very generous to a few people while ignoring the needs of the many. Paula was entirely free of that vice. She dispensed her alms as she found necessary for each individual person, not to provide anyone with luxury, but simply to meet their needs. No poor person was turned away empty-handed. She managed this not because of her opulence but because of the prudent way she shared it out. She constantly had on her lips, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy' (Matthew 5.7), and 'Just as water extinguishes fire, so almsgiving extinguishes sin' (Ecclesiasticus 3.33), and 'Make for yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness so that they might receive you into everlasting mansions' (Luke 16.9), and the warning given to king Nebuchadnezzar by Daniel 'Redeem your sins by almsgiving' (Daniel 4.27). She had no desire to invest her money in stones, destined to perish along with the earth and the world, but in living stones from which the city of the great king is built upon earth, as described in the Apocalypse of John under the symbols of sapphires, emeralds, jaspers and other jewels (Apocalypse 21.19). But, indeed, she shares these virtues with many others, and the devil knows that this is not where the greatest of virtues is to be found. For in the book of Job, after he has lost his belongings, his house and his children, the devil says to God, 'Skin for skin, all that a man has he will give for his life, but stretch forth your hand and touch his bones and his flesh, and then see if he will bless you to your face' (Job 2.4-5). We know of many people who give alms, but have not given themselves. They stretch out their hand to the poor but are in thrall to the desires of the flesh. They look clean on the outside, but inside there is nothing but dead men's bones (Matthew 23.27).

Paula was not like that. Her continence was above measure. Her body was weakened by excessive fasting and hard work. She took hardly any oil with her food, except on feast days, and from that one fact you may judge what she thought of wine and sauces, fish and milk, and honey and eggs and all the other things which are pleasant to the palate. Some people who eat these things compliment themselves on at least taking them quite frugally, and have no qualms about filling their stomachs with them, as long as they preserve their chastity.

Chapter XVI

But just as lightning strikes the highest mountains, so envy seeks to strike at virtue. It is not surprising if human beings are attacked by envy when the Lord

himself was crucified by the zeal of the Pharisees, and all the saints along with him. There was a serpent even in Paradise, (Genesis 3.19), whose envy brought death into the world (Wisdom 2.24). So it was that the Lord stirred up a 'Hadad the Edomite' against Paula, [He was an enemy of Solomon (1 Kings 11.14). Jerome does not tell us who, or what, Paula's enemy was] to batter her lest she get above herself, and warn her by means of this thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12.7) that the greatness of her virtues must not make her so conceited as to believe that she was above the vices of other women. I always used to say it was best to run away from malice and retreat in the face of rage, which is what Jacob did with Esau (Genesis 21.10), and David with that most persistent of enemies, Saul (1 Samuel 27). The former fled to Mesopotamia, the latter to the Philistines, preferring to surrender to enemies rather than to live with the vindictive.

"That would be all very well," she replied, "if the devil did not wage war against the servants and handmaids of Christ everywhere, and was not there before them whatever land they might flee to. Besides, I am kept here by my love of the holy places. I would not be able to find another Bethlehem anywhere else on earth. Why should I not be able to overcome malice by patience, break down my pride by humility and by offering the other cheek to anyone who hits me (Matthew 5.39)? As the Apostle Paul says, "Overcome evil with good" (Romans 12.21). Didn't the apostles rejoice when they suffered persecution for Christ's sake (Acts 5.41)? Didn't the Saviour himself humble himself, taking the form of a servant, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, that by his passion he might save us (Philippians 2.7-8)? If Job had not striven in the battle and won, he would not have been given the crown of righteousness, nor heard the Lord say, 'Do you think I should have spoken differently to you, so that you might have appeared to be in the right?' (Job 40.8). In the Gospel it is those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake that are said to be blessed (Matthew 5.10). May my conscience always be clear, so long as it is not because of my sins that I am suffering. The troubles of this world are sure grounds for obtaining a reward."

Chapter XVII

When the devil was being more than usually impertinent and provoking her to a real quarrel, she sang from the Psalter, 'When the sinners attacked me I was dumb, refraining even from good words' (Psalms 39.2), and 'I became even as a deaf man and heard nothing, and as a dumb man I did not open my mouth,

for I was like a man that does not hear, and in whose mouth are no reproofs' (Psalms 38.13-14). In temptations she turned over in her mind the words from Deuteronomy, 'The Lord your God is testing you, to see whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul' (Deuteronomy 13.3). In times of difficulty and sorrow she thought of the words of Isaiah, 'From the time you are weaned and taken from your mother's breast, you may expect nothing but trouble upon trouble, but also hope upon hope. Yet a little while shall these things be, because of lying lips and a deceitful tongue.' (Isaiah 28.9).

She found comfort in these words of Scripture, taking 'weaned' to mean 'arrived at mature age'. She understood that those who endured trouble upon trouble were those who had earned the right to hope upon hope, knowing that 'trouble gives rise to patience, and patience to trial, and trial to hope, and hope is not disappointed' (Romans 5.3-5), and 'What if our outer man perish? Our inner man is renewed. And the trifling and short-lived troubles of the present time are working towards an enormous glory for you who do not pin your hopes on things that are visible, but on the things which are not visible. For the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal' (2 Corinthians 4.16-18).

"The time cannot long be delayed for the help of the Lord to be present among us," she would say, "even when to our human impatience it seems tardy. For 'In an acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I came to your aid' (Isaiah 49.8). The lying lips and tongues of the wicked are not to be feared, for we rejoice in the help of the Lord. It is to him we must listen, warning us through the Prophet, 'Do not be afraid of the hostility of the people; do not let their blasphemies instil fear. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall devour them like wool' (Isaiah 51.8), and, 'In patience you shall possess your souls' (Luke 21.19), and, 'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us' (Romans 8.16). We should endure tribulation after tribulation, and be patient in everything that happens to us, for 'The patient man is of great understanding, but the timid and weak-minded man displays the height of folly' (Proverbs 14.29)."

When weary and weighed down with ill-health, she would say: 'When I am weak, then am I strong' (2 Corinthians 12.10), and 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Corinthians 4.4), until 'this mortality shall take on immortality, and this corruptible flesh shall take on incorruption' (1

Corinthians 15.53), and 'Inasmuch as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also shall his consolation' (2 Corinthians 1.7). In sorrow she used to sing, 'Why so cast down, O my soul, and why so troubled? Hope in God and put your trust in him, for he is the help of my countenance and my God' (Psalms 42.5). If she was in any kind of danger she would say, 'He who would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, for he who would save his soul shall lose it, and he who would lose his soul for my sake shall save it' (Luke 9.23-24).

When she was told that her family funds were seriously depleted, and her patrimony in ruins, she said 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matthew 16.26), and, 'Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. As the Lord pleases, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1.21), and, 'Love not the world nor the things of this world, for all that is of this world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world. And the world passes away and the lust thereof' (1 John 2.15-16). I know that when she received letters about her children's illnesses, especially those of Toxotius whom she loved above all, she first of all said with admirable self-control 'I was troubled but said nothing' (Psalms 77.4), and then burst out with 'He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10.37). And she prayed to the Lord, saying, 'Preserve, O lord, the children of those appointed to die, who die daily in their own bodies for your sake' (Psalms 79.11).

Chapter XVIII

I have been told of a certain gossip-monger (that most dangerous specimen of the human race) who under the pretence of being kind told her that there were certain people who thought that because of her excessive zeal she must be mad, and that she should have her head seen to. Her reply was, 'We have become a spectacle to the world, and to Angels, and to the human race' (1 Corinthians 4.9), and, 'We have become fools for Christ, but the foolishness of God is wiser than men' (1 Corinthians 1.25). Hence the Saviour says to the Father, 'You know my foolishness' (Psalms 69.5), and 'I am become an object of wonder to many people, but you are my strong helper' (Psalms 71.7), and, 'I am become as it were a beast of burden before you, but I am always with you' (Psalms 73.22-23). In the Gospels we learn that even his friends wanted to bind him as being someone of a disturbed mind (Mark 3.21), saying he had a

demon and was a Samaritan (John 8.48), and, 'He casts out demons in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of demons' (Matthew 12.24).

But she took heed of the exhortation of the Apostle, 'This is what we rejoice in, the witness of our own conscience, in holiness and sincerity, and in the grace of God which upholds us in this world' (2 Corinthians 1.12). And she listened to what the Lord said to the disciples, 'Therefore the world has hated you, because you are not of this world. If you were of this world, the world would love you as its own' (John 15.19). And she spoke to the Lord in the words of the psalm: 'You know the secrets of my heart (Psalms 44.21); all this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten you or acted wickedly against your covenant or turned our hearts away from you', and, 'For your sake are we killed all the day long, we have become as sheep for the slaughter, but you O Lord are my helper, I shall not fear what men can do to me' (Psalms 118.6). She read also the words of Solomon, 'My son, trust in the Lord and he will be your strength, and you shall fear no one but him' (Proverbs 7.2).

With these texts and many others she clothed herself in the armour of God against all adversities, and especially against the envy of those who denigrated her. She suffered insults patiently, and soothed the fury of those who raged against her. To the last day of her life these two things were conspicuous, her own patience, and the malice of others towards her. Jealousy gnaws away at the person who practises it, and turns its own fury in upon itself.

Chapter XIX

I shall now treat of the order of her monastery and of how she turned abstinence of those holy souls to her own profit. What she sowed in the flesh she reaped in the spirit, for earthly gifts she received in exchange spiritual gifts, she gave up fleeting pleasures and gained eternity. She gave the governance of the men's monastery into the hands of the men themselves, then gathered together a number of virgins from different provinces, some of them noble, some middle class, and some from the lowest class. She divided them into three companies or monasteries, and although they worked and dined separately, they all joined together for psalms and prayers.

After the singing of the Alleluia (the sign for them to come together), no one was allowed to stay behind. She was always first, or at least among the first, and then she would wait until the others had all arrived. She encouraged them to work conscientiously not through fear but by her modesty and example.

They sang the psalter according to the rule in the morning, the third hour, the

sixth, the ninth, at vespers, and in the middle of the night. The sisters had to know the psalms thoroughly, and during the rest of the day they had to learn some portion of the Scriptures.

On Sundays they went to the church near where they lived, each company proceeding in a line behind their mother superior. They went back in the same way, after which they would devote themselves to their allotted duties, and make garments either for themselves or for others. Anyone who was noble was not allowed to bring with them anyone from their household, lest they start remembering all the things they used to do, and start scratching at the thoughts of their former undisciplined childish waywardness, keeping it alive by constantly talking about it.

They all wore the same kind of dress. Linen was not used except for drying the hands. They were separated so strictly from men that she would not even allow eunuchs to come near them, to avoid giving occasion to the scandalous tongues that love to carp in order to draw attention away from their own misdoings.

She had various means of correcting people who came late for the psalms, or were slack in their work. If a sister was a bit temperamental she was gentle with her, but if she was fairly placid, her rebukes were quite firm. In this way she imitated the Apostle who said, 'What would you? Shall I visit you with a rod, or shall it be with gentleness and kindness?' (1 Corinthians 4.21). None was allowed to possess anything except food and clothing, in obedience to Paul who said, 'Having food and clothing, therewith be content' (1 Timothy 6.8). If they were to get into the habit of possessing more than that it could give rise to the vice of avarice, which is never satisfied with what it has got. The more one has the more one wants, and it is the same for both rich and poor. If any were quarrelling among themselves she reconciled them by her persuasive counselling. She disciplined the unruly desires of the flesh among the younger ones by doubling their fasts, preferring that their stomachs should suffer rather than their souls.

If she noticed anyone taking too much trouble about their appearance, she would frown disapprovingly and tell them that too much care over cleanliness of body and dress argued a certain uncleanness of soul. Bawdy and improper words should never soil a virgin's lips. They are the sign of a lascivious mind, and it is through the outer man that the vices of the inner man are made clear. Anyone wordy and garrulous, or provocative, or forever stirring up trouble, would be reproved for quite a few times, but if she failed to mend her ways

she would be put in the lowest place, outside the company of the other sisters altogether. She would be made to pray at the doorway of the refectory, and to take her food separately from the others, in the hope that where verbal correction had failed, shame might succeed.

Theft was regarded as something almost sacrilegious. Among worldly people it may be regarded as something not very serious or nothing to worry about, here in the monastery it was thought to be the most grave sort of offence.

How can I adequately describe her considerate and painstaking care for the sick, whom she nursed with wonderfully whole-hearted attention to detail? It was only when other people were sick that she showed any sign of wholesale relaxation of the rules - she even allowed the sick to eat meat! - but if she herself was ill she allowed herself no indulgence whatsoever. This was one area where there was no possibility of equal treatment for all; to herself she showed no mercy, clemency was reserved for others.

No young woman, however healthy and lively, would have fasted as much as she did, with her broken down and decrepit old body. I can testify that she was absolutely unyielding in this respect; she would not spare herself and would not listen to anyone advising her otherwise.

I will tell you about something which I was involved in. In the debilitating heat of one July she fell ill with a burning fever. We almost despaired of her life, but by the mercy of God she rallied a little, and the doctor advised that she should drink a little wine to refresh her body, warning her that to continue drinking water might make her dropsical. I secretly begged the blessed pope Epiphanius to urge her, compel her even, to drink the wine, but she was so discerning and clever that she immediately saw through what he was saying, and with a sly smile realised that the advice he was giving her was not his but mine. This blessed bishop spent quite a long time with her, but when he came out and I asked him how he had got on, his reply was, "Old man though I am, she almost persuaded me that I should never drink wine"!

I tell you all this not because I approve of anyone taking unreasonable burdens upon themselves beyond their strength, for does not Scripture warn us not to burden ourselves above our power (Ecclesiasticus 13.2)? I simply want to show how single-minded she was in her ardour of spirit and faithfulness of soul. She was forever singing, 'My soul thirsts for you, my flesh also in every possible way' (Psalms 63.1).

It is always difficult to avoid going to extremes. The philosophers are quite right to say that 'virtue lies in the mean, it is excess which constitutes vice'. We could put this more succinctly by saying, 'Nothing to excess'. But she was unyielding in her contempt for food, and at the same time exceedingly shaken by grief at any deaths of anyone she knew, especially her children. Indeed, in the deaths of her husband as well as her children she was in danger of dying from grief herself. She would sign her mouth and breast with the cross, in an attempt to alleviate a mother's distress, but she would still be overcome with emotion; however great her faith, her parental yearning was stronger. It was a physical thing which she could not banish, even though her faith remain firm. Once she had let this depression take hold of her, it went on for such a long time that her life seemed to be in danger and we were very concerned about her. And she found pleasure in saying over and over again, 'Wretch that I am! Who shall liberate me from the body of this death?' (Romans 7.24).

You will probably say, dear reader, that I have now changed my praise for criticism. But I call Jesus to witness, whom she served and whom I desire to serve, that I am in no way telling things other than the way they were. I am simply writing as a Christian man about a Christian woman. I am simply telling you the truth. I am writing a history not a panegyric, though what are faults in her might well seem to be virtues in anyone else. I simply speak of her faults as I saw them, and as all of us, her brothers and sisters lovingly saw them. We love her still, and lament her loss.

Chapter XXI

And so she had finished her course, she has kept the faith and now enjoys the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4.7-8), having followed the Lamb whithersoever he went (Revelations 14.4). Her thirst has been satisfied, and she sings with joy, 'As we heard, so have we seen, in the city of the power of the Lord, in the city of our God' (Psalms 48.8). What a blessed exchange! - she who wept now laughs for ever. Once she looked down on broken cisterns, but now she has found the fountain of life (Jeremiah 2.13). She used to wear a hair shirt, but now she is clothed in white garments, and sings, 'You have put off my sackcloth and girded me with joy' (Psalms 30.11). She ate ashes as it were bread and mingled her tears with her weeping (Psalms 102.9), saying, 'My tears have been my meat, day and night' (Psalms 42.3), but now she eats the bread of Angels for ever, and sings, 'O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!' (Psalms 34.8), and, 'My heart is bursting forth with the word of

blessedness. I tell of my works to the king' (Psalms 45.1). And the words of Isaiah, or rather the words of the Lord through the mouth of Isaiah, are fulfilled in her: 'Behold, those who serve me shall eat, but you will be hungry, they shall drink, but you will be thirsty, they shall rejoice, but you will be cast down. Behold those who serve me shall shout aloud for joy, but you shall cry out in the sorrow of your hearts, and howl for your sadness of spirit' (Isaiah 65.13-14).

Life of St Paula , (continued), Book 1d
(Also St Marcella further down this page)

Chapter XXII

I must briefly mention the manner in which she fled from the broken cisterns, enabling her to find the fountain of the Lord (Jeremiah 2.13) and sing, 'Like as the hart desires the water-brooks, so longs my soul after you, O God. When shall I come to appear before the face of God?' (Psalms 42.1-2). The heretics were the polluted cisterns she avoided; she held them to be no better than the heathen. There was a certain cunning knave, very learned and clever in his own estimation, who without my knowledge was putting certain questions to her.

"What sins has an infant committed, that he needs to be rescued from the devil? In the resurrection what age shall we be? If we are to be of the same age as that at which we die, there will be a need for nursemaids. But if we will be of a different age, that would not be a resurrection of the dead, but a transformation into somebody different Will there still be different sexes, male and female, or not? If yes, it follows there would have to be marriage, and intercourse, and childbearing. If not, then we would be beings without any sexual distinction, and so the body that arose from the dead would not be the same body. 'The earthly tabernacle weighs down the mind that thinks about many matters' (Wisdom 9.15), but in heaven we shall be unsubstantial and spiritual, as the Apostle says, 'It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body' (2 Corinthians 15.44)."

He was trying to prove, out of all this, that rational creatures, because of some ancient vices and sins, had been sent into bodily form, and subjected to such conditions as befitted the variety and seriousness of their sins. Some enjoy

physical health, being born to rich and noble parents, some have ill health, born into needy households, suffering the penalty of their former sins, and enclosed bodily in this present age as if in a prison. When she had listened to all this, she asked me about it and pointed the man out to me. I could see how necessary it was to counter the arguments of this wicked viper, this death-dealing beast, about whom the Psalmist says, 'Do not hand over the soul of those who trust in you into the power of the wild beasts' (Psalms 74.19), and, 'Set your face against the wild beasts of the reeds' (Psalms 68.30, Vulgate), whose writing is wicked, who speak lies against the Lord, and lift up their voices on high.

She asked me to talk to this man who had been trying to deceive her, so I asked him to meet me, and I set him a problem.

"Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead, or not?" I asked him

"Yes, of course," was the reply.

"Do they rise with the same body, or a different one?"

"Well, the same."

"Of the same sex as before, or different?"

He seemed disinclined to reply, and waved his head about this way and that like a serpent trying to avoid being struck.

"Since you won't answer," I said, "I will answer for you, and give you what follows on logically from your last reply. You say they rise with the same body, that is, women as women and men as men. If not, there is no resurrection of the dead. The difference between the sexes lies in their bodily function, and bodily function defines what the whole body is. Resurrection of the dead, therefore, must mean that the sexes rise with distinct bodily functions, otherwise it would not be resurrection from the dead. If it is not resurrection of the whole body it is not a true resurrection of the dead.

"Now, as to your other argument, your objection that if there are different bodily functions, there must also be marriage, the Saviour himself has already solved that one, for he said, 'You are wrong. You do not know the Scriptures or the power of God, for in the resurrection there is neither marrying nor being given in marriage, but they are like the Angels' (Matthew 22.29.30). In saying 'neither marrying nor being given in marriage' he confirms that the sexes will still be different. One does not talk about sticks and stones as either marrying or being given in marriage; they just do not have the possibility of marriage. In the resurrection, people must still have the possibility of marriage, but because of the grace and power of Christ they don't exercise it.

"And if you ask how can we be like Angels, who are neither male nor female, let me give you a brief answer. It is not the nature of Angels that the Lord promises us but their way of life and their blessedness. So it is that John the Baptist, even before his death by beheading, is called an Angel. [In Luke 7.27 it is written of John, 'Behold I send my angelos before your face'. Angelos in Greek simply means messenger] Besides, all the holy virgins of God, even in this life, show forth the Angelic life. We are promised a likeness, not a change of nature.

"Tell me also, how do you interpret Thomas touching the hands of the risen Lord, and looking at the wound of the spear in his side (John 20.27)? Or Peter who saw the Lord standing on the shore. And they also saw him eating a piece of roasted fish and a honeycomb (Luke 24.42). The fact that he was 'standing' shows that he must have had feet. The fact that he showed them his wounded side proves that he also had a chest and an abdomen, because you can't have a side without a chest and an abdomen for the side to be attached to. He spoke to them, so he must have had a tongue and a palate and teeth. Like a plectrum touching the strings, so the tongue engaging with the teeth produces a voice. If his hands were touched he must also have had arms. You could go through all the members of the body like this, and find that he had a whole body, made up of all its members, a male body like the body he died with, not a female body.

"And if you wonder whether we shall need to eat after the resurrection, or how it is that we should enter a room through closed doors, contrary to the properties of thick, solid bodies (John 20.26), then listen: don't make a mockery of faith in the resurrection because of a quibble about food. When the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue was raised Christ ordered that she be given something to eat (Mark 5.43). And it is written that Lazarus who had been dead for four days sat at meat (John 12.2). These things were written to prevent us thinking that they were mere phantoms that were raised.

"And if you argue from the account of him walking through closed doors, that his body was always spiritual and wraithlike, and his body must have been a spiritual body even before he suffered, especially since he was able to walk on water, then Peter also, who walked lightly upon the water, must also be believed to have had a spiritual body, when it was really a simple case of God showing forth his power of being able to overcome the forces of nature. To make it quite clear that this great sign was for the purpose of showing God's power, and not for changing nature into something different, remember that Peter who walked on the water by faith, would have sunk as soon as his faith

wavered, if the hand of the Lord had not lifted him up, saying, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' (Matthew 14.26-31).

"I am astonished that you can be so stubborn [or pig-headed? lit, 'harden your forehead'] when the Lord has said, 'Reach out your finger and touch my hands, and thrust your hand into my side, and don't be faithless but believing' (John 20.27). And again, 'Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me, and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you can see that I have. And when he had said that, he showed them his hands and his feet' (Luke 24.39). Bones, flesh, feet, hands - are you listening? Don't talk to me of the airy rubbish about the spheres that the Stoics go on about.

"But if you want to talk about infants who have committed no sin being saved from the devil, and what age they will appear to be in the resurrection, having died at a variety of different ages, I don't suppose you will be pleased with my answer - 'The judgments of God are like a bottomless deep' (Psalms 36.6), and, 'O the depth of the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! Who shall know the mind of the Lord or who will give him counsel?' (Romans 11.33).

The essential integrity of the body is not altered by the variety of ages through which it passes. Our bodies are daily in a state of flux, either getting stronger or getting weaker; are we constantly changing into different people because our bodies change? Am I not the same person when I was ten as when I was thirty, or fifty, or now when I am gray-headed? So then, the traditions of the church and the apostle Paul reply that we are resurrected into the perfect man, according to the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4.13). The Jews assume Adam to have been created as if at the age of thirty; it is the age at which we read that our Lord and Saviour arose from the dead."

All this and a great deal more I offered him from both Testaments in order to confound this heretic. From that day onwards she conceived a detestation of the man and of all those who were of his opinion, and publicly declared that they were the enemies of the Lord. I said it all not in the hope that I would be able to refute his heresy thus briefly, for it would take many books to do that. But I did want to outline the true faith to this great woman, for she always preferred to endure the hostility of other people, rather than offend God by forming harmful friendships.

Chapter XXIII

But I must return to the main drift of my story. I have never met anyone more

teachable than her. She was always slow to speak and swift to hear (James 1.19), mindful of the precept 'Hear, O Israel, and be still'. She knew the Scriptures by heart. She loved the histories, and said that all truth was founded on them, but she was even more eager to discern the spiritual truth underlying them, and with this keystone she ensured the integrity of the building of her soul. She asked that she and her daughter might read over the old and new Testaments under my guidance. Out of modesty I would not agree at first, but at last in reply to her many persistent requests I agreed to pass on to her what I had learnt from the famous teachers of the Church, not presuming to be that worst type of teacher, someone who thinks he knows it all. Whenever I hesitated, and frankly confessed that I was not quite sure of the right answer, she would not leave it there, but would keep on probing, urging me to say which of various different opinions was most likely to be the right one. I will tell you something else she did, which to anyone who has tried it would seem to be quite impossible. She said she wanted to learn Hebrew, and gave herself diligently to it. Now I had studied Hebrew from my youth up with much sweat and toil, and have never ceased to ruminate in it, lest the knowledge of it desert me. But she can now sing the psalms in Hebrew, and pronounce the words without a trace of a Latin accent. Even today her holy daughter Eustochium displays the same kind of ability - but of course she has always remained very close to her mother, and obeyed her commands. She has never slept apart from her, or gone anywhere without her, eaten apart from her, or possessed a single nummus of her own. She was perfectly happy for the patrimony of her father and mother to be distributed to the poor; she was quite certain that the godliness of her parents was the richest possible inheritance she could receive.

I must not pass over, either, how joyful she was to hear her grandchild, Paula, the daughter of her son Toxotius and Laeta, lisp out falteringly while still in her cradle the words "Alleluia", and "gran'ma" and "aunt". Little Paula had been conceived in answer to a vow that she would be dedicated to virginity when she grew up, and there was one reason alone for the grandmother to wish to see her native land again, and that was that she might see that her son and daughter-in-law and granddaughter had renounced the world and dedicated themselves to the service of Christ. And that has been granted to her in part. For although the granddaughter has not yet fulfilled her destiny of becoming the bride of Christ, her daughter in law has vowed herself to perpetual chastity, and follows her mother-in-law's example of faith and

almsgiving, resolved to do in Rome the same sort of thing that Paula does in Bethlehem.

Chapter XXIV

O my soul, what is the matter with you? Why are you so afraid of telling about her death? I have already spun my tale out longer than necessary, unwilling to come to the end of her life, as if by keeping quiet about it and concentrating on praising her, I could put off the evil day. Up till now we have travelled with favourable winds, and my keel has ploughed smoothly through the heaving waves of the sea, but now I am running upon the rocks, with tumultuous waves threatening on all sides. We are so badly in danger of shipwreck that I cry out, 'Master, save us, we perish!' (Luke 8.24), and 'Arise, O Lord, why are you sleeping?' (Psalms 44.23).

For how can anyone tell the story of Paula's death with dry eyes? She fell into a severe illness, in which she indeed seemed to welcome the idea of leaving us in order to be joined to the Lord. The loving care which her daughter, Eustochium, had always shown towards her came even more to the fore in this illness, for she sat by her bedside, fanned her, supported her head, plumped up her pillows, rubbed her feet, massaged her stomach, straitened out the bedclothes, warmed water for her, and brought her towels. In fact she forestalled the other nurses in all their duties, counting it loss to herself if anyone else did anything for her at all.

What tears she shed, what sighs and laments she uttered, as she ran back and forth between the cave of the Lord and the place where Paula was lying! How often she begged that she might not lose such a dear companion, or if she must, that she might share the same bier with her. How frail and fleeting is our mortal nature! Had it not been for the faith of Christ which raises us to the heavens with the promise of eternal life, our fate is one with the bodies of beasts both wild and tame. There is one grave for both the righteous and the ungodly, the good and the evil, the clean and the unclean, the worshipper and the non-worshipper. The good man and the sinner both come to the same end, as do the man who swears and the man who fears to take an oath. Both men and beasts, we all go down into dust and ashes (Ecclesiastes 9.2).

Chapter XXV

Why do I delay? Why make it into a much sadder story by dragging things out! This most discerning of women knew that her end was near. Both body

and limbs were growing cold; only the warmth of her soul still struggled in her holy breast. As if she were going home and saying goodbye to strangers, she murmured 'Lord I have loved the beauty of your house and the place where your glory dwells' (Psalms 26.8), and, 'How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of might! My soul faints with longing to enter into the courts of the Lord' (Psalms 84.1-2), and, 'I had rather be the least in the house of God than dwell in the tents of the ungodly'.

I spoke to her, she fell silent, and when I asked her why, and whether she was in pain, she replied in Greek that she had no pain, but that all was peace and tranquillity. She spoke to us no more, but closed her eyes as though taking leave of everything mortal, and continued until her last breath repeating those words from the Psalms, so softly that we could scarcely hear them. She lifted her hand to her mouth and made the sign of the cross on her lips. Her spirits sank, she gasped for breath, her soul struggled to break forth, the death rattle which usually accompanies death was turned into the praise of the Lord.

The bishop of Jerusalem and some from other cities, numbers from the lower priesthood and the Levites all gathered together; [i.e. bishops, priests and deacons, in our terms. Priesthood, sacerdotium, resided primarily in the bishop, and to presbyters if the bishop so chose to confer it. The levitical class, the deacons, were a class on their own] groups of monks and virgins filled every monastery to overflowing. And when Paula heard the bridegroom calling, 'Arise, my love, my fair one, my dove, for the winter is past and gone, the rains have ceased', she joyfully replied, 'The flowers are seen on the earth, the time to cut them has come' (Song of Songs 2.10-11), and, 'I truly believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living' (Psalms 27.13).

Chapter XXVI

There was no weeping or lamentation such as is customary among people of the world, but all joined together in singing psalms in their various tongues. The bishops bowed their necks to carry her bier, while others brought torches and tapers to lead the choirs of psalmody as she was placed in the middle of the church of the Saviour's cave. The whole of Jerusalem turned out for her funeral. Was there a single hermit who kept to his desert cell? Was there a virgin who remained enclosed? They would all have deemed it sacrilege not to have paid their last respects to such a great woman. The poor and the widows all showed the garments which she had provided them with, following the

example of Dorcas (Acts 9.39). A large crowd of the needy cried aloud that they had lost a mother and a nurse.

Wonderful to relate, her face had not become pallid; her features were as grave and dignified as if she were not dead but sleeping. Psalms could be heard being sung in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Syriac, not only during the three days before she was laid to rest in the church of the Saviour's cave, but for the rest of the week as well. All those there shed tears as if it were their own funeral they were attending. Her revered daughter Eustochium, as if being newly weaned, could hardly be dragged away from her mother. She kissed her eyes, she laid her cheek on hers, she embraced her whole body in her desire to be buried with her.

Chapter XXVII

As Jesus is my witness, she left not a single nummus to her daughter, only a mountain of debt, as I have already mentioned, and what was even more difficult, she left an immense host of brothers and sisters who were difficult to maintain and whom it would have been quite wrong to cast off. Can there be anything more astonishing than that this woman sprung from the most noble of families, formerly of immense wealth, had so divested herself of everything she owned that she finished up in the extremes of poverty herself? Others may boast of the alms they have given, or of the rewards stored up for them in God's treasury, or of the votive gifts hanging in the midst of tapers of gold. But no one has given so much to the poor that nothing was left for herself. But now she enjoys those riches and delights which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of mankind (Isaiah 64.4 & 1 Corinthians 2.9). If we were to carry on weeping for her now that she reigns with Christ, it would seem as if we were weeping because we ourselves were envious of her glory.

Rest secure, Eustochium. You have been endowed with a great inheritance. The Lord is your portion, and what should rejoice you more, your mother has been given the crown of her long martyrdom. Martyrs are not only those who have shed their blood; the pure offering of a devoted soul is itself a daily martyrdom. She has been crowned with roses and violets, albeit lilies are reserved for those who have shed their blood. Hence it is that we read in the Song of Songs 'My beloved is white and ruddy' (Song of Songs 5.10); God gives the same reward to anyone who is victorious, whether in peace or in war.

Your mother paid heed to the same command as was given to Abraham, 'Leave your own land and nation and go into a land that I will show you' (Genesis 12.1). The Lord also warned through the words of Jeremiah, 'Flee from Babylon and save your souls' (Jeremiah 50.28). Paula likewise left her own land and to the day of her death did not return to the land of the Chaldees, [i.e. Rome. cf. Genesis 11.31] nor did she hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt (Exodus 16.3), but joined to the company of virgins she became a citizen of the city of the Lord, and now that she has gone up from the little town of Bethlehem to the kingdom of heaven, she says to the real Noemi, 'Your people is my people, and your God is my God' (Ruth 1.16).

Chapter XXVIII

I have burned the midnight oil for two nights over this little essay for you, with the same sort of grief as you must be feeling. I have had to dictate it, for as often as I have picked up my pen to do what I had promised you, my fingers just went stiff, my hand failed me, I lost all sensation in it. Hence the unpolished style, lacking any elegance or verbal charm, which bears witness to the writer's feelings.

Chapter XXIX

Farewell, O Paula, and may your prayers come to the aid of one who holds you in deep reverence. Your faith and works unite you to Christ. Now you are in his very presence you may gain answers to your requests all the more easily. In your honour I have built a monument more lasting than bronze, which the years will not be able to destroy. I have had a eulogy inscribed on your tomb, which I here copy out for you, so that wherever the words that I have written may reach to, the reader may know that your praise is also recorded in Bethlehem where you are buried.

THE INSCRIPTION ON PAULA'S TOMB

Offspring of Scipio, born of the Pauline house, an offshoot of the Gracchi, and descendant of the famous Agamemnon, here in this grave lies Paula, so-named after her ancestors. Eustochium was her daughter. She was the first of Roman ladies. She chose poverty with Christ and Bethlehem for her country.

ON THE FRONT OF THE CAVE

Do you see this sepulchre, carved out of the living rock? It is the tomb of Paula who now lives in the heavenly kingdom. She left her brother, her family,

Rome, her native land, her wealth, her children, and is buried in this Bethlehem cave. Your manger, O Christ is here, and here the Magi, bearing their mystical gifts, worshipped the God-made-man.

Chapter XX

The holy and blessed Paula fell asleep on the seventh day before the Kalends of February, [22 January] on the third day of the week, after sunset. She was buried on the fifth day before the Kalends of February, [24 January] in the sixth consulship of Honorius Augustus, and the first of Aristænetus. [The year 404]

She lived in religious vows for five years at Rome and twenty years at Bethlehem. She died at the age of fifty-six years, eight months and twenty-one days.

Life No 26, Book 1d

The Life of St Marcella, widow, 325 - 410.

[Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on January 31]

by Jerome, presbyter and divine.(a letter written to Principia, a Roman lady)

Chapter I

You have often earnestly asked me, O Principia, virgin of Christ, to write a memoir of that holy woman Marcella, and set out her goodness in detail the goodness so that others may know about her as well and follow her example. I have delighted in the thought of her virtues for a very long time, and I must say that I am somewhat grieved that you have been so insistent, as though you thought I needed such urging, for I yield nothing to you in my respect for her, and I am certain that by putting on record her exceeding great virtues I shall gain much more benefit than I shall be able to convey. It is just that I have held my peace and remained silent for the last two years not as a deliberate ploy, as you wrongly seem to think, but simply because I have been overcome by such an incredible sadness oppressing my soul that I thought it better to stay silent for the present rather than try to produce something while in a state of being totally unable to give her the praise she deserved. And even now I do not intend to eulogise her according to the rules of rhetoric, cherished though she is by you, by me, by all the saints and by the whole city of Rome. I will not write about her illustrious family or her lofty pedigree, stretching back

through a long line of proconsuls and praetorian prefects. I will praise only what belongs inalienably to her, and which is so much the more noble in that she showed her contempt for nobility and wealth by embracing the greater nobility of poverty and humility.

Chapter II

Her father had already died when she married, but then she also lost her husband after only seven months. She was young, highborn, eminently respectable, and above all of great beauty, which is always an attraction for men, and so she was then pursued most vigorously by one Cerealis, of an illustrious consular family. As an old man his wealth promised to be available for her as a daughter rather than a wife, and Albina, Marcella's mother, did everything she possibly could to get such a powerful protector for their widowed household. But Marcella had her objections.

"If I really wanted to marry," she said, "rather than wanting to dedicate myself to perpetual chastity, I would be seeking a husband, not an inheritance."

"Yes, but don't forget old men can sometimes live quite long," said Cerealis, "while young men can die quite early."

"A young man may die early," she cleverly replied, "but an old man can't live long."

This put him in his place so firmly that it became obvious to others that there was no hope of persuading her to marry.

We read in the Gospel according to St Luke about Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, who was of an advanced age. She had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity and was a widow of eighty-four years. She departed not from the temple night and day, serving God in fasting and prayer (Luke 2.36-37). Not surprising that such great devotion earned the reward of seeing the Saviour. Now let us compare her seven years with Marcella's seven months. Anna hoped for Christ, Marcella held him fast, Anna acknowledged him at birth, Marcella believed in him crucified, Anna accepted him as a little child, Marcella rejoiced in his reign in heaven. I can't make any distinction between these two holy women. There are some who do foolishly discuss the differences among holy men and leaders of the church, but my aim is to stress that those whose labours are the same enjoy the same rewards.

Chapter III

In a community riddled with gossip, living in a city made up of people from all over the world who are full of every kind of vice, honest people are easily

maligned, and the pure and clean defiled. It is difficult for anyone at all to escape the breath of slander. In difficult or impossible circumstances, even the Prophet can do no more than hope for a favourable outcome, rather than presume he will get it, when he says, 'Blessed are those who are undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord' (Psalms 119.1). By 'undefiled in the way' he means people living in the world whom no hint of ugly rumour has ever stained, and who have never maligned their neighbours (Psalms 15.3). About people such as this the Saviour says in the Gospel, 'Look kindly on your adversary, and agree with him while you are in the way with him' (Matthew 5.25). Who ever heard anything derogatory about Marcella worthy of credit? For people to believe any such rumour was to lay themselves open to the charge of malice and defamation of character.

She put the heathen to shame because she made it patently obvious to all, by her moral sense and by the way she dressed, what Christian widowhood entailed. Pagans take great pains to paint their faces with rouge and white lead, to wear silken garments, to bedazzle with jewellery, to wear gold necklaces, to pierce their ear lobes from which to hang the most costly pearls from the Red Sea, to perfume themselves with musk, and although in mourning for their husbands, they take to themselves others at their own choice, not in accordance with the commandments of God, but simply in order to avoid having to obey. They choose poorer men, husbands in name only, who are willing to put up with rivals, because they know that if they object they will be sent packing.

Marcella, however, wore clothes simply in order to protect herself from the cold, not to display her body to advantage. She wore nothing of gold, not even a seal ring, preferring to spend her money on feeding the poor rather than keeping it in her own purse. She went nowhere unless accompanied by her mother. Whatever the demands of a large house might make upon her she would not even see clerics or monks without witnesses. Her servants were always virgins and widows, chosen for their seriousness, for she was well aware that the morals of the mistress are often judged by the behaviour of her maids.

Chapter IV

She had an incredible love of the divine Scriptures, and was forever singing, 'I have hidden your words in my heart that I may not sin against you' (Psalms 119.11). She held before her eyes the image of the perfect man: 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law does he meditate day and night (Psalms

1.2). Her kind of meditation did not consist in repeating the words over and over like the Pharisees of the Jews, but in learning how to put them into practice in accordance with the words of the Apostle, 'In eating or drinking or in whatever you do, do all for the glory of the Lord' (1 Corinthians 10.31), and the words of the Prophet, 'By your commandments I have gained understanding' (Psalms 118.104). In other words, it was by keeping the commandments that she earned the ability to understand the Scriptures. She also meditated on the words, '...that Jesus began both to do and to teach' (Acts 1.1), a clear statement that would bring a blush to the cheek of people whose conscience told them that it was of no use merely talking about poverty and almsgiving while rolling in the riches of Croesus, and no use parading in a threadbare cloak if they carefully looked after their silken garments at home. She fasted moderately, in that she ate no meat and was familiar with wine more from its aroma than its taste, using it only 'for her stomach's sake and her often infirmities' (1 Timothy 5.23). She rarely appeared in public, and avoided the houses of the prominent patrician women for fear of being drawn back into a way of life which she had already put behind her. She visited the basilicas of the apostles and martyrs to pray in solitude apart from a crush of people, and was obedient to the wishes of her mother, to the extent that sometimes she would do things that she really would rather have not done. For her mother was keen on keeping up family ties, and in the absence of sons and grandchildren she formed the intention of leaving everything to her nephews and nieces, but Marcella would have preferred to remember the poor. She could not go against her mother, however, so her necklaces and other personal effects were earmarked for those who were already rich, so that she renounced the ability to dispose of her own wealth, rather than give her mother cause to be upset.

None of the high-born ladies of Rome at that time had embraced the monastic way of life. Such an innovation they would not have dared to embark upon. It was thought to be a rather reprehensible existence, and no one would have wished to make a public profession of it. But at that time it so happened that pope Athanasius of Alexandria was in Rome, where he had fled to escape from the persecution of the Arian heretics, Rome being the safest haven in which to find communion. From this man first, and later from Peter, another Alexandrian priest, [Athanasius' successor in the see in the year 373] she learned about the life of the blessed Antony, still alive at that time, [Antony died in 356] and the monasteries of Pachomius in the Thebaid. She learned too

that widows and virgins also followed this discipline. She did not feel ashamed to profess anything that was pleasing to Christ. And her example was followed many years later by Sophronia and many others after her, to whom might rightly be applied the words of the Poet Ennius, 'Would that never in Pellon's woods'.

The venerable Paula enjoyed her friendship, and it was in her care that Paula's daughter, that glorious virgin Eustochium, was trained. To be given the charge of such an outstanding pupil gives some indication of the qualities of the teacher.

Chapter V

The unbelieving reader might well wonder why I should go on for so long singing the praises of mere women, but let him call to mind those holy women who were companions of the Lord and ministered to him of their substance, (Luke 8.3) and the three Marys standing before the Cross, (Matthew 27.55) especially Mary Magdalene who for her zeal and diligence was called a Tower. [Magdala means "tower"] She was privileged to witness the resurrection before any of the apostles. Does not this convict the unbeliever of pride, rather than convict me of folly? I try to judge people not by their sex but by the capabilities of their souls, and give greater respect to those who do not presume on their status or their wealth. It is for that reason that Jesus loved John the evangelist above the others. The high priest knew John because of his social position, so John was not afraid to give instructions for Peter to be allowed in to the courtyard (John 18.15-16). Alone of all the apostles, he was not afraid of standing by the cross, where he received the mother of the Saviour into his keeping. The virgin son received the virgin mother as a legacy from the Lord.

Chapter VI

For many years, then, Marcella lived an ascetic life and was quite advanced in years before she was able to remind herself that she had once been young. She highly approved of that saying of Plato that the true philosophy was to meditate on death. Likewise, the Apostle says, 'I die daily for your salvation' (1 Corinthians, 15.31). And the Lord himself says, 'If anyone will not take up the cross daily and follow me, he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 9.23). And much earlier than that the holy Spirit spoke through the Prophet, 'For your sake we are killed all the day long. We are become as sheep for the slaughter' (Psalms 44.22). Many generations afterwards there were these words spoken: 'Think always of the day of your death and you will not fall into sin'

(Ecclesiasticus 7.36). Persius the Satyrist also says, 'Live with the thought of death in mind. Time flies, hence this warning'. So then, she lived always with the thought that she must die. She dressed in such a way as to remind her of the grave, offering herself as a rational, living sacrifice, pleasing to God (Romans 12.1).

Chapter VII

There came a time when the affairs of the church demanded that I should go to Rome, along with Paulinus, bishop of Syrian Antioch, and Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus. [There was a Synod in Rome in the year 382] I was modestly trying to avoid the company of the highborn ladies, but Marcella was determined, 'in season and out of season' (2 Timothy 4.2), to overcome my modesty by her persistence. She seemed convinced that there was no name more renowned for knowledge of the Scriptures than mine, so she never came to see me without asking questions about the Scriptures. She didn't always agree with me, but would often suggest different interpretations, not contentiously, but in order to have answers for anyone who might make such remarks to her.

I hesitate to say too much about the virtues I discerned in her, or the intellectual brilliance, or holiness or purity, lest I say something you would find it difficult to believe in, or depress you because I would be reminding you of attributes you do not possess. But I will just say this: whatever I have learned over a long period of study, and by daily meditation made part of my very being, this she drank in, learned thoroughly and possessed for herself - so thoroughly, in fact, that after I had left Rome, if there were any dispute arising about any Scriptural text, it was she who would be called upon to settle the matter. And she was extremely prudent, and understood very well what the philosophers call to prepon, that is, the quality of acting modestly, so that when asked for her opinion she always replied as if she were not offering her own views but as if they were what I, or some other person, had said. She understood very well the saying of the Apostle, 'I do not permit women to teach' (1 Timothy 2.12), lest she seem to belittle the male sex, including the priests, if they asked her about obscure and ambiguous matters.

I have been told that you, Principia, had taken my place as her companion, and that not even so much as a finger's breadth, as the saying goes, was ever allowed to come between you. You shared the same house, the same room, so that it was well known to everyone in the city that you had found a mother and she a daughter. You found some land on the outskirts of the city for a

monastery, and you chose the countryside as a sort of desert. You lived for a long time like that. Many others were converted and imitated your example, and it gave us great pleasure to know that in this way Rome had become a second Jerusalem. The number of monasteries of both monks and virgins increased so quickly that a city which had previously been of ill reputation began to asquire a reputation of glory.

During this time we consoled our separation from each other by frequent letters, so that what we could not achieve in the flesh we achieved in the spirit. We always looked out for each other's letters, were always trying to help each other, and treated each other with respect. We did not lose much therefore by our separation from each other, seeing that we kept up such a vigorous correspondence.

Chapter VIII

But in the midst of this scene of tranquillity in the Lord's service, a terrible storm of heresy began to disturb our Eastern provinces, causing a great deal of uproar, and reaching such a pitch of madness that it spared neither themselves or any of those on the side of what is right and good. [This was the controversy caused by Rufinus' translation into Latin of Origen's *Peri Archon* (On First Principles)] And as if it were not enough to have upset everything here, it launched a ship full of blasphemies into the harbour of Rome itself. The provisions it contained soon found a buyer, [Invenitque protinus patella operculum, lit. "the dish soon found a cover", a metaphor familiar to Jerome's readers, but not to us] and the diet of the citizens of Rome was contaminated by it, as was the fountain of Rome's pure faith by the heretics' dirty feet. No wonder, then, that false prophets were able to beat the buttocks of the ignorant in the squares and market places, or pick up a cudgel and break their teeth. It was a poisonous and spurious teaching that they were introducing into Rome. This was when that infamous book *On First Principles* appeared, and also that 'fortunate disciple' who could have been counted fortunate indeed if he had never become involved with such a teacher. [[The 'fortunate disciple' was one Macarius, a writer to whom Rufinus had dedicated his translation of Origen] I then wrote a refutation which threw the company of the Pharisees into confusion.[Presumably the Roman clergy who sided with Rufinus] The holy Marcella had up till then remained silent, not wishing to be seen as though she were putting herself forward. But then she sensed that the faith of Rome, which the Apostle said was spoken of throughout the whole world (Romans 1.8), was in danger. Even the priests, many of the monks and especially the

laity were being drawn into agreement with the heretics. Even the bishop was inclined to agree with them, being a simple man who judged others according to the measure of his own naiveté. Marcella then spoke out in public, preferring to please God rather than men.

The Saviour in the Gospel praises the unjust steward, who deceived his lord in order to save himself (Luke 16.8). Similarly, the heretics observed how a small spark had soon spread fire up to the housetops, and were aware how many people they had deceived, so they asked for, and obtained, letters from the church authorities, before they went on elsewhere, to the effect that they were in true communion with the Church. Not long after this Anastasius, a brilliant man, succeeded to the pontificate. [In the year 398]. Rome was not allowed to have him for very long. It was right that he should have been spared from having to be the pontiff during the sacking of the chief city of the world. [Rome was sacked by Alaric the Goth in 410] He was taken up to heaven so that he would not have been able to attempt by his prayers to stay the hidden sentence of the Lord, like that pronounced to Jeremiah: 'Do not pray for this people, nor seek to do them good. However much they fast I will not listen to their prayers. However many victims and sacrifices they offer me I will not accept them. I will consume them by the sword, by famine and by pestilence' (Jeremiah 14.11-12).

Did I hear you ask what all that has got to do with the praise of Marcella? Well, she was the principal cause of the heretics being condemned. She it was who brought into the public domain witnesses who had listened to their teaching and been corrupted into heretical error by it. She pointed out how many had been deceived by reading that infamous book, *On First Principles*, edited by the hand of a scorpion. [The scorpion is Rufinus, whom Jerome accused of editing the book in such a way as to conceal some of the worst of Origen's 'errors']. When summoned by frequent letters to come out and defend themselves in public, the heretics refused. They felt so guilty that they preferred to be condemned in their absence rather than defeated in public. Marcella was the cause of this glorious victory. You, Principia, also played an important part along with her to the benefit of all, and you know that I am telling the truth. You know that there are many things that I have not said a great deal about, lest I tire the reader with wearisome repetitions, and appear to the malicious minded to be praising someone merely as an excuse to give vent to my own spleen. But I must go on to the rest of my tale.

Chapter IX

The storm passed from East to West threatening grievous shipwreck to many. And thus were the words of Jesus fulfilled: 'When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18.8). 'The love of many grew cold' (Matthew 24.12), though some who loved the true faith aligned themselves with us, to the great danger of their very lives, for great forces were brought to bear against them. Think how 'Barnabas himself was carried away by their dissimulation' (Galatians 2.13), just as a present day Barnabas was prepared to commit murder, if not in actual fact then certainly in will and desire. [The reference is to certain prominent churchmen who defended Origen's principles] Then behold, the wind of the Lord blew away the tempest, fulfilling the words of the prophet, 'You will take away their spirit and they shall fail, and be turned again to their dust' (Psalms 104.29). 'In that day all their thoughts shall perish' (Psalms 146.4). Remember the words of the Gospel also: 'You fool, this night your soul shall be taken away from you. Who then will own all those things you have gathered together?' (Luke 12.20).

Chapter X

While these things were happening in Jebus, [The Canaanite name for Jerusalem] terrible news came from the West. Rome had been besieged [By Alaric the Goth, in 408] and the citizens forced to pay protection money. Then they were attacked again. Having lost their money they were also threatened with losing their lives. My voice fails me, and my words are choked with sobs. The city was taken, that city which ruled the whole world, and the people perished with hunger even before being put to the sword. There was scarcely anyone who remained alive to be taken captive. In their frenzied hunger people had resorted to horrible practices in order to eat. They tore each other limb from limb, the mother spared not the infant at the breast, ingesting back into herself that which she had lately brought forth. 'Moab is taken by night. By night her walls have fallen' (Isaiah 15.1). 'O Lord, the heathen have come into your inheritance, they have polluted your holy temple, they have turned Jerusalem into an apple orchard. The bodies of your saints have become food for the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints for the beasts of the earth. They have spilt blood like water on every side of Jerusalem and there is none to give them burial' (Psalms 79.1-3).

Who can tell the horror of that night, who can declaim the funeral oration, or who can shed sufficient tears to match their grief? The ancient city falls, city supreme for countless ages. Lifeless bodies lie in profusion in her streets, and

in the houses. Everywhere the image of death.

And in the midst of all the confusion bloodstained victors forced their way into Marcella's house.

Chapter XI

Let it now be my privilege to tell what I have heard, and repeat what has been seen by holy men who were present in the midst of it all, and who say that you also, Principia, were with her in that perilous hour. She is said to have confronted the intruders with no fear. They demanded money. She pointed to her threadbare clothing to show that she had no treasure hidden away, but they would not believe that she could be so voluntarily poor. She was beaten with cudgels and whips, but she is said to have felt no pain. She threw herself at their feet and pleaded with tears that you would not be taken away from her. She pleaded that you in your youthfulness would not be subjected to the same torture which she in her old age did not fear to suffer. And Christ softened their hard hearts to provide a moment of kindness to offset their bloodstained swords, for these barbarians took you both to the basilica of St Paul, to bring one of you to safety but the other to the tomb.

Marcella is said to have broken out into praise of God with great joy for keeping you from harm. Being taken captive had not made her poor for she had been poor already. She had been able to go without her daily bread because Christ had satisfied her needs. She felt no hunger, but in word and deed she proclaimed, 'Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return. As it seems good to the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1.21). After a few days she fell asleep in the Lord, whole and vigorous in spirit, leaving you as the heir of her poverty, or rather the poor through you. She died in your arms, giving up her spirit before your very eyes. As you wept she smiled, having a good conscience of a life well spent for a reward in the life to come.

For you, O venerable Marcella, and for you, my daughter Principia, I have dictated this letter in the space of one brief night, not in order to display my own eloquence, but to express my heartfelt gratitude to you both. My only desire has been to please both God and my readers.

End of Book 1

De Vitis Patrum, Book II
By Rufinus of Aquileia

Prologue

Blessed be God who wills all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It is he who has guided our steps to Egypt, and showed us great wonders, to be recorded for the benefit of posterity. In this history will be found salutary examples and teachings most conducive to true devotion, which for anyone wishing to walk in holiness will reveal clearly the pathways along which our forefathers in the faith have walked.

We feel it is impossible to do justice to the tale of such great matters, nor does it seem right that an important attempt to portray high virtue should be entrusted to the halting narrative of authors as unskilled and unimportant as we are. Nevertheless the brothers of the holy Mount Olivet have in their charity frequently begged us to write about the way of life of the monks of Egypt and what we saw of their spiritual strengths, their devout practices and their heroic abstinence. Believing that I have no option but to be obedient to their prayers, I accede to their requests, not to seek praise for my authorship, but in the hope that future readers will draw inspiration from this narrative, and encouraged by the example of what others have done may likewise feel invited to despise the corruption of the world and truly seek rest for their souls by embracing a disciplined life.

Truly, I have seen with my own eyes the riches of Christ hidden in human vessels, and having found this treasure I had no desire to keep it enviously to myself, but to make my findings common knowledge for the benefit of all. I am sure that the more people that are enriched by this the richer I shall be myself. How can I fail to be enriched, for my reward shall have been the salvation of others because of my ministry.

At the beginning of this narrative therefore let us pray that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may be with us, upon whose power depends all the discipline of the Egyptian monks. For we saw among them many fathers living the life of paradise while still dwelling here on earth, a new race of prophets, seers as well as people with great strength of soul. The efficacy of their signs and wonders bears witness to their worth, and deservedly so.

Indeed, why should not these men acquire heavenly power, despising as they do the carnal values of the world? We found that many of them were cleansed to such an extent from all malicious and cynical thoughts that it was as if they no longer had any memory of the evil in the world. So great was their tranquillity of mind, so completely had simple goodness grown into them, that it could deservedly be said of them: Great is the peace of them who love thy name, O Lord. (Ps. 119.165)

They dwell in separate cells scattered about the desert, but united together in charity. Their houses are ordered in this way so that as they keep their minds set in peaceful silence on heavenly things they may be disturbed by no human voice, no meetings, no unlooked for conversations. Each one in his own place looks for the coming of Christ like good sons of the Father, or like soldiers in camp getting ready for the presence of the Emperor, or like faithful servants looking for the coming of their lord to set them free and shower gifts upon them. They all take no thought for what they shall eat or what they shall wear. They know that as it is written in Scripture after all these things do the gentiles seek (Matthew 6.32). For they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things are added unto them.

When any of the necessities of life were lacking, many of them would not seek human help but would turn to God, making their requests known as to a father, and their requests were granted there and then. So great was their faith that they could move mountains. There were some who by their prayers turned back flooding from the river which was endangering the neighbouring region. They departed on foot into the depths of the river valley, they tamed many wild beasts, and did many others of the great and powerful signs which the apostles and prophets did of old. It cannot be doubted but that their merits maintain the stability of the world.

It was wonderful to behold, that all those excellent gifts which are usually so rare and difficult to obtain flourished among them not only in great numbers but also in exceptional power. Some of them live in towns, some in the country, the best of them scattered through the desert, like a heavenly army living in tents ready for battle, always intent upon obedience to the commands of the king, fighting with the weapons of prayer, protected by the shield of faith from the infidel enemy, winning the kingdom of heaven for themselves. Their way of life is admirable, they are free from conflict, gentle and peaceful, bound together in brotherly love. They strain every nerve in the battle to acquire all the virtues. Each one strives to outdo the other in clemency,

kindness, humility and patience. If there is anyone who is wiser than the others, it is held to be for the benefit of all, especially the less gifted, so that in accordance with the Lord's command he may be seen as the least of all and the servant of all.

It is a great gift from God that I have been able to see them all and converse with them. I shall now try to talk about them one at a time as the Lord brings them to my memory, so that anyone who has not seen them in the flesh may learn of their deeds, and in reading about them understand what a perfect life is like. May they be encouraged to follow the example of their holy works, and seek the palm of perfect wisdom and patience.

Chapter I

JOHN (Also in VIII.43)

As a foundation stone for our task let us take John as an example of everything that is good. For those who are religiously devoted to God, John will be more than sufficient as a guide to the heights of virtue and the summit of perfection. We met him in the desert parts of the Thebaid, living on the side of a steep mountain near the city of Lycus. It was very difficult to get up to his monastery. The approach was so narrow and full of obstacles that no one had joined him there for all of the fifty years since his fortieth birthday. Whenever he heard people coming, he would show himself from a window, from where he would offer a word about God, or give answers to those seeking counsel. No women ever got near enough for him to see them, and even men but rarely, and then only at certain fixed times. He did allow a guest house to be constructed at some distance where those who had come from afar could rest a while. He remained alone inside, occupied solely with God, ceasing not day or night from prayers and supplications to God, in total purity of thought seeking that divine essence which is above all thought. The further he cut himself off from all human cares and conversation the closer he came to God. To such a fine quality of mind had he attained that God gave him insights not only into present matters but also rewarded him with foreknowledge of things to come. God quite plainly gave him the gift of prophecy, so that he not only saw into the future of local citizens and country dwellers alike, when asked, but often predicted how the wars of the Emperor Theodosius would turn out, the manner in which he would gain his victories over petty kings, or how many invasions he would suffer from the tribes of the barbarians.

At one time the Egyptians attacked the Roman fort at Cyrene, which is the

city of the Theban region nearest Ethiopia, causing much destruction and making off with a great deal of plunder. The Roman officer in command feared to counter attack because he had very few soldiers whereas the enemy was very numerous. He came to John who named a certain day and said, "It will be quite safe for you to go out on this day that I have named. You will overcome the enemy, you will take lots of spoils and recover what you have lost." Once this had come to pass he used to prophesy even for the benefit of Augustus, who accepted him and valued him greatly. But he ascribed these gifts of prophecy more to the greatness of those who asked him than to his own merits. He used to say that these prophecies were given by God on account of those for whom they were intended, not because of himself.

There is another marvel that God manifested through him. A certain military tribune came to him and begged him to give permission for his wife to visit him. He said that she had already undergone great dangers in the effort to get to see him. John said that he had never been in the habit of giving interviews to women, especially since having shut himself up in this monastery on the cliff. The tribune persisted in his pleas, saying that if she couldn't see him she would doubtless perish from grief. Again and again he pleaded, repeating that his wife would surely die, in the belief that she had lost all hope of being healed. Overcome at last by the tribune's faith no less than his importunity, the old man said, "Go, your wife shall see me this night, not here but at home in her own bed." At these words the tribune went away, pondering in his heart the meaning of this reply. He told his wife what had been said, and she also was no less puzzled by it. But when she was asleep the man of God appeared to her in a vision, and standing next to her said, "Woman, great is your faith, and therefore I have come to satisfy your desire. But I admonish you that you should not try to seek the physical presence of the servants of God, but rather should contemplate their acts and doings in the spirit. For it is the Spirit which gives life, the flesh profits nothing. I have prayed to God for you, not because I am a righteous person or a prophet, as you think, but simply because of your faith, and he has granted you healing of all the diseases, which afflict your body. From now, you and your husband will be whole, and your whole household will be blessed. Be mindful, both of you, of the blessings which God has given you, fear him always and be content with your wages. You have seen me in your dreams, that should be enough for you, you don't need anything else." When the woman awoke she told her husband what she had seen and heard, and described the man's face and what he was wearing and all

other distinguishing marks. Whereupon the man marvelled, and went back to the man of God to give thanks. The man of God blessed him and he went away in peace.

On another occasion a military commander came to him having left his heavily pregnant wife at home. On the very day when he saw John, his wife gave birth and became dangerously ill. Then the holy man of God said, "If only you knew that by God's gift a son is born to you this day you would give thanks. His mother is seriously ill but God will be with you and you will find that she will be all right. Make haste, then, go back home to see your seven-day-old child. You shall call him John, and you shall bring him up in your own home without any outside influence until he is seven years old, and then you shall hand him over to a monastery to be taught under a holy and heavenly discipline."

Many came to see him from far and near, and after questioning them he opened up to them the secrets of their own hearts. Whatever sins they privately confessed to him he admonished and counselled them, urging them to penitence and amendment of life. He could predict whether the flooding of the Nile would be abundant or meagre. If because of human sin it chanced that there were any natural disasters or other visitations of God, he always knew about them in advance and was able to point out the reasons why this punishment was being inflicted. To those who sought him out he brought wholeness of mind and bodily cures, but in such a way that he avoided ostentation. For he did not allow petitioners to come to him, but instead blessed oil for them to be anointed with, by which means they were healed of all their disorders.

When a certain senator's wife lost her eyesight she begged her husband to take her to the man of God. When he replied that the man of God was not in the habit of receiving women she begged him that at least he might make him aware of the extent of her disability, and ask him to pray for her. The husband duly presented this appeal to him, whereupon he prayed, blessed oil, and sent him back to her. After applying this oil to her eyes for three days she recovered her sight and gave thanks to God. But it would take a long time to tell of all his accomplishments. So let us pass over all that we have heard tell about him and come to the things which we have seen with our own eyes.

We were a group of seven who came to him, and when we had greeted him he received us with great kindness, had a friendly word with each one of us, and asked us to pray and give a blessing. (For it is the custom in Egypt that when

brethren arrive they join together with each other in prayer.) He then asked if any one of us was a cleric, which we all denied. He looked at each one of us and knew that there was one of us who was ordained as a deacon, but kept it secret apart from one other in his confidence. The rest of his travelling companions did not know. Because of his humility he had decided on not revealing the honour of his rank, preferring to be ranked lower than all these men of such qualities that he deemed himself to be inferior to them all. As the holy John looked at him and saw that he was younger than the others he pointed at him and said, "This man is a deacon". He tried to deny it, but John grasped him and kissed him saying, "Do not deny the grace of God, my son, lest you exchange good for evil, and your humility is seen to be false. All untruth should be avoided, whether for an evil intention or even for a good, for all lies are not from God but from the evil one, as our Saviour teaches." Hearing this he accepted the gentle rebuke graciously and apologized. We offered prayer to God and when we had finished one of our number suffering from a severe infection [tertiano typo "tertian ague"] begged the man of God to cure him. "You are trying to rid yourself of something which is necessary for you," he replied. "For just as bodies are cleansed by soda and other such remedies, so souls are purified by bodily weakness and other afflictions of this sort." He went on from there to give us a lengthy discourse upon mystical teaching, and finally blessed some oil and gave it to him. The sick man anointed himself with it and vomited out a great deal of poison, after which, restored to good health, he walked back to the guesthouse. After this he saw to it that the duties of humane hospitality should be fulfilled, and our bodily needs attended to. He took thought for us, though neglectful of himself. For his own longstanding custom and discipline was to eat nothing till evening, and then sparingly. He was very thin, and desiccated of body because of his abstinence. His beard and hair were so sparse and straggly, that no amount of food would be able to nourish them, or refreshing draught give them strength. Although, as we have said, he was a nonagenarian, he still would take no cooked food. Having fulfilled the duties of hospitality he bade us come and sit down. He asked us where we had come from and why, since now he had received us very happily as his own sons. We replied that we had come from Jerusalem for the benefit and advancement of our own souls. We wanted to verify with our own eyes what his fame had brought to our ears, for it was much easier to fix in the memory what the eye saw than what the ears heard. And the blessed

John replied with an untroubled countenance, half mockingly, but with great warmth, "I am astonished, my beloved sons, at the great labour of such a journey as you have undertaken, when you can't possibly see anything in me to make it worthwhile. I am but a humble and unimportant person. There is nothing in me worth seeking out or marvelling at, and even if in your opinion I did have something, surely you could have found as much by studying the prophets and apostles. They are read out loud daily in the churches of God, providing people among themselves in their own homes examples of life for them to imitate without the need to travel to distant foreign places. So much the more I marvel at your decision to undertake such research with so much effort, to travel with difficulty through so many countries, simply for the sake of benefiting your own souls. For ourselves we are so lazy and idle that we don't even venture outside our cell! But if you really do think that there is something in me from which you can draw profit, you must above all take care that you do not make the labour of visiting me an occasion of boasting. It would diminish any profit for your soul if you were to put yourself forward as something marvellous because you had actually been to visit someone whom other people knew only by hearsay.

"Boasting is a very serious and dangerous fault. It can destroy even those who have arrived at the peak of perfection. So I urge you above all to guard against this. This evil comes in two ways. It happens to some in the first stages of their conversion. They take on a bit of abstinence, they give some money to the poor, and because they then think that they have managed to cast off some of their chains they begin to act and think as if they were better than those to whom they had given alms. The other kind of boasting comes to those who have arrived at the very peak of virtue, for they ascribe this not wholly to God but to their own studious efforts, and in seeking for human glory they lose the glory of God. So then, my sons, let us flee from the vice of boasting, lest we open up a chink through which the devil may gain entry.

"We should take particular care to discipline our hearts and minds. We must take care that no avarice, or evil thought, or empty desire or anything contrary to the will of God take root in our hearts. From roots of this sort there constantly swarm vain and useless thoughts. They are so evil that they do not cease even when we are praying or standing in the presence of God, making a mockery of the prayers which are offered for our salvation. They take our minds captive, and although our body proclaims that we are at prayer our thoughts and feelings are dragged away in all kinds of different ways. So for

anybody who reckons to have renounced the world and the devil it is not enough to have made a vow, and shed possessions and estates and other worldly affairs unless you have also repudiated your own vices and cast down your unprofitable and empty desires. This is what the Apostle is talking about when he mentions 'foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction' (1 Tim.vi.9). This is what it means to renounce the devil and all his works.

"For the devil snatches an entry into our hearts through every occasion of vice and corruption of will, because vices belong to him just as virtues come from God. If there are vices in our heart they welcome the devil's approach as if into his own domain and let him come in as if to his own property. And thence it comes that hearts like this never know peace and quiet, they are always in turbulence, always in bondage, now manic, now depressed, for they harbour a most evil tenant inside them. They have let him in through their own passions and vices. In contrast to this is the mind which has truly renounced the world, i.e. has repudiated and amputated every vice, blocked every entry to the approach of the devil, subdued anger, restrained his passion, fled falsehood, condemned envy, not only kept himself from slandering his neighbour, but forbidden himself even to think evil or suspicious thoughts about him, rejoices with his neighbour's rejoicing, and is saddened by his neighbour's sorrows. The mind that observes these and suchlike precepts opens a space in himself for the Holy Spirit to enter and enlighten, whence arise joy, gladness, charity, patience, longsuffering, kindness and all other fruits of the Spirit. This is what the Lord says in the gospel, a good tree cannot bear evil fruit, neither can a bad tree bear good fruit. By its fruits shall the tree be known.

(Matthew.7.18,20)

"Moreover there are some who seem to have renounced the world but have made no effort towards purity of heart, they have not rooted out vices and passions from their souls, nor amended their way of life. For these people their only thought is to seek out some holy father, memorise the things he says, and then glorify themselves by telling others what he has learnt from this or that person. By acquiring a knowledge of some small scraps of wisdom which they have heard and learnt by heart, they forever wish to be considered as teachers, but they teach not what they do themselves but what they have heard and seen, thus despising others. They aspire to priesthood and try to become members of the clerical class, ignorant of the fact that someone in whom virtues flourish, yet is not so bold as to teach anyone else about virtue, is more to be praised than one who teaches others about virtue while still ruled

by passions and vices. So, my little children, it is not important either to avoid the clerical class or priesthood or avidly to seek after it. What is needed is to drive out vice and acquire spiritual virtues. It can be left to the judgment and will of God as to whom he wills to call to the priesthood or any other ministry. He whom the Lord calls to himself is to be approved, not he who puffs himself up.

"The chief work of the monk is to offer up to God pure prayer with a clear conscience, as the Lord says in the Gospel, "When you stand at prayer, forgive your brothers from your heart if you have anything against them, for if you forgive not your brothers neither will your Father in heaven forgive you."

(Mark 11.25,26) If, as we have said, we stand before God with a pure heart, free from all the passions and vices mentioned above, we may see God, in so far as that is possible. Directing the eye of the heart to him as we pray we contemplate with the mind, not with the body, that which is invisible, with the discernment of pure knowledge, not physical eyesight. But let no one imagine himself able to embrace the divine substance as it is in itself, as if he were constructing in his heart a mental image like a picture corresponding to something physical. Let him not imagine God has any shape for he is boundless, but there may be a mental perception which can be experienced as a stirring up of the affections of the heart, even though it is beyond comprehension and cannot be described or explained. We must come to God with all reverence and fear, and let our minds be fixed on him in such a way that we are aware always that he is immeasurably greater than any images of splendour, brightness, brilliance or majesty that a human mind may conceive. We say this may only happen if the mind is pure, and free from any meanness of thought or perversity of will. To pay attention to these things is of the greatest importance to those who have renounced the world in order to seek God, as it is written, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalms 46.10). If anyone has come to know God, so far as is humanly possible, he will come at last to an understanding of all other things and take hold of the mysteries of God. The more his mind is purified, the more God will make himself known to him and reveal his secrets. For he has now become a friend of God like those to whom the Saviour said, 'I no longer call you servants, but friends, and anything you seek from God will be granted you as to a dearly beloved friend' (John 15.15,16). Indeed the angelic powers and all the divine mysteries will love you as a friend of God and look favourably on all your petitions. This is the meaning of the scripture, "Neither death nor life, nor angels not

principalities nor powers nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8.38,39)

Chapter I (continued), Life of John, Book II (Life of Hor begins nearer the bottom of this page)

"Therefore, my beloved, inasmuch as you have chosen to try and please God and come to his love, take care to distance yourself from all boasting, all vices of the soul, all bodily delights. And don't think that 'bodily delights' are limited to what pleases worldly people. Anyone who practices abstinence must realize that 'delights' comprise all things which he might have sought after with greediness, even such commonplace things as might be normally used by an abstainer. For even bread and water, if taken to satisfy greed rather than for mere bodily need, can lead to the vice of gluttony. One must be accustomed in all things to keep the soul free from vice. The Lord wishes to teach us how to resist the devices and desires of our own heart, and so he says, 'Enter in by the narrow gate, for the way to death is broad and spacious, but the way to life is strait and narrow'. (Matthew 7.13,14). The way of the soul is broad when every desire is pandered to, the narrow way means denying satisfaction to your own desires. A somewhat isolated dwelling and a solitary way of life can be of great profit in grasping these things, for if there are a lot of fraternal visits and much coming and going, the yoke of abstinence and frugality may be relaxed and little by little one is led into the habit of enjoying 'delights'. Even the perfect can sometimes be taken prisoner in this way. So at last hear what David says, 'See, I have fled far off to dwell in solitude'" (Psalms 55.7).

(cf VIII.xliv) Afterwards, however, the holy John discussed with us many aspects of the vice of boasting and other matters of special benefit. Finally he gave us this warning, "Let me reveal to you what happened recently to one of our brothers, as a precedent and example to make you more cautious yourselves.

"There was a monk living nearby in the desert - his dwelling place was a cave - a man of great abstinence, seeking his food by the daily labour of his hands, persevering in prayer day and night, adorned with all the virtues of the soul. But he began to feel happy and proud about how successful he was. Feeling confident of his own powers he was not putting his trust in God, but imputing

all his success to himself. When the Tempter of the soul realised this he came near to prepare a trap for him. One day at vesper time, he caused the appearance of a beautiful woman to come wandering through the desert. She looked weary, as if she had been working hard, and came to the monk's door pretending to be worn out with fatigue. She went inside and threw herself at his knees.

"Have pity on me," she said. "Night has unfortunately overtaken me as I seek refuge in this desert. Pray let me rest in a corner of your cell, lest I be attacked by nocturnal beasts."

"Overcome with compassion he welcomed her into the cave and began to ask her why it was that she was wandering through the desert. She pitched him a sufficiently plausible tale, and mixed it all up with sly flattery, and seductive poisons. She portrayed her plight to be truly pitiful, and desperately in need of help. By the smooth beauty of her way of talking she insinuated her way into the monk's affections, and aroused in him illicit desire. She introduced a few jokes and laughter into her talk, and then protesting how much she admired his bearded chin she wantonly stroked it, then gently caressed his neck and shoulders. What more need I say? She led the soldier of Christ on towards his inevitable captivity.

"Now he began to be internally disturbed, and burn with surges of lust, completely forgetful of all his former labours and his monastic profession. He did not fight against the concupiscence in his heart, but welcomed deceitful pleasure into his secret thoughts. In his foolishness he disfigured his own life, and became as a horse or a mule with no understanding (Psalms 32.9). But as he tried to take the woman into his obscene embraces, she gave a terrifying howl, a bloodcurdling shriek, and slipped from his enfolding arms like the insubstantial shade she was, and with foul mockery left him clutching the empty air with shameless gestures.

"Now a crowd of demons gathered in the air to watch this sight, shouting loudly, exulting with cacophonous derision.

"'You who exalted yourself to the high heavens,' they cried, 'Oh how cast down you are now to the lowest depths! Learn the lesson that whoever exalts himself will be humbled' (Luke 14.11).

"Almost out of his mind, and unable to bear the shame, he proceeded to deceive himself to an even greater extent than the demons had done. What he ought to have done was to repair the damage and renew the contest, and make satisfaction by the fruits of tears and humility in order to wipe out the blame

of his former conceitedness. But he did not do this. Instead he handed himself over in despair to lasciviousness and iniquity, as the Apostle says (Ephesians.4.19), and went back to the world, conquered by the demons, avoiding the company of all the saints, so that nobody was able to give him any useful advice which might have drawn him back from the precipice. If only he had made up his mind to return to his former abstemious way of life he would without doubt have regained his former state of grace.

"Now hear about what happened to another man who was similarly tempted, but who had a different outcome to his temptation. This man lived a disgraceful and disreputable life in a neighbouring state, committing all kinds of wicked deeds, so that he was universally held in opprobrium. But by the mercy of God he was drawn to repentance, and enclosed himself in a sepulchre, where day and night with his face on the earth he bathed his former polluting deeds with fountains of tears. He would not dare so much as lift up his eyes to heaven (Luke 18.13), nor use his voice to call upon the name of the Lord, but never ceased groaning and weeping. Dead and buried, he offered up from the mouth of hell the lamentations and groans of his heart. After a week of this the demons came by night into his sepulchre, clamouring and shouting. "What do you think you are doing, you unclean and disgraceful person? After being sated with all that filthiness and impurity do you think that you can now become chaste and religious? After having immersed yourself in wickedness, do you think there is any power that can wipe out those deeds? You, wanting now to be recognised as a Christian, modest and penitent! As if any other place is possible for you, steeped in evil as you are, than that which is owed to you by us! You are one of us. You can't be anything else. Come back, come back to us, and for whatever time there is left to you don't miss out on the pursuit of pleasure. We shall prepare a flood of delights for you, most excellent harlots, and all kinds of other things to restore you to the flowering of your graceful youth. Why make vain and useless crosses for yourself? Why hand yourself over to punishment before the time? Can the sufferings of hell be any worse than what you are going through now? If punishment gives you pleasure, just wait for it a little bit longer until you are really prepared for it. In the meantime enjoy what we can give you, which you have always found sweet and pleasant.'

"They castigated him with many more similar taunts, but he lay there without moving, paying them no attention and saying nothing in reply. Over and over again they repeated even fiercer taunts, but he still made no response, till at

last, realising they were being despised, they fell into a fury and attacked him with rods, leaving him half dead with a multiplicity of crucifying wounds. Even in the midst of such torments he moved not a jot from where he had lain down to pray.

"The next day some of his friends sought him out, simply from human kindness, and found him grievously wounded. They asked him what had happened, and when they were told, suggested that they take him back home where he could be cared for properly. He refused, and stayed where he was. The following night the demons sought him out again and tortured him with even more severe beatings, but even so he would not move from the place.

"Better to die than listen to the demons,' he said.

"The third night, nevertheless, a great crowd of demons gathered and fell upon him without mercy, inflicting many grievous wounds. His body was almost dead because of the wounds, but from the depths of his spirit he still refused to obey the demons. Faced with this the demons at last cried, 'You have conquered, you have conquered!' and departed in great haste as if pursued by power from heaven, and brought no more of their wiles and wickedness to bear upon him.

"But he progressed so much in spiritual virtues, and came to live such a lovely life, full of the power of every divine grace, that the whole region came to believe he was one of the holy Angels who had dropped down from heaven, and cried aloud with one voice, 'This is the change of the right hand of the Most High' (Psalms 77.10) What a great example he was to those who had fallen into despair, and then returned to a hope of salvation, and laid their hopes upon emendation of life where before there was despair! How great an admiration for him was felt by those who were snatched up from the inferno of sinners, with their virtuous nature restored. For his conversion was so monumental that anything seemed possible for everybody. And it was not only his emendation of life and the acquiring of virtues which adorned him, for even greater graces of God were given him. The many signs and wonders which he did testified how great were his merits in the eyes of the Lord. So it is that humility and conversion are the source of all goodness; conceitedness and despair are the cause of death.

"To avoid the danger of falling, and to acquire the grace of God, and to seize hold upon the knowledge of his manifest divinity, the most fruitful path is that of the hiddenness of dwelling in the desert. And this I think you may better learn not from my words but from actual deeds and examples.

"There was a monk who lived in a part of the desert more remote than any other. For many years he persevered in abstinence until time had brought him almost to the age of senility. But he was adorned with every virtue, inspirational for the greatness of his total continence, serving God sedulously with prayers and hymns. So great were the merits of this soldier that the Lord prepared for him a great gift, in that while still in the body he enjoyed the ministrations of an incorporeal Angel, judging him worthy to receive celestial food in the desert, as one who sleeplessly sang the praises of the heavenly King.

"God willed that he be given his promised reward even in this world, and took the provision of his daily food into the care of his divine providence for whenever he needed food as a necessity of nature he would go into his cave where he would find bread of marvellous quality and exceptional freshness laid out on his table. He would dine on this and give thanks to the divine presence and return again to his hymns and prayers. He received many divine revelations, and warnings of the future were given to him by God. In the midst of such manifold rewards he began to take pride in his accomplishments, reckoning that the merits of his life deserved such heavenly benefits, and gradually a sort of idleness entered his soul, so gradually that he did not even notice it. This developed into even greater negligence, he came to his hymn singing somewhat reluctantly, he no longer enjoyed getting up to pray, the psalms were not sung with the same attentiveness as that with which he used to sing them; having done a small proportion of what he used to do his soul was tired out as if it had been overworked, and he hastily retired to rest.

"His senses dulled, he rapidly went from bad to worse, and his thoughts snatched him away into all sorts of dangerous regions. But he kept to his usual routine, even though there were thoughts of a disgraceful and contemptible nature hidden in his heart. For just as a ship continues to glide through the water after the oars have stopped rowing, because of its own momentum, so did his established routine carry him through the usual offices. So it seemed as if he was still in the same state as before. So after his prayers he looked for his food at vespertime as usual, he went to the usual dining place, found the usual bread on the table, which he ate without taking any attempt to amend the thoughts of his heart. He was not aware of any change or deterioration, thought no less of himself, and did not understand how gradually he was falling.

"Inwardly he began to be stirred up by a fierce flame of desire, and with

sordid eagerness began wanting to return to the world. But he restrained himself for the moment, went in to take his food which he found placed on the table as usual, although he found it a little stale. He wondered at this and felt a little sad, but although he looked upon it as a sort of divine omen, he nevertheless took the bread and ate it. After three days he was shaken by urges three times worse, they were ever present in his thoughts and almost tangible. He imagined there was a woman lying down with him, whom he seemed to embrace and with whom he performed indecent acts. As he went next day to his usual duties of psalmodising there seemed to be a cloud before his eyes, and his mind seemed to be held captive. When he went for his food at vespertime he found it as usual on the table, but it was mouldy and dried up, and looking as if mice or dogs had been at it. Seeing this, he groaned and shed tears, but they did not come from the heart and were not sufficiently copious to quench the flames of a great fire. But he took the food, though there was not as much of it as he would have liked, and it did not have its usual taste. "Meanwhile his thoughts besieged him like a army of barbarians, hurling javelins at him from all directions, and once more took his mind captive to the thought of going back to the world. He went by night to begin his journey through the desert to the city. But when daylight came the city was still a long way off. He soon began to be overcome by the heat and was wearied, and as he looked about him his eyes began to register the fact that he was near a monastery. He saw the cell of some brothers, and went towards it hoping that there he might find some rest. When the brothers saw him approaching they immediately ran towards him, revered him as if he were an Angel of God, washed his feet, invited him to prayer, prepared food for him, and in fact did everything in accordance with the divine commandment of charity. "When they had dined and rested a little they began, as is usual, to ask him for a word of encouragement, as if he were a skilled and well-known father, able to give them words of salvation. They asked him how to escape from the traps of the devil, and how to drive out and cast down the evil thoughts which the devil puts into the mind. Compelled to give the brothers some advice, and teach them something of the way of salvation, he talked to them about the wiles of the devil which assail the servants of God, and talked to them so plainly and forcefully that he was moved to compunction himself and said to himself, 'Here am I giving others good advice when I am in the depths of deception, myself. How do I dare tell others how to behave, when I have not amended my own life? Wretch! First do yourself what you are urging others to

do.' Having cursed himself in this way and having realised how miserably he had fallen from grace, he said goodbye to the brothers and took sudden flight into the desert, returning to the cave he had left, prostrating himself in prayer before the Lord, saying, 'If the Lord had not been my helper, my soul would have almost been in hell.' (Psalms 94.17), and again, 'I had almost fallen into all kinds of evil, they had almost consumed me upon earth' (Psalms 119.85,87), and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'A brother giving aid to a brother shall be lifted up like a strong and fortified city. The brother who helps a brother is like a city of good standing where all his judgments are as strong as the city defences.' (Proverbs 18.19). From then on he spent his life in tears and mourning, lamenting that he no longer enjoyed the heavenly food which was formerly given him, and in the sweat of his own brow he began to eat his own bread. He shut himself up in his cave, lying in the dust wearing a hair shirt, and persevered weeping in prayer until the angel of the Lord came to his aid, saying, 'The Lord has accepted your penitence and restored you, but take care lest you become proud and fall again. See, even now there are brothers on the way to you, bringing you blessings for the teaching which you yourself gave them. Don't turn them away, but take food with them and give thanks to God.'

"I have told you these things, my little children, that you may understand how strong is humility and how greatly ruinous is self-conceit. Indeed our Saviour himself put humility at the top of the beatitudes, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew.5.3). I have given you examples of this so that you may be on the alert against being seduced by demonic thoughts. Furthermore monks use a custom of saying a prayer and invoking the name of the Lord whenever anyone visits them, whether man or woman, old or young, well known or stranger, so that if it is only a demon in disguise it may be put to flight by continual prayer. If the demons suggest to your thoughts that there is something for which you deserve to be praised and held up as an example don't listen to them, but humble yourself in the eyes of the Lord when they try to make you seek after praise.

"The demons have often plagued me at night, preventing me both from sleeping and praying by suggesting all kinds of phantasies to my thoughts and senses the whole night long. But in the morning they made an illusory prostration before me, saying, Forgive us, father, for causing you so much trouble all night. I replied, 'Depart from me you workers of iniquity, and so not tempt the servant of God'. (Psalms 6. 8) Therefore. my little children love

silence and peacefulness (quies), seek after understanding, purify your mind before God by frequent study (collatio) to banish any impediment to your prayers before God.

"There are of course people living in the world who with a good conscience do good works and busy themselves in a holy and religious manner by hospitality, works of charity, visiting those in distress and other works of this kind. There is a lot of good in such people, who also keep themselves pure. Those who please God in good works are praiseworthy, very praiseworthy, and undoubtedly fulfil the commandments of God. Nevertheless their actions are all rooted in the earthly sphere, concerned with corruptible matter. But anyone who gives himself up to mental strife, and cultivates a sense of the spiritual in himself, must surely be considered to be following a much better way. For he prepares an interior dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, and oblivious of earthly matters gives all his care to what is heavenly and eternal. He places himself always in the presence of God, and casts all worry about the present behind him, driven by a fiery desire for God. He sets himself to praise God and never tires of singing hymns and psalms day and night."

With this and much more of the like the blessed John continued speaking to us for three whole days, refreshing and renewing our spirits. And when we began to feel it was time to go he gave us a blessing, "Depart in peace, my little children, and I would like you to know that on this very day the victory of the religious emperor Theodosius over the tyrant Eugenius has been proclaimed. It must also needs be that Theodosius himself will come to the end of his life before very long." After we had left him we found that these events had happened exactly as he had predicted.

A few days later some of the brothers followed after us to tell us that John himself was now resting in peace. This was the manner of his passing. He said that no one was to visit him for three days, and then knelt in prayer and gave up his spirit. Thus he passed to the Lord, to whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen

Chapter II

HOR (cf. VIII.9)

We visited another venerable man in the Thebaid called Hor. He wore the habit of the highest order of monks and was the father of many monasteries. He was ninety years old with a very full and splendid silvery beard, a lively

face and appearance, reflecting something greater than mere human nature. He had lived at first in a remote part of the desert, practising many works of abstinence, before founding a monastery not far from the city. In several places near where he lived he had planted young trees and thus established forests of various kinds of trees where there had been no cultivation at all before he came, as several of the holy fathers confirmed. His reason for planting these forests was so that brethren wishing to join him would not have far to go to get timber. He took thought not only for what was necessary for their bodily needs, but also for their faith and salvation. In the desert he had subsisted on herbs and roots, which he found quite acceptable. He drank water when he could find it, and occupied himself day and night with prayers and hymns of praise. But when he had got to a mature age an angel of the Lord appeared in the desert by a vision, saying, 'You will become a great people, and many through you will believe, many thousands of human beings will be saved through you. Those whom you convert to the way of salvation in this life will remain under your leadership for the future, Fear not, you will never lack any provision for the bodily needs which you ask the Lord to provide.' Hearing this he moved to a more accessible neighbourhood, and began to live at first in a little hut which he had built for himself, mixing in a few vegetables to his diet, but sometimes vegetables alone, and then only after a long fast. To begin with he could not read. But when he moved from the desert to these more accessible places which we have described above a divine grace was given to him. For when he was given a book by his brothers he began to read it as if he had always been able to read. He had become very powerful in fighting demons, to such an extent that some possessed by demons would come to him without even being invited, protesting loudly about his supremacy. He also healed a great number of the sick.

He gathered about him great numbers of monks, but when he saw us arriving among them he turned towards us with a most warm welcome. He greeted us, said a prayer as was the custom, washed the feet of us guests with his own hands, and began to point out to us from the Scriptures many things to help build up our lives and our faith. God had given him a great gift for teaching. After giving us many wise interpretations of Scripture he turned again to prayer. For it was his custom never to take food until he had enjoyed a spiritual Communion with Christ. This done, he gave thanks and invited us to eat. He sat down with us himself, but never ceased conversing about spiritual subjects. This is one of the stories he told us:

"I know of a certain man living in the desert who ate no earthly food for the space of three years, for an angel brought him bread from heaven every three or four days, and this was meat and drink to him. And again there was another man like this to whom the demons came looking like the armies of heaven, dressed like angels, driving chariots of fire, sumptuously equipped as befitted the cohorts of some great king. The one whom the others seemed to regard as king said, 'You have fulfilled all things [required of you], O man. It remains only that you worship me and I will carry you up like Elijah.'

"At this, the monk said to himself, 'What is all this about? Daily I worship the Saviour who is my King. If this really be he, why is he asking me to do something which he knows I have never stopped doing?'

"And he replied, 'I know my King whom I worship daily without ceasing. You are not my King.'"

In actual fact he was inventing the character of some else to tell us about his own experiences as if they belonged to another. Others of the fathers present confirmed for us that it was he who had seen and heard these things.

Chapter II (continued), Life of Hor Book II

(Ammon, Benus, Oxyrynchus, Theo, Apollonius, all further down this page)

So there was this splendid father, who among other good deeds was accustomed to deal like this with those who came wanting to stay with him: he would gather all the brothers together in order to build for the newcomer a cell that same day. The brothers all worked at this with a will. Each one of them would busy himself either in building up the walls, or plastering with clay, or digging a well or collecting firewood. When it was finished he handed it over personally to the brother, complete with all the necessary utensils.

On one occasion a deceitful brother came having hidden some of his clothing so that he might appear destitute. Hor denounced him in the midst of the community and produced in their midst the hidden clothing, so that he struck fear into them all. No one after that dared to try and deceive him, such was the virtue of his character, such the greatness of the grace given him by God, acquired by his laborious abstinence and his pure faith. And so full of grace were the multitudes of brothers around him that when they gathered in church they seemed like choirs of angels, with shining clothing and brilliant intelligence, keeping vigil with hymns and praises to God in imitation of the

heavenly powers.

Chapter III

AMMON (cf. VIII.48)

While in the Thebaid we saw another man called Ammon, the father of about three thousand monks at Tabenna, men of great abstinence. They wear tunics with very short sleeves (*colobii*), seemingly made out of flaxen sacking (*quasi saccis lineis*), covered over by a cured sheepskin falling from the neck down the back and sides. Their heads were hidden under cowls, especially when they came to a meal, so that their faces were veiled and they could not see what each other was eating. There was complete silence at meal times, so that when sitting at the table you could hardly imagine there was anyone else there. Indeed their whole attitude towards each other was as if each one was totally alone. In this way the abstinence of each one was hidden, no one could see how sparingly the other was eating. It was as if they were just sitting at table together rather than eating food, but they never stayed away from table, even though they never fully satisfied their hunger. Great is the virtue of continence, and keeping custody of the eyes and hands.

Chapter IV

BENUS (cf VIII.49)

We saw another old man who was gentle above all others. His name was Benus and the brothers with him asserted that no oath or lie had ever come from his mouth, that no one had ever seen him losing his temper with anyone, or indulging in unnecessary, idle conversation. He lived his life in a profound silence, his manner was always peaceful, in all things he was a man who seemed to be angelic. His humility was very deep, counting himself as nothing in every way. We ourselves urgently pressed him to favour us with some encouraging conversation, but his modesty prevented him from giving us more than just a few words.

Once there was a certain beast called a hippopotamus causing a great deal of damage in a neighbourhood near him, and at the invitation of the farmers he came to them and when he saw this immense animal he said, "I beg you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you devastate this region no longer" From this time onwards, as if put to flight by a pursuing angel, it was no longer to

be seen. Later on, so they told us, he also put to flight a crocodile.

Chapter V

THE CITY OF OXYRYNCUS

Eventually we came to a certain city of the Thebaid called Oxyryncus, which was so famous for good religious activities that no description could possibly do justice to them all. We found monks everywhere inside the city and also in all the countryside round about. What had been the public buildings and temples of a former superstitious age were now occupied by monks, and throughout the whole city there were more monasteries than houses. There are twelve churches in this very spacious and populous city where public worship is conducted for the people, as well as the monasteries which all have their own chapels. But from the very gates with its battlements to the tiniest corner of the city there is no place without its monks who night and day in every part of the city offer hymns and praises to God, making the whole city one great church of God. No heretics or pagans are to be found there, for all the citizens are Christians, all Catholics, so that it makes no difference whether the bishop offers prayer in the streets or in the church. The magistrates, the leaders of the city and other citizens keep watch over each gate, and whoever turns up, whether pilgrim or pauper, is informed of the preconditions to which it is necessary for him to conform.

But how can I possibly describe all the kind acts done to us by the people as they watched us going through the city, greeting us like angels, making us welcome. We were told by the holy bishop of that place that it contained twenty thousand virgins and ten thousand monks. I could not possibly tell you, not even by stretching the truth to its limits, how great was the kindness and hospitality shown to us, to the extent that the clothes were almost torn off our backs by those who were eager to seize us and take us home as their guests. We saw there also many different holy fathers who were examples of various different God-given graces, some by way of preaching, some by abstinence, others by showing forth many signs and powers.

Chapter VI

THEO (cf. VIII.40)

Not far away from the city we saw another man called Theo, in a place bordering on the desert, a holy man shut up by himself in his cell, who was

noted for having kept silence for thirty years and who had done so many marvellous deeds that he was held to be a prophet. A great number of sick people came to him daily. He would put his hand out the window and lay it on the head of each person, blessing them and relieving them of all their ills. He was so gracious of countenance and excited such reverence that he was regarded as an angel living among people, so radiant and full of grace did he appear to people's view.

Not so long ago, so we were told, some robbers came one night thinking they might find he had some gold, but he overpowered them by prayer alone and caused them to remain fixed outside the door, unable to make the slightest movement. When the usual crowd arrived in the morning and saw the robbers fixed near the door they wanted to make a bonfire of them. But constrained by this emergency he actually spoke, saying, "Let these evil-doers go, for otherwise the gifts of healing will leave me." When the people heard this, not daring to contradict him, they drove them off. When the robbers realized what had been done to them they lost their desire for crime and did penance for their many past wickednesses by going to a neighbouring monastery and embarking upon a programme of amendment of life.

This man was moreover skilled not only in Greek and Egyptian but also in Latin, as we learned not only from those who knew him but from him himself. He evidently wished us to know this, for, desiring to give us some reward for the labour of our pilgrimage, he showed us just how grace-filled and learned his teaching was by writing to us on tablets. He never ate cooked food and it is said that when he went out to the desert at night he was usually accompanied by a great crowd of the wild beasts of the desert. He rewarded their companionship by drawing water from the well and pouring it into a bowl for them. Manifest evidence of this could be seen in the traces of oxen, goats and wild asses which lay about his cell.

Chapter VII

APOLLONIUS (cf. VIII.52)

Another holy man we saw was named Apollonius, living in the Thebaid in the region of Hermapolis, the city which tradition says that our Saviour visited with Mary and Joseph, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah, Behold the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud and shall come into Egypt and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence and fall to the ground (Isaiah 19,1).

Indeed, we saw the very temple which the Saviour entered, where there is a memorial to the idols falling to the ground and shattering.

So we saw this man who had a monastery nearby in the desert by a mountain. He was the father of about five hundred monks and was held in great esteem throughout the whole of the Thebaid region. He was credited with many great works and powers, for God did many signs and prodigies through him.

Brought up from boyhood in abstinence, he grew in the grace of God until he reached maturity. He was about eighty when we saw him flourishing in his monastery, and it seemed that his disciples also were so perfect and splendid that nearly all of them were able to perform signs. They say that he was fifteen years old when he departed into the desert, where for forty years he struggled in spiritual battles. It is said that then the voice of God came to him saying, "Apollonius, through you I will confound the wisdom of the wise in Egypt, and cast down the knowledge of the prudent. Through me you will confound those who are reckoned among the wise in Babylon, and you will bring to ruin all the worship of demons. Go now to the well populated areas where you will build up for me a great and perfect people, seeking eagerly after the works of righteousness."

But he replied, "Deliver me, O Lord, from a boasting spirit, lest raised up above my brothers I fall away from all your righteousness".

The voice of God came to him again, "Put your hand down your throat, pluck out what you find there and bury it in the sand". Without delay he groped down into his throat and pulled out what appeared to be a tiny Ethiopian.

Immediately he thrust it into the sand as it cried out, "I am the spirit of pride". After this a voice came from God, saying, "Now make haste, for everything you ask from God you will obtain". So then he went to a more populated area. This all happened in the time of the tyrant Julian.

In this place there was a cave a little way into the desert where he began to live, offering his prayers day and night without ceasing on bended knee, a hundred of them by day (so they said) and the same number at night, existing more on heavenly food than earthly. His clothing consisted of a tunic of coarse flaxen cloth, with a hood to cover his head and neck. They say that he continued wearing these garments in the desert and they never wore out. There he was in this place nearby in the desert, living in the power of the Spirit, doing wonderful signs and healings, so great that it is impossible to describe them (so we learned from the older men who were with him). So greatly was his fame noised abroad that he began to be held in honour as a prophet or

apostle. Monks from various regions round about began to come to him, offering the great gift of their own souls to this deeply respected father. He received each one of them with total commitment, encouraging some to work and others to study, but he also showed them by his example what he taught with his words. As a general rule he allowed those with him to practise what abstinence they could, but on Sunday, of his charity, he begged them to come and dine with him, although he himself kept to his usual abstinence, eating only uncooked herbs and vegetables.

During the time of Julian, whom we mentioned above, he heard that one of the brothers was locked up having been conscripted into military service. He visited him with some brothers to support him and encourage him to remain steadfast in his time of need, and despise and scorn all the dangers which threatened him. "It is a critical time, now," he said, "when the resolve of the faithful will be tested and publicly proved." With these words and others in the same vein he was giving the young man courage, when the centurion arrived, very annoyed because they had dared to come in. He immediately locked the prison from the outside, shutting all those visitors up, presumably so that they too might be held for military service, and having set some guards he departed. In the middle of the night an angel resplendent with a brilliant light was seen to appear and open up the gates of the prison. The guards were amazed and terrified. They fell down at the feet of those holy men and begged them to depart, saying that they would rather die in their place than resist the power of a god who took such care of them. In the morning the centurion himself came early to the prison with other officers giving orders that all prisoners should be released, for he said that his house had been shaken by a great earthquake and certain of his servants had been killed. At this those holy men broke out into hymns and praises to God, and returned to the desert as one man, being of one heart and soul together after the example of the apostles (Acts 4, 32).

One of the older fathers gave them daily lessons in developing their virtues and refusing entry to the deceits of the devil which he tries to insinuate into human thoughts. "For if you break the serpent's head," he said, "his whole body is put to death. This is why the Lord bids us beware of the serpent's head, that right from the very beginning we refuse entry of all evil and sordid thoughts into our hearts. When repulsed at the very beginning it is so much the more difficult for mental fantasies to spread out into our senses." He also urged that each one of us should strive to outdo one another in virtue, so that

no one should fall short of what the other was achieving. "You will know whether you have begun to advance in virtue if you have lost all desire for the delights of the world. This is the first of God's gifts. And if any one of you arrives at being able to do signs and wonders, don't let that make you proud, or entertain thoughts that you ought to be promoted above your fellows. Don't make a show of your gifts, lest you get carried away into deceit and lose grace."

It was a magnificent gift of teaching the word of God that he possessed, and we ourselves enjoyed a sample of it. But a far greater grace lay in the deeds he performed. Whatever he asked God for was granted immediately. He had had an older brother living with him for a long time in the desert, seeking after a life of perfection. After his death he had a dream, in which he saw him sitting in the company of the Apostles and made one with them, handing on to him his legacy of virtue and grace. He prayed to God that he might be taken quickly to enjoy rest eternal with his brother in the heavens, but the Lord replied that he must carry on for a little while longer until there were many more people emulating his manner of life. He should believe that there would be many more monastic families and a whole army of devout people, through whom he would find the reward from God which he deserved. And it all happened according to this vision.

Monks gathered around him from all directions, attracted by the fame of his teaching and above all by his example. There were so many of them renouncing the world that they built a splendid monastery in this same mountain, with one accord maintaining a common life and one refectory. It was obvious to us that they were a disciplined body of angels in heaven, adorned with every virtue. None of them wore anything grubby. The cleanliness of their clothing mirrored the splendour of their souls, so that, as Scripture says, the thirsty land breaks forth into singing, and in the desert a multitude (Isaiah 35.7). This saying refers to the Church, though as a matter of historical fact it is exemplified most fully in the deserts of Egypt. There were many who found salvation in the cities, but just as many were populating the Egyptian deserts. It seemed to me that in them was fulfilled the saying of the Apostle, "Where sin did abound, there grace was superabundant" (Rom.5.20). For at one time the poisonous cult of idols was rife in Egypt as in no other nation ever before. They worshipped dogs and monkeys and other such absurdities. They also believed that garlic, onions and other kinds of herbs and vegetables were gods, so we learnt from the father Apollonius, who

expounded to us what their early superstitions had been like. At one time also they believed the ox to be a god, inasmuch as country dwellers derived from the ox not only food but a way of living. The Nile too they worshipped, for it fertilized the Egyptian plains, which they venerated as being more fruitful than other lands. The monkeys, dogs and various vegetables that we mentioned above they worshipped because it was held that salvation had come from them in the time of the Pharaohs. In connection with this an unusual custom seems to have arisen among them, in that Apollonius, following the custom of the fathers, was immersed in water, carrying some useful item which had been thought to be a god. To make it clear that they no longer followed Pharaoh they said, "Because this used to be a god for me, today I drown it along with myself, to show that I no longer follow Pharaoh."

This is the outline of what the holy Apollonius told us. But a great deal more can be written both about his virtues and about the things he did. At one time there used to be ten villages not far away in that area where devilish superstitions were seriously followed. There was one large temple in which there was an image which used to be carried about in procession by the priests, accompanied by a choir of females. Crowds of people followed it, performing profane rainmaking rituals. It so happened once that Apollonius and a few of the brothers were travelling through that place when these orgies were being performed. When he saw these unfortunate people rioting about through the fields as if possessed by demons, he felt sorry they were so deluded and called upon our Lord and Saviour on his knees. All those conducting these devilish ceremonies, together with the image, suddenly found themselves standing still, unable to progress further by a single step. All day they remained like this, scorched by the searing heat, unable to understand why they were stuck motionless in one place. Then the priests said that it was the work of a certain Christian called Apollonius living nearby in the desert, and that they could not be released from their dangerous predicament unless they begged him to intervene. This was heard by a large crowd which had gathered from all directions, wanting to know the reason for this miraculous event, unable to account for it themselves. So suspicion fell upon Apollonius, and they demanded that he be approached. But certain of them, even though they agreed with this and had even seen Apollonius going by with his companions, immediately began themselves to try and bring help. They brought oxen, thinking that they should be strong enough to move the image, but all in vain. Unable to achieve any progress, they sent a deputation to the

man of God, promising that if he would release these people from their bondage, perhaps he might also free them from the bondage of their errors. On being approached he straightway went down to them, poured out his prayers to God and so released them. With one accord they all turned to him, believing in the salvation of our God and giving thanks. The image, which was made of wood, they immediately consigned to the fire. They all began to follow the man of God, and learning from him the faith of the Lord they became members of God's church. Several of them stayed with him permanently and even now still live in the monastery. The fame of this marvellous deed was everywhere spread abroad, and many were converted to the faith of the Lord, so that there remained hardly anyone in those parts who was a pagan.

A little while later there was a boundary dispute between two villages. When the man of God heard about it he hurried down to try and make peace. But they had become so angry in this dispute that they would in no way entertain any thoughts of peace, mainly because the people on one side were putting their faith in the strength of a certain robber who seemed to be the instigator of the struggle. When Apollonius saw that this man was firmly setting his face against peace he said to him, "If you would agree with me to work for peace I will pray to God and he will forgive you all your sins" When he heard this he did not even argue, but fell on his knees and begged for mercy. Then he turned to the crowd who followed him and bade them all disperse peacefully. When they had gone he remained with the man of God seeking the fulfilment of his promise. So Apollonius then took the robber back to the monastery with him, teaching him how he ought to change his way of life and patiently wait for God's mercy, looking for the promise by faith, for all things are possible for those who believe (Mark 9.23).

While both were asleep in the monastery that night each of them saw a vision of heaven, where they were standing before the judgment seat of Christ, together with the angels of God and his saints adoring the Lord. At this sight they also fell down and worshipped and they heard a voice from God saying, "Although it is not fitting for light to have any fellowship with darkness, nor the unfaithful to receive their portion with the faithful (1 Cor.6.14), nevertheless, Apollonius, salvation has been granted to him for whom you have made supplication." Many other things they heard in this vision beyond the power of tongue to relate or ear to hear, and when they arose from sleep they described their vision to the brothers. They were greatly astonished that each one had had the same dream as the other.

The robber, already in the process of becoming holy, remained with the brothers, changing his former habits and way of life into ways of innocence and devotion. So radically was he changed from a wolf into a lamb that in him was visibly displayed in full measure the prophecy of Isaiah that the wolves shall lie down with the lambs and the ox and the lion feed from the same manger (Isaiah 11.6). We noticed also that there were many Ethiopians living in the monastery, excelling many of the other monks in religious observance and spiritual virtue, so that in them was visibly fulfilled the Scripture that Ethiopia shall lift up her hands to God (Psalms 68.31).

The following story is also told about Apollonius. A dispute had arisen between two neighbouring villages, one Christian, the other pagan. A great crowd of armed men was coming out from both villages, when by chance Apollonius came in between them. He urged them to make peace, but the man who seemed to be the leader of the pagans and who was the prime cause of the dispute, a fierce and quarrelsome person, vehemently refused, saying that he would never make peace but would rather die. "So be it", said Apollonius, "and you will be the only one to lose your life. And your tomb will be no more than you deserve, not in the earth but in the bellies of beasts and vultures." In due course his words turned out to be true, for he was the only one on either side who fell. And when the battle was over and they returned next morning they found that the beasts had dug him up and torn him to pieces and vultures had helped to devour him. They were all amazed that the word of the man of God had been thus fulfilled, and were all converted to the faith of our Lord and Saviour, hailing Apollonius as a prophet.

Chapter VI (continued), Apollonius, Book II

It did not escape our notice either what he had done in the early days when he had begun to live in a cave with a few companions. It was the time of the paschal feast, and when the holy vigils and sacraments in the cave had come to an end, some of those with him prepared a meal, but there was nothing

except some dry bread and a few vegetables preserved in salt. Apollonius said to those with him; "If we have faith, as true and faithful servants of Christ, let us each one ask God whether he has anything for us to enjoy freely on this festal day." But they preferred that he alone should ask this of God, because he excelled them not only in age but in virtue, while they were much inferior to him in grace. He enthusiastically poured forth a prayer to God, to which they all replied Amen, and suddenly there appeared at the mouth of the cave a number of complete strangers who brought with them a vast supply of all kinds of different foods. Nobody before in the whole country of Egypt had ever seen such a diversity of so many different kinds of food. There were grapes, nuts, figs, pomegranates, besides things completely out of place such as milk, honeycombs and honey. There were also warm "nicolae", a type of richly decorated loaf which obviously originated in foreign lands. No sooner had the bearers of these gifts handed them over than they departed, as if they could hardly wait to get back to whoever it was who had sent them. The monks gave thanks to God and began to feast on what had been given them. There was so much of it that it lasted till the feast of Pentecost. They had no doubt that God had sent these things for the celebration of the feast.

We learned also that one of the brothers who was completely lacking in the graces of humility and gentleness asked Apollonius to pray to God that he might be given these graces. Apollonius prayed, and the graces of humility and gentleness which came to him were so great that the brothers were amazed at the peace of mind and modesty which they saw in him where previously they had seen none.

At one time there was a famine in the Thebaid. The local people knew that Apollonius and the monks who served God were frequently fed by God alone when they had no food, so they all came to him, along with their wives and children, asking not only a blessing but also food. Unhesitatingly he began to share with them the food which had been set aside for the use of the brothers, giving freely to one and all. At last there were only three baskets of bread left, but there were people still hungry. He ordered the three remaining baskets of bread to be brought out - only just enough to feed the monks for one day - and in the presence of all the people whose hunger had brought them together he lifted up his hands to God and said, "Is not the hand of the Lord mighty to make these multiply? Thus says the Holy Spirit. 'The bread in the baskets shall not run out till we all are filled with the new harvest'." And many of those who were there testified to us that for four months he continued to take bread out

of the baskets without the supply diminishing. They also said that on another occasion he did the same with oil and grain.

The devil was annoyed by these powers, and is said to have reproached him thus, "I suppose you think you are Elias or some other prophet that you dare to do these things?"

He replied, "Come now. Are not the prophets and apostles they who handed on to us their faith and their grace? Was God present then and absent now? God forbid. God is almighty, and what he can do he can always do. If God is good, you devil, why is it that you are evil?"

As we have said, these stories of his deeds were faithfully told to us by the seniors, holy and religious men. But notwithstanding the reliance that should be placed in their truth, the Lord provided us with even greater grounds for belief by means of that which we witnessed with our own eyes. For we saw baskets of bread being carried to the tables and all ate their fill. But the baskets were gathered up again just as full as before.

I must tell you also about another thing we can bear witness to. When we were on the way to this monastery and still a long way off, three brothers came to meet us for he had told them three days earlier that we were coming. They were singing psalms as they came, for this is their custom always when monks turn up. They prostrated themselves, embraced us, and pointing to us said to each other, "These are the three brothers whom our father Apollonius told us about three days ago. He said, 'Three brothers from Jerusalem will be with us in three days time.'" Some of the brothers then walked on before us, others behind, and both groups were singing psalms. When we were nearly there the holy Apollonius heard the psalmody and came out himself to meet us. When he saw us he first of all prostrated himself, then embraced us, took us into the monastery, and offered a prayer (as is the custom) before washing our feet with his own hands and seeing to all our other bodily needs. He does this for all new arrivals. It is also the custom for him and all the brothers with him not to take food before receiving the Communion of the Lord at around about the ninth hour, and in the interval between then and Vespers they listen to the word of God and with no let up are given instruction on fulfilling the commandments of the Lord (cf. VIII.9). After the evening meal some of them go to their hermitages and spend the light reciting the Scriptures by heart, others remain gathered together and keep vigil till morning light with hymns and praises to God. I was present and saw this.

Some of them at the ninth hour came down from the mountain to receive

Communion and straightway went back again, content with this spiritual food alone, and kept this up for several days. But there was such a great happiness and joyfulness in them, such exaltation, as no other man on earth could display. No one showed any signs of sadness, or if any one did happen to look a bit out of sorts father Apollonius immediately enquired what was the matter. It frequently happened that if anyone tried to conceal [his thoughts] Apollonius would say out loud what was being hidden, in order to make the victim face up to it. He would admonish them that it was absolutely wrong to be dejected when God was their salvation and their hope was in the kingdom of heaven. "Let the gentiles be sad," he would say, "let the Jews mourn, let sinners weep unceasingly, but let the righteous rejoice. For if lovers of the world take comfort in their fragile and perishable possessions, should not we be overflowing with joy when our hope lies in such great glory and the promise of eternity? Hasn't the Apostle implored us to 'rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in all things give thanks'?" (1 Thess.5.16). But who can do justice to the grace of his words and doctrine? It were better that I say no more rather than fail to commend him adequately.

In personal interviews the blessed Apollonius discussed many things with us - the underlying principles of abstinence, living a balanced life, the duty of hospitality. This latter especially he impressed upon us, that we should greet visiting brothers as if it were the Lord coming to us. "For this tradition of giving every honour to visiting brothers," he said, "is maintained among us for it is certain that to welcome brothers is the same as to welcome the Lord Jesus, who said, 'I was a stranger and you took me in' (Matthew 25.43). Abraham likewise took in some who appeared to be men but whom he understood to be the Lord. (Genesis 18)". Moreover he said you should insist on giving hospitality to the brothers even against their will, and he cited the example of the holy Lot who insisted on the angels seeking refuge in his own house (ibid.19).

He also urged that as far as possible monks should partake of the mysteries of Christ daily, lest if they stay away too long they stray away from God. "It is the frequent communicant who frequently receives the Saviour, for the Saviour himself said, 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him' (John.6.56). This commemoration of the Lord's passion is exceptionally beneficial as it provides an example of patient suffering." And he warned us that each one of us should always take care to prepare himself, lest he be found unworthy of the mysteries of the Lord, adding that through

the mysteries the remission of sins is given to those who believe.

He warned that except for some great necessity there should be no relaxing of the statutory fasts on Wednesday and Friday, for on Wednesday Judas planned the betrayal of Jesus and on the Friday the Saviour was crucified. It followed that anyone who needlessly relaxed the fast on these days betrayed the Saviour along with the traitor, and crucified him with the crucifiers. But he went on to say that if any brother did arrive on either of these two days and you wished to refresh him after his journey, even if it was before the ninth hour, you should just offer him food by himself. If he did not wish it he would not be put under any pressure. This is the generally accepted rule. He also castigated soundly those who fussed over their hair (*comam capitis nutriunt*. [washed their hair? combed it? cut it?]), or wore iron necklets, or did anything else which only drew attention to themselves. "It's obvious," he said, "that these people are only looking for human praise. They do it to make themselves noticed, but the commandment is that even your fasting should be carried out in secret, that it may be known to God alone who sees in secret and rewards openly (Matthew.6.18). As you can see, they are not content with the testimony and reward of him who sees in secret, but wish people to be able to see them. The complete regime of abstinence should be kept secret, so that the body is kept under by fasting without boasting to your fellows and your reward sought only from the Lord."

This and much more he told us about the life-style of the monks and how it varied during the week, and he pointed to their deeds as bearing out the faithfulness of his teaching. As we were about to depart he produced one more little admonition, "Above all, beloved, maintain peace among you, let there be no divisions among you." Then turning to the brothers, who along with him were seeing us on our way, he said, "Which one of you would like to take them to the fathers in the monasteries nearby?" Nearly all of them immediately expressed themselves willing to do so and wanted to come with us. The holy father Apollonius therefore chose three of them who were fluent in both Greek and Egyptian to do any necessary interpreting for us. They were also such people as would be able to help us in what they said themselves. As he sent us off with them he urged us not to part company with them before we had seen all the fathers and all the monasteries we wanted to, although no one would have been able to see them all. He dismissed us with a blessing in these words; "The Lord bless you out of Sion that you may see the good things of Jerusalem all the days of your life." (Psalms 128.5).

Chapter VIII

AMMON (cf. the last section of VIII.52)

I don't believe we should omit what we heard from Ammon, another holy man, whose place where he lived in the desert we visited. After we left the blessed Apollonius we went to a part of the desert towards the south when we saw in the sand traces of the footprints of a large serpent (draco). They were big enough to look as if a large piece of timber had been dragged along. We were absolutely terrified when we saw them, but the brothers guiding us urged us to be in no way afraid but to have faith and follow the serpent. "You will see the power of faith," they said, "when you have seen us destroy it. For there are lots of serpents, snakes and horned creatures (? cornutas) which have perished at our hands. For thus we read the scriptures, 'The Saviour enables those who believe in him to tread upon serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy'" (Luke 10.19). What they said simply made us more and more afraid, in our weak lack of faith, and we begged them not to follow the tracks of the serpent but keep to the right path. But one of them impatiently rushed off to follow the serpent, and almost immediately he came to its cave. He shouted to us to come and see what would happen. But one of the brothers who lived in the neighbourhood came out to us and advised against following the serpent for he was sure we would not be able to bear it, especially as we were not used to seeing such things. He had often seen it himself, he said, and it was unbelievably large, at least fifteen cubits long [cubit = distance from elbow to tip of middle finger]. After urging us to avoid the place, he ran up to the brother who was prepared to destroy the serpent and was expecting us to follow him. He took him by the arm and begged him to come back with him. And by his insistent pleading he prevailed over the one who was still unwilling to depart without destroying the serpent. He then came up to us, saying that he would not have it that we were craven or faithless.

(At this point, cf VIII.53) He then led us to his cell and with great friendliness offered us some refreshment. He told us that the place where he lived had been the home of a holy man named Ammon, whose disciple he had been. The Lord had done many great things through him, among which had been the following:

Robbers often had been stealing his bread, his sole means of subsistence, even the meagre supply which he had in store. Having put up patiently with this for

quite some time he went out one day into the desert and returned with two large serpents which he ordered to live with him and told them to stay at the door of his cell (monasterium) to guard the entrance. When the robbers came as usual they saw something guarding the cell, and when they realized it was serpents they became paralysed and senseless, they were struck dumb and fell to the ground. When the old man realized what was happening he came out and found them half dead. He came to them and raised them up, and rebuked them, saying, "You should realise that you are worse than these serpents, for whereas they have been obedient to us for God's sake, you neither fear God nor are ashamed to disturb the lives of the servants of God." Whereupon he took them into his cell, sat them down at the table and gave them food. They were cut to the heart, and turned away with repulsion from their barbarous ways. In a very short time they became even more virtuous than many who had already begun to serve the Lord. Their penitence began to effect such radical changes that it was not very long before they were doing the same signs and wonders as Ammon.

On another occasion there was an immense serpent which was terrorising the neighbouring region and killing many people, and the local inhabitants came to the aforesaid father begging him to rid the area of this beast. They also hoped to excite his pity by bringing to him a lad, the son of a shepherd, who at the mere sight of this serpent had been frightened out of his wits. The mere breath of the serpent had rendered him unconscious and bloated, but the holy man anointed him with oil and restored him to health. However, although he accepted the need for the serpent to be killed, he at first seemed unwilling to promise anything, as if there was nothing he could do to help them. But in due course he did go out to meet the beast, and knelt down praying to the Lord. The beast began a furious rush towards him, uttering terrifying groans and hissing loudly. But he cared nothing for all that. He turned towards the serpent and said, "May Christ the Son of God who will slay the great whale (Isaiah 27.1) bring you to destruction." At the old man's words this most horrible serpent burst asunder, even as it was spewing forth poison with all its force. The neighbouring people gathered together, amazed at such a great miracle. Unable to bear the smell it left behind they began to pile up a huge pile of sand over it. Ammon remained near at hand, for even though the beast was dead they would not have dared approach it without him being there.

THE PRESBYTER COPRES AND PATERMUTIUS (cf. VIII.54)

There was a presbyter called Copres who had a cell (monasterium) in that same desert, a holy man about eighty years old, who had done many great deeds, encouraging the weary and healing the sick, driving out demons and doing many miracles, some of which he did while we were there. In greeting us he embraced us, and after the usual prayer washed our feet, after which he asked us for news of the world. We would rather that he would tell us of his own doings, and asked him about the deeds and worthiness through which the Lord had bestowed upon him such graces. But he demurred, and began to make a comparison between his own life and those who had gone before him, saying that they were far more illustrious than himself, being barely able to follow their example. "There is nothing marvellous about me," he said, "in comparison with the holy fathers."

[The following account of Patermutius is not in Book VIII]

"Before us there was this splendid man, Father Mutius by name. He was the first monk in this place and was the first to teach the way of salvation to all of us in this desert. He was a pagan (gentilis) at first, a most notorious thief and tomb robber, a connoisseur of every kind of wickedness. His saving moment happened in this way:

"He went one night to the house of a certain consecrated virgin in order to burgle it. He climbed up on to the roof, equipped with a well known type of tool-kit, trying to find a method or an opening by which he could break in. The operation proved too difficult for him, and he spent the greater part of the night on the roof to no avail. Frustrated by the failure of many attempts he felt weary and fell asleep and saw in a vision someone standing by him dressed like a king, who said, 'Desist from all these crimes, and from the spilling of blood. Turn all your efforts towards religious purposes instead of shameful theft, and join the angelic host of heaven. From now on live with virtue in mind, and I will make you the principal leader of this host.'

"He listened to what was being said to him with a great feeling of joy, and was then shown a great army of monks, of which he was bidden to be the leader. As he awoke he saw the virgin standing there, demanding to know who and whence he was and what he was doing there. Like somebody out of his mind all he could say was, 'Please take me to a church.' She realised that some divine operation was working in her, and she took him to the church and

introduced him to the presbyters. He prostrated himself in front of them and begged to be made a Christian and do penance. The presbyters knew this man to be the instigator of all kinds of wickednesses and wondered if he were really genuine. But he persisted, and convinced them he really meant what he was asking for. They warned him that if that was what he wanted he would have to leave off from his former way of life. He was baptised, and begged to be given some precepts by which he might begin to walk along the way to salvation. They gave him the first three verses of Psalm 1 [Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, that bringeth forth his fruit in due season, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper] They told him that if he diligently took these verses to heart it would be enough to lead him into the way of salvation and to a growth in holiness (*scientia pietatis*). He stayed with them for three days and then went off to the desert where he stayed for a long time, persevering day and night in prayers and tears, living off roots and herbs.

"He went back to the church where the presbyters realised how the three verses of Psalm 1 which they had given him had affected his speech, his actions and his whole way of life. The presbyters marvelled at how such a sudden conversion could have led him immediately into such a strict self-discipline. They gave him further instruction in the holy Scriptures, and suggested that he stay with them permanently. So as not to appear disobedient he lived out a week with them but then returned to the desert, where he spent the next seven years very abstemiously, receiving such a fulness of grace from the Lord, that he was able to learn almost the whole of Scripture by heart. He took bread only on Sundays, and this was given to him by divine providence. For after he came away from his prayers he would find bread there which no human hand had brought. When he had given thanks and consumed it he found that it was sufficient to see him through to the next Sunday.

"A long time afterwards he came back from the desert and encouraged many people to follow his example, among whom was a young man who wanted to be his disciple. After giving him the monastic habit, that is, the sleeveless tunic, the hood and the goatskin cloak, he began to instruct him in the other principles of monastic life, especially the duty of taking care to bury Christians who had died. And when that disciple had observed the care with which he clothed the dead in burial garments, he said, 'I hope that when I am

dead, master, you will prepare and bury me like that.'

"I will indeed, my son, and I shall keep on clothing you until you say "enough".

"Not long after this the young man died and this promise was fulfilled. For having clothed him in several garments he said in the presence of all those there, 'Is this sufficient for your burial, my son, or should we add some more?' Everybody then heard the voice of the dead boy, even though his jaw had been tied up and his face covered, saying, 'Enough, father. You have fulfilled your promise'. Those present were astonished, and wondered exceedingly about such a miraculous deed. But once the boy was buried, he made no attempt to boast about it but went straight back to his hermitage.

"On another occasion he left his hermitage to visit the brothers whom he had established. It was revealed to him that one of them was in extremis and likely to die. It was already getting towards evening, so he was hurrying in order to see him. But the place where the sick man lived was still a long way off and he did not want to get to the place after dark. He called to mind the saying of the Lord, 'Walk while you have the light lest the darkness overtake you' (John 12.35) and 'He who walks in the light does not stumble' (John 11.10). And as he saw the sun beginning to set he said to it, 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ stay still for a while until I arrive at my destination.' And although it had partially begun to sink it stopped, and stood still until he had arrived. This was obvious to all those who were waiting there. As they stood and watched the sunset being delayed they wondered what sort of an omen it could be for them that the sun should delay its setting for such a long time. So when they saw Father-Mutius coming out of the desert they asked him what sort of a portent was signified by the sun. He replied, 'Have you forgotten the word of our Lord and Saviour, "If you have faith as much as a grain of mustard seed you will do greater things than these"' (Matthew 17.20). And when they realised that the sun had stood still because of his faith they feared greatly, and many of them joined his band of disciples and began to follow him.

"He went into the house of the brother who had been the reason for his hasty journey and found him already dead. He prayed, went to the bed, embraced him and said, 'What would you rather, brother, to depart and be with Christ or remain in the flesh?'

"His life came back to him, he sat up and said, 'Why are you calling me back, father? It is better for me to depart and be with Christ. I do not need to remain in the flesh any longer.'

Chapter IX (continued) Copres and Patermutius, Book II

(Syrus, Isaiah, Paulus, Anuph, Helenus, Elias, Pithyrion all further down this page)

"Sleep then in peace, my son,' he replied, 'and pray for me.' And immediately he lay back on the bed and fell asleep. Those present were astounded. 'Truly this is a man of God,' they said. He then clothed the young man appropriately according to his custom and kept vigil the whole night with psalms and hymns before giving him decent burial.

"There was another brother whom he visited in bed sick, and he could see that this brother felt himself to be condemned by his own conscience and was frightened of dying. 'Why are you unprepared for death, my son?' he asked. 'It is laziness, as far as I can see, that your conscience is accusing you of.'

"The brother then begged him, 'Please, father, intercede for me to God that I may be allowed a little more time in which to amend my life.'

"He replied, 'You are asking for more time now, when you have come to the end of your life? What were you doing for all the rest of the time in your life? Weren't you able to cure your own wounds? Haven't you been adding even more wrongdoings right up till now?' The brother continued to implore him, until the old man said, 'As long as you don't add any more sins to the ones you have already committed, we will pray to God for you. For he is good and long-suffering and will allow you a little more time in this life to enable you to make up for all your failings.' He then prayed to God and when he had finished he said, 'See, the Lord has given you three years more in which you can apply yourself to doing penance.' And stretching out his hand he raised him up from the bed. Without any delay he followed him back to the desert. Three years later the old man summoned him back to the place where he had raised him up, so that everyone could be enlightened by [the example of] his way of life, asserting before God that rather than being a mere human being, he was now more like a man turned angel. He called an assembly of brothers and set him in the midst of them. Using him as an example he then discoursed to the brothers the whole night through on the subject of his conversion and the fruits which penitence brings forth. As he was preaching, the brother began first to look a little drowsy and then suddenly fell asleep for good. He prayed over him, did everything necessary for his burial according to his custom, and hastily went back to his hermitage.

"He frequently walked across the vast river Nile, with the water coming only up to his knees.

"On another occasion he came in to the brothers through closed doors when they were gathered together in an upper room, and would often be transported in a moment of time to somewhere else, however far away it might be.

"It is said that at the time of his first conversion when he was in the desert, after fasting for a week a man came to him out of the desert bringing with him bread and water, begging him to accept it for it had been sent to him from heaven.

"Once a demon came to him and showed him a great treasure hidden in the earth which had once belonged to Pharaoh. 'Take your treasure with you to perdition in the middle of the earth', he replied. The Lord did all these things and many more through him. But there were many other fathers as well of whom the world was not worthy (Hebrews 11.38), performing heavenly signs and marvels. Why should you be surprised if it is only very small things that we small people can do, such as caring for the blind and the lame, which any doctor can do by means of his art?"

As Copres was telling us these things one of our brothers was evidently sceptical about what was being told us and got so bored with it all that he fell asleep. In a deep slumber he saw in a vision Copres holding a book written in golden letters, from which he seemed to be reading what he was telling us. Beside him was someone of most venerable gray-haired appearance who severely rebuked him, saying, "Why aren't you listening intently to what is being said, instead of falling asleep in disbelief?" Greatly troubled he woke up, and quietly told us in Latin what he had seen.

While all this was going on we also noticed a peasant coming to Copres' door carrying a bowl full of sand, patiently waiting until Copres had finished talking to us. Having seen him, we asked Copres what the peasant wanted, standing there with a bowl of sand in his hand. "I really shouldn't tell you," he said, "for fear that we should be seen to boast about God's work in us and so lose the due reward of our labour. However, for your edification and benefit, bearing in mind that you have come such a long way to visit us, I cannot let myself hide from you the works of God which he has deigned to do among us. "All the cultivated land round here was very sterile and unfruitful. But the seed still had to be sown, even though it only returned twofold. Maggots were appearing on the stalks of the new shoots, which consumed the grains as they grew upwards. Now the peasants in that place had been pagans, but since we

had taught them to believe in God and to become Christians, they came to us as newly made Christians asking that we should pray to God for their crops. We told them that we would indeed pray, but that God required from them a faith that would deserve such prayer. So they filled the fold of their robes with sand that we ourselves had walked on and brought it to us begging that we would bless it in the name of the Lord. I said to them, 'Be it unto you according to your faith.' They took the sand away with them and mixed it with the seed they were sowing and scattered it over the fields. The crop which resulted was greater than anything which the land of Egypt had ever previously been able to produce. From then on the custom arose of them coming to us twice a year with the same request.

"I won't leave you ignorant either about something else which the Lord for the glory of his name did through me. I had gone down to the city once and found there a Manichaean teacher subverting the people with whom I began a dispute. But he was a very crafty individual, and I was not able to convince him by words, so, fearing that the people would come to some harm if he seemed to win the argument, I said so that the people could hear me; 'Make a big fire in the centre of the square and let us both walk into the midst of the flames, and if there should be one of us that is not burned in it, let the faith of that one be believed to be the true one.' The people were pleased with what I said and immediately set a big fire going. I took him and began to drag him towards the fire, but he said, 'No, not like this. Each one of us should go in separately, and since this is your idea you should go in first.' Committing myself in the name of Christ I walked into the midst of the flames, which began to part here and there and move away from me almost entirely. I stayed in the midst of that fire nearly half an hour and in the name of the Lord hardly came to any harm at all. The watching people shouted out with great approval and blessed God, saying, 'God is wonderful in his saints!' (Psalms 68.35).

Then they began to goad the Manichaean into going into the fire, which he was very reluctant to do and tried to get away. Whereupon the crowd seized him and threw him into the fire. The flames immediately licked round him and delivered him up again half burned and still on fire. The people reviled him and threw him out of the city, shouting, 'Let the deceiver burn alive'. But me they took with them to the church, blessing the Lord.

"On another occasion I was passing by a temple where I saw the pagans offering sacrifices, and I said to them, 'You are people endowed with reason. Why are you offering up these dumb and insensible images? Are you not even

more insensible than what you are offering up?' And because of what I had said the Lord opened up their minds and they stopped being governed by error and followed me, believing in our God and Saviour.

"I used to have a little garden near my cell where I used to grow vegetables in order to entertain any visiting brothers. One night a pagan came in and stole some vegetables. He took them home and began to cook them on the fire, but after three hours over a steadily burning flame they would neither get hot, nor soften up nor get warm to the slightest degree, remaining as fresh as they were before. The water just would not get the slightest bit warm. This made him realise in himself that he was a thief, and he snatched the vegetables off the fire and brought them back to us, where he prostrated himself at our feet and begged that he might find forgiveness for his sins and become a Christian, which indeed was brought to pass.

"And it so happened that on that very same day a number of brothers came to us as guests. The vegetables therefore were already most opportunely prepared for them. We gave thanks to God for his wonders, having a twofold cause for rejoicing: the salvation of a human being and gifts from God besides."

Chapter X

ABBAS SYRUS, ISAIAS, PAUL AND ANUPHIUS
(VIII. 55-58)

He also added this story:

Three abbas, Syrus, Isaias and Paul met together at the bank of a river. They were upright men, of great abstinence and very religious. They were intending to visit a certain Anuphius, whose cell was three days journey away. They wanted to cross the river but there was absolutely no transport available, so they said among themselves, "Let us ask for God's grace that the good work of this journey will not be hindered." And turning to Abba Syrus, the other two said, "You especially must pray to God, for we know that God listens to you and always provides what you ask for." So he urged them to bend their knees along with himself, and prostrated himself face down before the Lord. Their prayer completed they got up and behold! they saw that a boat had been called up, ready to cross the river and help them on their way in the journey they were making. They got aboard, and were carried so quickly up river that in the space of one hour they covered the whole journey which they had expected would have taken three days. When they came ashore Isaias said, "The Lord

has given me a vision of this man we are hurrying to meet, coming towards us, being told all the secrets of the heart of each one of us." And Paul said, "And the Lord showed me that in three days time he will be taken from this world."

They had progressed a little way from the river on their journey to the cell, when they saw coming towards them the man they were coming to visit. He greeted them and said, "Blessed be God who has often shown you to me in spirit, but now in the flesh." And he began to spell out the virtues of each one of them in the sight of the Lord, and all the things they had done. And Paul said, "Since the Lord has revealed to us that in three days time he will take you from this world, we beg you to tell us about all your virtues and deeds which have been pleasing to the Lord, and don't be frightened that we will think you boastful. Leave us with a memorial of your doings before you die, as an example for posterity."

"I don't know that I have done anything remarkable," he said, "but I did succeed in this, that I confessed the name of my Saviour through all the persecutions, nor did any lie ever proceed out of my mouth after this confession of truth, nor have I loved the things of earth more than the things of heaven, and the grace of God has never failed me in these things. He has never failed me in anything I have needed on earth; by the ministry of angels he has always supplied me with sufficient food. The Lord has always shown me what was happening on earth, and his light has never departed from my heart. Sustained by that light I have done without sleep, nourished always by a longing to see him. His angel has always been sent to stand by me, teaching me about each and every virtue in the world. His light has never been shut out of my mind. Anything I have asked for I have immediately carried out. He has often showed me multitudes of angels standing round about him, I have seen the assemblies of the just, the congregations of martyrs, the gatherings of kings and of all the saints, that is, of all those whose task is nothing other than to praise and bless the Lord for ever in simplicity of heart and faith. As against that I have seen Satan and all his angels cast into eternal fire, and again, the just enjoying eternal bliss."

After telling them about these things and many more for three days, he gave up his spirit. And straight away they saw his soul taken up by the angels and carried to heaven, and they heard the sound of the hymns with which his soul was praising God along with the angels as he was going to the Lord.

Chapter XI

HELENUS (VIII.59)

There was another holy man called Helenus who had been serving the Lord since boyhood. Schooled in the ways of chastity and moderation in all things, he had become a very praiseworthy person. While he was still a boy in the monastery, if he needed to ask a neighbour for fire, he would carry burning coals away in pieces of cloth without their getting burnt. All the brothers admired him and tried to follow the example of his attitude of mind, and the good points of his way of life. Once when he was alone in the desert he felt a sudden craving for honey. Looking around, he saw a honeycomb fixed to a rock and immediately recognised it as a deception from the devil. Angrily he said within himself, "Depart from me you deceiver with your illicit desires. For it is written 'Walk in the spirit and do not fulfil the desires of the flesh'" (Galatians, 5.16). And from then on he left his own home and went to the desert, where he began to discipline himself with fasting in order to punish his fleshly desires. In the third week of his fast he saw several apples scattered about in the desert, but knowing the wiles of the enemy he said, "I won't eat them, I won't even touch them, lest I cause offence to my brother, that is, my soul. For it is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God'" (Deut. 8.3 & Matthew. 4.4). After he had fasted another week he had been asleep for a little while when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, "Get up, and what you find put ready for you, eat without fear." He got up and found a gently flowing stream of water, with its banks teeming all around with tender and sweet-smelling fruits. He went up to them and picked and ate, and drank from the stream. He realised that never in his whole life had he tasted anything quite so sweet and delicious. In this same place he found a cave where he stayed for quite some time. And whenever his body needed refreshment he prayed to the Lord and by the grace of God he lacked nothing.

He was once making a rather difficult visit to some brothers, loaded up with various things for their bodily needs. As he journeyed his burden was getting heavier and heavier when he saw at a distance some wild asses going through the desert. He shouted out "In the name of Jesus Christ let one of you come and take my load!" And behold, just one out of all that herd came gently up to him, offering its services of its own free will. He loaded it up, sat on it

himself, and was carried in no time to the cells of the brothers he wanted to visit.

On another occasion he visited a certain monastery on a Sunday and found that they were not observing the solemnity of the day. Upon asking why, he was told that the presbyter who lived on the other side of the river had not come. No one indeed was willing to cross the river for fear of the crocodiles. "If you like," he said, "I'll go across and get him." And he immediately made his way to riverbank. He called upon the name of the Lord, and suddenly a crocodile appeared, ready to stop being a terror to mankind and change into a ferry for the righteous. It offered him his back, which he accepted, all fear cast aside, and was carried to the opposite bank. Helenus went straight up to the presbyter and begged him to come to the brothers. Now his clothing was quite mean and dishevelled, and the presbyter wondered where this person had come from and asked him what he wanted. But when he realised that he was indeed a man of God he began to follow him to the river. He mentioned that there was no boat to be found in which they could cross, but abba Helenus said to him, "Don't worry, father, I am now about to call up a ferry." And in a loud voice he commanded the beast to appear. It came as soon as it heard his voice, and peacefully offered his back. Helenus got on first and then invited the presbyter to do so. "Come on, don't be afraid," he said. But the presbyter was so frightened at the appearance of this monster that he took to his heels and fled.

Fear and amazement fell on all his companions when they saw him being carried across the waters of the river by a crocodile. When he got back, he led the beast up the bank with him and said, "Death would be a better thing for you than to be burdened with the guilt of so many assaults and homicides." And immediately the beast burst asunder and died.

The holy Helenus remained three days in this monastery, giving talks to the brothers on spiritual matters. As a result many of them brought out into the open the thoughts and secret workings of their hearts. One said that he was troubled by the spirit of fornication, another by the spirit of anger, another by the love of money, and several admitted to being deceived by boasting and spiritual pride. He drew attention to the gentleness of one, the justice of another and the patience of someone else. And so by underlining quite impartially the vices of some and virtues of others, he encouraged in a wonderful way the advancement of them all. Some of the sceptical among them were cut to the quick and changed their minds after certain things came

to pass among them exactly as he had foretold. For as he was about to leave he said to them, "Prepare some food against the arrival of some more of the brothers." As they were making preparations some brothers did arrive on the instant and were gladly welcomed, while he went back to the desert.

One of the brothers asked if he might be allowed to live with him in the desert. He replied that it was a very serious matter, and very laborious, to withstand the temptations of the demons, but the young man urged it all the more vigorously, protesting that he would be able to put up with anything as long as Helenus would give him generous support. So he gave him permission and the young man followed him into the desert, where Helenus told him to live in a cave not far away from his own. That night the demons flocked around him, first of all stirring up sordid and filthy thoughts, and then violently threatening to rush in and kill him. But the young man rushed out and fled to the cell of the holy Helenus to tell him of the evils that were assailing him. Then the old man gave him a few words of comfort, advocating the virtues of faith and patience, before going back with him to the cave from which he had fled. There he traced a line in the sand before the cave with his finger, and in the name of the Lord he forbade the demons to dare trying to cross this boundary. And it was so, that by the power of his word the young man was safe from then on.

It was said of him that when he himself was a young man in the desert he often received food from heaven. Some brothers were visiting him when he had nothing to offer them, but a young man came bringing bread and other necessities, and having put them down in front of the cave was no longer to be seen. "Let us bless the Lord," said Helenus, "who provides food for us in the desert."

All this and much more father Copres told us of the life and doings of the holy fathers, enlightening us with great kindness. After his very instructive talk he took us to his little garden and showed us the palms and other fruit trees which he had planted. "It was the faith of the local peasants" he said, "which encouraged me to plant these in the desert. For I saw what great faith they had when they took the sand that we had walked on and scattered it over their fields, thereby turning sterile soil into abundant fertility. It would have been a shame if we had been seen to be inferior to them in faith, when it was through us that God had granted faith to them."

Chapter XII

ELIAS (cf. VIII.51)

We saw another venerable old man called Elias in a remote part of the territory of Antinoe, a city of the Thebaid. He was said to be a hundred and ten years old, and the spirit of Elijah was said to rest upon him. Many marvellous things were told about him. They said that he had spent seventy years in the depths of this vast wilderness, a desert so fearful and inhospitable that no word was adequate to describe it. This old man had lived there all that time having no contact with any place of human habitation. The trackway which led to him was narrow and stony and very difficult for visitors to find. The place where he actually lived was a horrible cave, striking terror into the hearts of those who found it. He himself had trembled and shaken in all his limbs for all his adult life. But every day he was doing signs, for he loosed the bonds of all who came to him, whatever troubles they might have been burdened with. All the fathers agreed that no one could remember when it was that he had come to this hermitage. For food he took a little bit of bread and a few olives, even in his extreme old age. In his youth, however, he had frequently fasted the whole week through.

Chapter XIII

PITHYRION (VIII.59)

After this we returned to the Thebaid to see a rugged mountain, overhanging a river, a very menacing, rocky apparition, fearful to look at, and in this precipitous place there were caves which were terribly difficult to approach. Many monks dwelt here, the leader of whom was a father called Pithyrion. He had been a disciple of the blessed Antony, after whose death he had lived with the holy Ammon. When Ammon died he settled in this mountain. He was so abundantly virtuous, so greatly endowed with the grace of being able to give sound counsel, and with such power against the demons, that he seemed to have inherited a double portion, worth two of the greatest men all by himself. He encouraged many with his words of warning, and was the source of much sound teaching. In particular he taught us about the discernment of spirits, saying that there are certain demons who latch on to whatever definite vices people have. Anyone who seems to be passively subject to any vicious motions in the soul they turn to positive deeds of evil. So if there is anyone who is looking to be dominated by demons, be sure they are first of all

dominated by their own passions and vices. But whatever vice with its appropriate passion you have been able to cut off in yourself, you will then have the power of expelling the demon of this vice from those possessed by it. He took food only twice a week, accepting a few little portions of gruel made from flour (*pulticulas ex farina*), nor would he ever eat meat, allowing no alteration to his customs because of his age.

Book II (continued)

(Apellen & John, Paphutius, Isodore, Serapion, Apollonius all farther down this page)

Chapter XIV

THE FATHER CALLED EULOGIUS (cf. VIII.75)

We saw another holy father called Eulogius, who had received from God the grace of being able to discern both the merits and the guilt of anyone who approached the altar of God, so that he would stop some of the monks coming to him for Communion saying, "How can you dare to approach the divine Sacraments when your mind and intentions are evil? In fact, last night you had thoughts of fornication, but you said to yourself, 'It makes no difference whether you come to the Sacrament as one of the sinful or one of the righteous.'"

And there was another who quibbled in his heart, saying; "Well, isn't Communion able to sanctify me anyway?"

He refused to give Communion to each one of these and said, "Go away for a while and do penance. Purify yourself by making satisfaction [for your sins] in tears. Then you may be fit to receive the Communion of Christ."

Chapter XV

THE PRESBYTER APELLES, AND JOHN (cf. III.51)

We saw another presbyter, a righteous man, in the neighbouring region called Apelles. He was a smith and made whatever utensils the brothers needed.

Once when working at the forge in the silence of the night, the devil came to him in the shape of a beautiful woman, bringing some work for him to do. But he picked up a hot iron from the furnace with his bare hands and thrust it into its face. It fled, shouting and screaming, and all the brothers round about heard the screaming as it fled. And from that time onwards he was habitually able to pick up burning iron with his bare hands without taking any harm. When we visited him he gave us a most kindly welcome. We asked him if he would speak to us on the subject of the virtues, using either his own deeds as an example or the deeds of those whom he knew to be of conspicuous sanctity. He replied:

"In the nearby desert there is an elderly brother called John who excels everybody in his life, his customs, and his abstinence. When he first came to the desert he stood underneath a protruding rock face for three years continuously, always praying, never sitting or lying down. He took only what sleep he could standing up. He took food only on Sunday. For on that day a presbyter came and offered the Holy Sacrifice for him, and the Sacrament was his only food. One day Satan, wishing to undermine him, disguised himself as the presbyter who usually came to him, and arriving at an earlier hour than usual, pretended to have come to administer the Sacraments. But, ever vigilant, he recognised the devil's deceits and indignantly said to him, 'O, father of all grief and fraud, you enemy of all justice, not only do you never cease from seducing Christian souls but you even dare to penetrate into the terrible and sacrosanct mysteries.' He replied, 'I thought you were a prize I could win, for I deceived another of you people like this so that he blew his mind and fell senseless. When I left him he thought he was insane because of what I had done, and the prayers of a great number of the righteous were hardly able to restore him to his former state of sanity'. Having said this the demon left him.

"He persisted in the task which he had begun and persevered in prayer. From standing still so long his feet became ulcerated, with pus oozing out of them. When three years were up an angel of the Lord came to him and said, 'The Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have heard your prayers. They bring healing to the wounds in your body and grant you an abundance of heavenly knowledge and speech.' He touched his mouth and his feet, making him

whole from his ulcers, and immune to the pangs of hunger. He ordered him to travel to another place and to visit the brothers in the desert nearby in order to instruct them in the words and teachings of the Lord. But on Sundays he always came back to his original spot to receive the Sacrament in the same way as before. On other days he worked with his hands, making harness for the draught animals, weaving palm leaves together as was the custom of that place.

"A lame man seeking a cure once decided to go and visit him. And it happened that the animal he was intending to ride had a girth which had been made by the man of God. He got on to the beast and as soon as his feet touched the girth he was healed. The man of God also sent blessed bread to whoever was ill, and as soon as they received it they were healed. The Lord did many other signs and healings through him.

"He excelled all the fathers and other people in one particular grace, that the way of life of all the brothers in the neighbouring monastery was revealed to him. He could write to their superiors and tell them that some person or other was lazy and did not rightly fear God, or that other people were making good progress in faith and virtue. But he also wrote to the brothers themselves, to some because they were lagging behind their brothers and showing little inclination for being patient, to others because they were constantly acting carefully, and were a great help to their brothers. He predicted the rewards due to this one because of his virtues and the punishment threatened by the Lord to that one because of his laziness. He even described the deeds, motives, merits or negligences of people in their absence, so that when they heard what he had said they were convicted by their own conscience and could not make any denials. He taught everyone that they should lift up their minds from visible and bodily things to things invisible and incorporeal. 'We have been given time,' he said, 'in order that we might transfer our attention to studies of that sort. We should not remain always as immature infants, but aspire now to the higher things of the spirit, take control of our senses and direct our intelligence towards perfection, so that virtues may shine in our souls.'

This holy man of God, Apelles, commended to us most authentically many other things about this man, John, which if they were to be written down would be excessively long and so superhuman as to be scarcely credible to whoever might hear them.

PAPHNUTIUS (cf. VIII.62)

We also saw the monastery of the holy Paphnutius, the man of God, the most famous anchorite in those parts. He lived in the most distant part of the desert in the region of Heracleos, that splendid city of the Thebaid.

We learned about him from a very faithful account given to us by the fathers. When he was already living the angelic life he once prayed God to show him if there were any other holy people he could be compared with. An angel appeared and told him that there was a musician (symphoniacus) like him (cf. VIII.63) in a certain village, who made a living by practising his art.

Astonished by this strange reply he made his way with all haste to the village and sought the man out. When he had found him he tried to lay bare everything that the man did and earnestly enquired of him why in the world he was performing holy and religious works. He replied that the fact of the matter was that he was a sinner, a man of a shameful kind of life. Not long since he had been a robber, but had turned from that disgraceful trade to what he was now seen to be doing. Paphnutius pressed him further to tell him whether if by chance he had done any good deeds in the course of his robberies. "I'm not in the least bit conscious of having done anything good," he said. "But I do know this - that when I was among the robbers we once captured a virgin consecrated to God. My fellow robbers wanted to rape her, but I stood up and objected. I rescued her from that degradation, and took her back to her village and her own home unharmed.

"Another time I found a respectable looking woman wandering about in the desert and I asked her what she was doing in that place. (cf. VIII.63) 'Don't ask me,' she said. 'I am a most unfortunate woman. Don't ask why - but if you want a servant take me wherever you like. I am unlucky enough to have a husband who because of his debts has been repeatedly hung up and beaten and punished by all sorts of tortures. He has been shut up in prison and is not let out except to be tortured again. We have three sons who have also been seized because of this debt. Since they started looking to punish me in my misery I have fled from place to place. I have no food, I am totally distressed, I have been wandering about without detection in this place for three days now without anything to eat.' Upon hearing this I took pity on her and led her to my cave, where I refreshed her spirits which were almost spent through hunger, and I gave her three hundred solidi, for the sake of which she and her husband and her three sons had become liable not only to slavery but to

physical punishment. She went back to the city and freed them all with the money I had given her."

Then father Paphnutius said, "I have not done anything like that. I have been sent to you because the name of Paphnutius was fairly well known among monks. I am fairly well versed in being able to lead my life under monastic discipline. And it was for this reason that God revealed to me that you are just as worthy in the sight of God as I am. So, brother, don't neglect your soul, for you must see that you have a high place in God's eyes." And at once he put down the flute which he was holding and followed him to the desert. He turned his musical art into a spiritual harmony of heart and mind and for three whole years gave himself over to [a regime of] strict abstinence exercising himself day and night in prayers and psalms. Still pursuing his heavenly journey with all the power of his soul, he gave up his spirit at last into the choirs of the holy angels.

(cf. VIII.64) After Paphnutius had given up to the Lord this musician who had been blessed with the practice of every virtue, he himself worked even harder at his disciplines. And again he asked the Lord if there was anyone else like him upon the earth. And again the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, "Know that the headman of the next village is similar to you." On hearing this Paphnutius hurried to him without delay and knocked on his door. Now this man always welcomed guests, and he greeted Paphnutius, took him inside, washed his feet and set food before him, all in the most friendly manner. As he was eating Paphnutius began to question his host about his deeds, his disciplines, his rules of life. He replied in humility that he preferred to hide his good deeds rather than publish them, but Paphnutius insisted, saying that it had been revealed to him that he was equal in worth to any monk. This made him feel even more humble still. "I am not aware of anything particularly good in anything I do," he said. "But since the Word of God from whom nothing is hidden has come to you I cannot remain silent. So I will tell you of what I do in the midst of the many situations in which I am placed. No one knows that for the last thirty years my wife and I have agreed to be continent. She had given me three sons, they were the only reason for having sex with her, I have not been with anyone else, nor she either. I have always received guests, since no one before me seems to have been willing to give a welcome to visiting pilgrims. I have never let anyone go from my house without giving them food for their journey. I have never neglected the poor, but have contributed to their needs. When administering justice I have never practised

any favouritism even to my own sons. The profits due to someone else's labour has never found its way into my house. Where I have seen strife I have spared no effort in trying to bring peace to the quarrelling parties. No one has ever been able to bring any reproach against my servants, my flocks have never caused any harm to my neighbour's produce, I have never stopped anyone from producing food in my district, I have never chosen the best bit of new ploughed land for myself leaving the less fertile to others, as far as I could I have never let the strong oppress the weak, I have tried throughout my life not to grieve anyone. If I have been involved in any lawsuit I have not condemned anyone out of hand, but have tried to bring adversaries to agreement. This, now, by the grace of God has been my way of life up to the present."

Listening to this the blessed Paphnutius kissed him and blessed him saying, "'May the Lord bless you out of Sion, and may you see the good things of Jerusalem' (Psalms 128.5). You have done all these things thoroughly and properly. One thing is lacking, the greatest good of all, that putting all else aside you seek that true wisdom of God, and search for those hidden treasures which you cannot arrive at in any other way than by denying yourself, and taking up your cross and following Christ" (Matthew.16.24). On hearing this he did not wait even to set things in order in his house, but followed the man of God to the desert.

When they came to the river there was no ferry to be found, but Paphnutius bade him walk into the water with him, even though it was quite deep at that place. They crossed over easily, the water coming scarcely up to their waist. When they arrived at the desert Paphnutius put him in a cell at a little distance from the monastery and gave him a spiritual rule to live by. He instructed him in the practice of striving after perfection, and initiated him into the more advanced levels of wisdom (*scientiae secretiora*). While giving him all this instruction he devoted himself anew to even greater efforts, because he judged that the works of this person who had been busied with the affairs of the world had been even more demanding. "For," he said, "if people living in the world can do such good works, how much more should we not endeavour to surpass them in works of abstinence, both in quantity and in quality."

After spending some time in this programme, Paphnutius had drawn him so far into the knowledge of wisdom (*scientiae perfectionem*) that he had already become perfect in what he was doing. And one day as Paphnutius sat in his cell he saw that man's soul taken up to heaven amidst choirs of angels singing

"Blessed is he whom thou hast chosen and taken. He shall dwell in thy tabernacles." (Psalms 65.5). Paphnutius then continued in fasting and prayer, giving himself up to even greater efforts towards perfection.

Once more he prayed to the Lord to show him someone like himself. And again a voice from heaven replied, "You are like a certain merchant (cf. VIII.65) whom you will see approaching. Get up quickly and run to meet him. He is a man who I judge to be like you." Paphnutius went out without delay and went to meet this merchant from Alexandria, who was coming back from the Thebaid with three ships and a profit of twenty thousand solidi. And because he was a religious man always trying to do good works he had loaded his sons up with three bags of vegetables to take to the monastery of the man of God. Hence his meeting with Paphnutius, who as soon as he came into view cried out, "What is that you have done, that you are most precious and worthy in the sight of God? What sort of work have you been doing on earth such that your lot and fellowship has risen into the realms of heaven?

Relinquish all these things into the hands of those who are of the earth and whose thoughts are earthy, and become a merchant of the kingdom of God to which you are called. Follow the Saviour, to whose presence in a short while you must be taken up." And without any hesitation he instructed his sons to disburse any superfluous profits to the poor, even though he had already distributed a great deal himself. But he followed the holy Paphnutius to the desert, where he was installed in the same place as those who had earlier been taken to the Lord. He was instructed in the same way, and persevered in spiritual exercises, and in the study of divine wisdom. After a short while he too was taken up into the congregation of the righteous.

Paphnutius himself continued to develop his life to the highest degree of abstinence and spiritual labours, and not long after this an angel of the Lord came to him saying; "Come, O blessed one, and enter into those eternal tabernacles which are your just deserts. Behold the prophets, who take you up into their choirs. You have not been told about this before lest you become conceited and receive only damnation as a reward for your labours." He was given one more day in the flesh after this while certain presbyters came to visit him, to whom he made known all that the Lord had revealed to him. He told them that no one living in the world should be given up for lost, even if they had been robbers, or actors, or farmers, or married, or merchants seeking profits. For in every sphere of life there were souls pleasing to God, doing in secret works with which God was well pleased. Whence it was obvious that it

was not an outward profession of life or the wearing of a habit which was pleasing to God so much as sincerity and integrity of mind, and honesty in all one's dealings. He expressed a few similar sentiments on each of these topics and gave up his spirit. And the presbyter and all the brethren present plainly saw him taken up by the angels singing hymns and praising God all together.

Chapter XVII

THE MONASTERY OF ABBA ISIDORE (cf. VIII.71)

In the Thebaid we also saw the monastery of Isidore, a large enclosed space surrounded by a wall, within which could be seen a large number of buildings in which the monks lived. Inside there were several wells, irrigated gardens and sufficient apple trees and trees of paradise to supply all needs, in fact more than enough. This ensured that none of the monks living there had any need to go outside to get anything that was needed. At the gate sat a senior, chosen out of the leading men for his gravity, whose task it was to acquaint newcomers with this rule that once they were in they would not be allowed to come out. This was an unbreakable law for those who decided to go in, but the wonderful thing was that it was not the obligation of law that kept them in but the blessedness and perfection of their lives. This old gatekeeper lived in a guest house of which he was in charge and where he gave hospitality to visitors and showed them every possible human kindness. So when we were received by him we were not allowed to go inside, though we did learn from him what kind of blessed life was lived there. He said that there were only two of the senior men who had liberty to go in and out, with the responsibility for selling articles which the men had made and for bringing in anything which was needed. All the others lived in peace and quietness giving themselves to prayers and religious exercises, and cultivating the virtues of the soul of which they all showed evidence. And the most wonderful sign of all was that none of them ever fell ill. Even when they approached the end of their lives they were completely aware of it beforehand. Each of them would warn the other brothers of his departure and wish everyone farewell, whereupon he would lie down and give up his spirit with joy.

Chapter XVIII

SERAPION THE PRESBYTER (cf. VIII.76)

In the region of Arsinoe we saw the presbyter Serapion who was the father of many monasteries. Many and diverse were the monasteries under his care, containing about ten thousand monks. They all worked together, especially in harvest time, to gather up the fruit of their manual labour, out of which they brought the greater share to the aforesaid father for distribution to the poor. This was the custom not only of them but of nearly all the Egyptian monks, that at harvest time they would hire out their labour to harvesting, as a result of which each one would collect eighty measures of grain, more or less, and give the greater part of it to the poor. This not only fed the poor of that region but ships laden with grain sailed to Alexandria in order to extend the benefit to those in prison, or pilgrims, or other needy people. For there were not enough poor people within Egypt to absorb the benefit and fruit of their almsgiving. In the regions of Memphis and Babylon we saw great numbers of monks among whom we observed various gifts of grace and examples of virtue. There is a tradition that these places, which they call the treasures of Joseph, are where Joseph is said to have stored up the grain. Others say it is the Pyramids themselves in which it is thought that the grain was collected.

Chapter XIX

APOLLONIUS, MONK AND MARTYR (cf. VIII.66)

The elders among them related a tradition that at the time of the persecutions there had been a monk called Apollonius who as the culmination of a magnificent life among the brothers had been ordained deacon. During the persecutions he took it upon himself to go around the brothers and encourage them to martyrdom. He was eventually arrested himself and cast into prison where a great crowd of the gentiles came to mock him and cry out against him with many blasphemous and impious words.

A man called Philemon was one of them, a famous flute-player, greatly loved by the people. He piled insults upon Apollonius, calling him impious, wicked, deceiver of humanity, worthy of being held in abhorrence by all. After suffering all this and many other even worse insults, Apollonius replied, "May the Lord have mercy on you, my son, and impute to you as a sin nothing of what you have said." These words cut Philemon to the quick. In his own mind he felt the force of something that was more than human, so much so that he instantly declared himself to be a Christian. And immediately he rushed from there to the judge's seat and shouted out in the hearing of all the people, "You

wicked judge. It is unjust to punish these religious men who are loved of God, for Christians neither do nor teach anything evil." At first the judge thought he was joking, seeing that he was a [well known] man of that place. But when he saw that he was persisting and carrying on without any let up he said, "You are mad, Philemon. You have had a sudden brainstorm."

He replied, "I am not mad. It is you who are unjust and crazy to persecute unjustly so many just men. For I am a Christian, a most noble sort of human being." The judge then in the presence of all the people began with many persuasive arguments to try and get him to recant from that which he saw he had become. But Philemon remained obdurate, so the judge threatened him with all kinds of tortures. He realised that this change had come about through the words of Apollonius, so he seized him and subjected him to very severe tortures, making a very big issue out of the crime of being a deceiver.

Apollonius said, "I would to heaven that you, O judge, and all those present who hear what I am saying, would follow what you call this error of mine." The judge immediately ordered that he and Philemon should be thrown into the flames in the sight of all the people. From the midst of the fire the blessed Apollonius cried out to the Lord so that all could hear, "'Deliver not up to the beasts, O Lord, the souls that confess thee' (Psalms 74. 19), 'but show us clearly thy salvation'." (Psalms 84.8.) When Apollonius had spoken to the Lord so that all the people and the judge could hear, a rain cloud suddenly surrounded them and put out the rising flames of fire. The judge and people were stupefied, and began to cry out with one voice, "Great is the one God of the Christians, he alone is immortal."

Chapter XIX (continued) Apollonius, Book II

(Diuoscurus, the Monks of Nitria, the Cellia, Ammon, Didymus, Cronius, Origen, Evagrius

Macarius the Greater of Egypt, Macarius the Lesser of Alexandria, all further down this page)

The news of this came to the ears of the prefect of Alexandria, and made him ferociously angry. He picked out some of the most cruel and savage members of his entourage, more like beasts than men, and sent them with orders to bring bound to Alexandria the judge who had believed as a result of the divine miracle and those through whom the power of God had been shown forth. But while they were all bound and being taken to Alexandria the grace of God appeared in what Apollonius said, for he began to teach faith in God to those who had bound them and were taking them. Believing in the mercy of God they wholeheartedly accepted faith in God, and appeared before the judge as professing Christians along with those whom they brought in bonds. When the prefect saw that they were steadfastly persisting in believing in God he ordered that they should all alike be cast into the sea, not knowing in his arrogance what he was doing. For them this was not a death but a Baptism. But their bodies, doubtless by the providence of God, were washed up on the shore, whole and cleansed. People came to give them a decent funeral, recovered the bodies, and took them to be gathered together in one sepulchre as a final resting place. From that time to this they have performed many signs and wonders to the astonishment of all. For they take up the vows and prayers of all, and bring our petitions to fruition in the place where the Lord deigns to lead us and fulfil the vows and petitions of us all.

Chapter XX

DIOSCUROS THE PRESBYTER (cf. VIII.68)

We saw another venerable father in the Thebaid, a presbyter called Dioscuros, who had a monastery of about a hundred monks. We noted that when people came to the Sacrament he took particular care and diligence to ensure that no one who came should bring with him any stain on his conscience. He even warned about those things which happen to men when they are asleep, either because of fantasies about women appearing to them or because of the natural overflow of bodily fluids. "If such things happen without any accompanying fantasies about women," he said, "there is no sin in it. For once these fluids have been produced in the body and filled up their proper receptacle they have to be expelled by their own proper channels, and thus far it does not occasion sin. But accompanied by images of women and the pleasures of the flesh they are a sure sign that there is a desire in their souls to be taken up with such

illicit thoughts. Monks therefore should drive all kinds of images like this from their minds, nor let their senses be aroused by these blandishments of the devil, otherwise there would not seem to be any difference between them and those who live in the world. But the monk should labour at taming and overcoming the natural man with much abstemious fasting and many prayers and reduce the stain of his [nocturnal] flux by even more prayer and fasting. Furthermore, if doctors recommend to those who live luxuriously that they should abstain, for the good of their bodily health, from all things harmful, why should not a monk do much more than that in seeking health of soul and spirit.

Chapter XXI

THE MONKS LIVING IN NITRIA (cf. VIII.69)

We arrived at Nitria, that most famous place among all the monasteries of Egypt, about forty miles from Alexandria. It takes its name from the nearby village where natron [native sesquicarbonate of soda, or soap] is produced. The name of Nitria, by the foresight of divine providence, I believe, carries with it the idea that however sordid the sins of men they could be cleansed and washed away in this place as if by natron. Here, there are not much fewer than fifty dwellings near each other under the rule of a single father. Some have many occupants, some just a few, quite a lot only one, but although their dwellings are all separate, nevertheless they are all inseparably joined in faith and charity.

As we approached the place they sensed that pilgrim brothers were drawing near, and immediately like a swarm of bees they all rushed out of their cells and came to meet us, vying with each other in the happiness and hastiness of their approach. Several of them carried with them jugs of water and bread, for the prophet had rebuked some people saying; "You did not go out to meet the children of Israel in the way with bread and water" (2 Esdras.13). So, having greeted us, they first of all took us to the church, singing psalms, then washed our feet, with each one of them wiping our feet with the strips of linen which they use, ostensibly to lighten the labour of our journey, but in reality embodying the mystical tradition of bringing balm to the troubles of human life.

What can I say now about their humanity, their work, their charity, since all of them beckoned us towards their own cells, not only fulfilling the obligation of

hospitality, but also showing us the humility and gentleness and other virtues of this sort which are learned by people thus separated from the world. Their gifts of grace were various, the doctrine [by which they lived] was one and the same for all. Nowhere else had we seen such charity flourishing, nowhere such acts of compassion and eager hospitality, nowhere else such knowledge and thoughts about the divine Scriptures, nowhere else so many methods of gaining knowledge of the divine (*scientiae divinae tanta exercitia*), that you might well believe that nearly every one of them was an expert in divine wisdom.

Chapter XXII

THE PLACE CALLED CELLIA (cf. VIII.69)

There is another place about ten miles further on into the desert called Cellia, because of the number of cells scattered about in the wilderness. To this place, having first been taught in the Thebaid, fled those who wished to cast all care aside and live a more secluded life. In this empty desert there was so much space between each of the cells that none of them could either see or hear each other. Living one to a cell there is a great silence and quietness among them. Only on Saturdays and Sundays do they come together in church, where it seems to them as if they are restored to heaven. If anyone is missing they realise that he is prevented by some bodily ailment, and each one visits with something of his own which might be welcome to one who is sick - not all at once, but they all take turns. There is no other reason for anyone to dare break into the silence of his neighbour, unless it might be for someone to be able to give a word of instruction, and like athletes in the arena anoint each other with the oil of a consoling word. Some of them come from three or four miles away from the church, so spaced out are their cells from each other. But so great is the charity among them, and so thoughtful are they for each other and for all the brothers, that they are held in admiration and as an example for all. As soon as they know that anyone else wants to come and live with them, each of them is quite willing to offer his own cell.

Chapter XXIII

AMMON (cf. VIII.12)

Among them we saw another venerable father called Ammon, upon whom

God had conferred a great fulness of spiritual gifts. If you could see the grace of charity in him you would say that you had never seen anything like it anywhere. And if you were thinking about his humility you would have to say that he was more accomplished by a long way in this gift than anyone else. And again, if you considered how he excelled all others in each one of the virtues of patience, gentleness, kindness, you would not know how to find anyone better than him. God had conferred upon him such gifts of wisdom and knowledge that you would believe that no one out of all the fathers had penetrated so deeply into the realms of every kind of knowledge there is. Everybody who met him said that no one had been taken up so closely into the wisdom of God. He had two of his brothers with him, Eusebius and Euthymius. His older brother Dioscuros had been elevated to the episcopate. They were not only brothers according to the flesh, but brothers in their style of life and total nobility of soul. Like a nurse caring for her children, they were a source of strength to all the brothers living in that place, instructing each one of them, and striving to lead them to the highest peak of perfection. We found that this man of God, Ammon, had a cell (monasterium) with a wall round it, which was very easy to construct out of rough building blocks in these parts. Inside it was everything he needed - he had even dug a well. There was once a brother who came to him seeking salvation and who asked him if there was an empty cell anywhere where he could live.

"I will find out", he said. "But until I do, stay here in this cell. I am going out now to see to what you want." And he left his cell and everything in it and found a tiny little cell quite some distance away and set himself up in it. The newly arrived brother did not even realise that Ammon had given him his own cell and everything in it.

But if several people arrived at once seeking salvation he would gather the brothers together and quickly give them instructions so that a new cell would be built on that very day. And when a sufficient number of cells had been built to cater for the needs of them all, he took those who would be living in them to the church as if to provide them with refreshment, but while they were in there each one of the brothers would bring necessary items from their own cells and put them in the new ones. As a result of this charitable exercise there was no lack of either tools or food, and it wasn't at all obvious who had given what. At vespers time, those for whom the cells had been prepared came back and found them fitted out with everything necessary for living in. The cells had been so built that there was nothing lacking.

Chapter XXIV

DIDYMUS

Among the seniors we also met a good man called Didymus in whom were many graces from God, as his face showed. This man got rid of insects which lie on the earth in wait for the feet, such as scorpions, horned caterpillars (? cerastas quos cornutas vocant) and snakes which flourish in these places because of the heat of the sun, so that no one was ever stung by them.

Chapter XXV

CRONIUS (cf. VIII. 25&89)

We also met among them another father of great age called Cronius, still going in spite of his marvellous age. His lifespan was about to be accomplished, for he was a hundred and ten years old. He was a survivor from the disciples of Antony and among the many other virtues of his soul we were aware of his great grace of humility.

Chapter XXVI

ORIGEN (cf. VIII.10)

There was another of Antony's disciples called Origen, a magnificent man of great discretion, whose sermons and talks about the virtues of his great master, the man of God, edified all who heard. He stirred people up so powerfully that they could almost see the things he talked about before their naked eyes.

Chapter XXVII

EVAGRIUS (VIII.86)

We saw there this most wise man, wonderful in all sorts of ways, called Evagrius. Among the other virtues of his soul he had been given the grace of discernment of spirits (1 Cor.12.10) and the renewal of the mind (Ephesians 4.23) as the Apostle teaches. There was no other among the brothers who had attained to such a great and subtle spiritual knowledge. He had amassed an impressive store of learning through his experience in so many matters, and not least through the grace of God, but much of his learning had come to him

through having been a disciple for a long time of the blessed Macarius, a most famous man by the grace of God, outstanding in signs and virtues, as everyone knows.

His abstinence was incredible, and he gave instruction to the brothers about it. If they were really serious about mortifying the body and driving away demonic phantasies he would encourage them to be very sparing in the amount of water they drank. "For," he said, "If you flood the body with a lot of water you generate even more phantasies, and offer a bigger space to the demons." He taught many other things about abstinence very insistently. For himself he used water very sparingly and hardly even ate much bread. The other brothers in that place were quite content with bread and salt. In all that great number of people you could hardly find anyone who even used a little oil. Many of them did not lie down to sleep, but sat and meditated, as I do believe, on the divine Word.

Chapter XXVIII

THE TWO MACARII. AND FIRST, MACARIUS THE GREATER, OF EGYPT (cf. VIII. 19 & 20)

Some of the fathers living there told us how the two Macarii had been shining lights of heaven in those parts. One of them had been a disciple of Antony and was known as "from Egypt", the other "from Alexandria". Their spiritual virtues and their magnificent graces from heaven were consistent with their names ["Macarios" (Greek) means "blessed"]. Both Macarii were equally distinguished in the practice of abstinence and in spiritual virtues, but the former was held to be superior only for having inherited the graces and virtues of the blessed Antony.

(The following incident not in Book VIII but appears in III.41) They said that once there had been a murder committed in a neighbouring village and a certain innocent person had been accused of it. The man thus falsely accused fled to Macarius' cell. His accusers followed after, saying that they would not be safe unless this murderer were arrested and handed over to the law. The accused however swore on the Sacrament that he was not guilty of that person's blood. The argument went back and forth for some time, until the holy Macarius asked where the murdered person was buried. When they had told him he hastened to the grave along with all the accusers, and with bent knee called on the name of Christ. "Let the Lord now show us," he said to

those present, "whether this man you accuse is guilty." And raising his voice, he called upon the dead man by name. There came an answer from the tomb, and Macarius said, "I conjure you, by the faith of Christ, that you testify whether you were killed by this man who is being accused of it." From the sepulchre came a clear voice saying, "I was not killed by him."

Stupefied, everyone threw themselves to the ground, prostrate at Macarius' feet. Then they began to ask him to enquire who the murderer was. "I will not ask that," he replied. "Sufficient for me that the innocent is freed. It is not for me to produce the guilty one."

There was also a tale about another kind of miracle. (cf. VIII.19). It appeared to people that the daughter of a householder (*paterfamilias*) in a nearby town had been turned by the spells of a magician into a horse. They really thought she was a mare and not a little girl. They brought her to Macarius.

"What do you want?" he asked

"This mare that you see," said his parents, "is a little girl, our virgin daughter, but wicked men have turned her by magic arts into this animal which you see before you. We are asking you to pray to the Lord to change her back to what she was."

"All I can see is that it is a girl you are showing me," he said, "with nothing of the beast about her at all. What you are telling me is not in her body but in the eyes of those who are looking at her. Demonic phantasies, not true."

He took her and her parents into his cell and on bended knees began to pray to the Lord, and he asked the parents to pray to the Lord with him. After which he anointed her with oil in the name of the Lord, which resulted in all the false vision being destroyed, so that the girl was seen by all just as she used to be.

Another small girl was brought to him whose private parts (*obscoena corporis*) were diseased through and through. The flesh was so eaten away that the inside of her body was laid bare, with a great number of maggots spewing out from there. People could hardly bear to come near her because of the horrible smell. He took pity on this suffering virgin when she was brought to him by her parents and laid outside his door.

"Be of good cheer, my daughter," he said. The Lord intends this for your salvation not for your damnation. It was foreseen that your health would save you from danger." And after a session of prayer which lasted for seven days, he blessed some oil and anointed her members, and so restored her to health that she no longer had the appearance or the body of a woman, but took her place among the male sex, freed from the hindrance of being a woman or even

of being suspected to be a woman. (absque femineae suspicionis obstaculo)
They told us also how he was visited by a certain heretic of the Hieracitus persuasion, a class of heresy prevalent in Egypt. He was upsetting several of the brothers in the desert by his persistent arguments, and even dared to make known his false faith to Macarius himself. Macarius resisted him and contradicted him, but this man ridiculed Macarius' simple words with powerful arguments. The old man saw that the brothers' faith was in danger, so he said, "What is the use of bandying words about to the repulsion of our audience? Let us go to the graves of those who have gone before us in the Lord, and let each of us pray to the Lord to raise up the dead out of the tomb, so that all may know whose faith it is that is approved by God." The brothers all approved of this idea. They went to the graves and Macarius urged the Hieracitus heretic to call up the dead in the name of the Lord. "No, you go first," he replied. "It was your idea in the first place." Macarius prostrated himself in prayer before the Lord, and after he had prayed for some time he lifted up his eyes and said to the Lord, "Tell us, O Lord, which of us two holds the true faith by raising up this dead person." And he called upon the name of the person who had recently been buried there. A voice was heard coming from the mound of earth, and the brothers quickly came, removed the earth, and lifted the dead person out of the grave. They unloosed the grave garments tied around him and showed that he was really alive. Seeing this, the Hieracitan fled in terror. And the brothers drove him and all his followers out beyond the borders of that land. Many other things are related about him too numerous to write down, but from these few examples some idea can be gained of his other deeds.

Chapter XXIX

MACARIUS THE LESSER, OF ALEXANDRIA (cf. VIII. 19 & 20)

The other holy Macarius also became magnificent in his virtues. Much has been written about him by others, which suffices to show how the greatness of his virtues should be cherished, so it would be better for us not to deal with those matters.

They say that above all others he was a great lover of the desert. In fact he penetrated so far into the most distant and inaccessible places of the desert that he came across a certain place which had been set up at the farthest boundaries where fruit bearing trees had been planted and which was replete

with all kinds of good things. It is said that he found two brothers there, and he asked them if they would let him bring monks with him to settle there, since it was a pleasant place, with an abundance of everything necessary. They replied, "You can't bring a lot of people here, lest they be deceived by demons as they pass through the desert. For the desert holds many demons and monsters, and anyone not used to their cunning wiles would not be able to withstand them."

He went back to his own brothers and told them what a favourable place it was, so that many of them became quite eager to go there with him. But when the rest of the fathers realised that their minds were all agitated, they discouraged them with some very sound advice. "This place is supposed to have been set up by Jannes and Mambres (2 Tim 3.8 & Ex.7.11), and if that is true you need not believe anything other than that it has been prepared by the work of the devil for our deception. If it is indeed pleasant and abundant, as alleged, what can we hope for in the world to come if we are to enjoy sweet things here?" That, and other arguments of this sort, damped down the enthusiasm of the younger brothers.

Chapter XXIX (continued). Macarius of Alexandria, Book II

The place where Macarius himself lived, however, is called Scythia, situated in a vast empty desert, a night and a day's journey from the monasteries of Nitria. There is no marked road to it, no landmarks or other earthly signs to be noted as pointing to it, you can only travel there by the stars in their courses. You find water only rarely, and when you do it has rather a bitter smell, somewhat bituminous, although safe to drink. There are men there who have been brought to a high stage of perfection (for those living there could not endure such a terrible place unless their way of life were perfect and they had great perseverance). They practise great charity among themselves and show the greatest consideration towards everyone who manages to visit them.

It is said that Macarius was once given a bunch of grapes, and "seeking not his own but that which is another's" (1 Cor.10.24), he gave them out of charity to another brother who he thought was somewhat infirm. This brother gave thanks to God for this brotherly kindness, and thinking no less of his neighbour than of himself gave them to someone else, and this person again to

another, and thus the bunch of grapes was handed on throughout all the cells which were scattered at great distances from each other through the desert, with no one any the wiser about who had first sent them. In the end they came back to the sender, and Macarius gave great thanks that he had been a witness of such restraint and charity among the brothers, and increased in severity the practices of his own spiritual life.

The following story, which they had heard from his own mouth, further strengthened our belief in him. A demon beat on the door of his cell one night, saying, "Get up, Macarius, and let us go to the meeting (collecta) where the brothers are gathered together for vigils."

"Liar and enemy of truth!" said Macarius, who was too full of the grace of God to be deceived, and who knew the devil was lying. "What fellowship and companionship do you have with the meetings and gatherings of the saints?"

"Didn't you know, Macarius," he replied, "that no meeting or gathering of monks goes on without us? Come with me, and you will see what we do."

"The Lord rebuke thee (Jude 9), you unclean spirit," he said, and turning to prayer he begged the Lord to show him whether what the devil was boasting about was true.

He then went to the meeting where the brothers were celebrating vigils, and again in prayer he begged the Lord to show him the truth of the matter. And behold, throughout the whole church he saw little Ethiopian boys darting about hither and thither as if carried about on wings.

Now it is the custom in these services for all to sit while one person says a psalm, with the others listening, then joining together in a responsory. The little Ethiopian boys were tormenting those sitting down by pressing two fingers against their eyelids, whereupon they started dozing. By putting a finger in anyone's mouth they immediately made him yawn. When the brothers prostrated themselves for prayer after the psalm they did not cease running around each of them, appearing like a woman to one monk lying in prayer, like builders carrying things to another, or performing various other antics. And whatever shape the teasing demons took got mixed up with the thoughts in the hearts of those praying. Some of them however, when they started these tactics, were suddenly thrown backwards as if by some superior force, and hardly dared to stand upright or cross over to someone else. But others danced about on the necks and backs of the weaker brothers because they were not intent on their prayers.

Macarius groaned deeply at this sight, and shed tears before the Lord. "Look,

O Lord,' he said, 'and do not keep silent nor show leniency, O God. (Psalms 83.1). Arise O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered and flee before your face' (Psalms 68.1), for our hearts are filled with illusion." After the prayers, in order to make the truth clear, he spoke to each one of the brothers before whose faces he had seen the demons dancing about in various guises and shapes. He asked them if they had been thinking during the prayers of building works, or going on a journey or any other of the diverse images which he had seen the demons presenting to each person. And each of them admitted that the thoughts of their hearts had been exactly as he said. And so he established that all the vain and unnecessary thoughts of each person during both the psalmody and the prayers had come about through the wiles of the demons, and that the disgusting Ethiopians had been driven back by those who kept custody of their hearts. The mind united to God will admit nothing unfitting or superfluous, especially if intent upon God during the time of prayer.

He saw something even more awesome when the brothers were receiving the Sacrament. As they held out their hands to receive, Ethiopians rushed in to put hot burning coals into the hands of some of them, while the Body which ostensibly was given by the hands of the priests returned to the altar. But the demons drew back and fled in great fear from some of the others, aided as they were by their superior merits. And he saw that an angel of the Lord assisted at the altar, and with his own hand overruled the hands of the priests. And this grace from God remained with him always, that he knew what stray thoughts the demons were putting into anyone's heart at the time of psalmody and prayer during vigils, nor was the unworthiness or the merits of those approaching the altar hidden from him.

On another occasion both Macarii, the men of God, together with some brothers were on a journey in order to visit someone. They took a ferry to cross the river, and in the ship with them were some tribunes, very rich and powerful men, who had with them several horses and grooms and many servants. One of the tribunes noticed the monks sitting in the lower part of the ship, in rough clothing and uncluttered by any possessions.

"Blessed are you," he said, "who despise this world and ask for nothing from it but the meanest clothing and a little food."

"What you say is true," said one of the Macarii. "Those who follow the Lord despise (illudunt) the world, and we are sorry for you, for on the contrary it is the world which deceives (illudit) you."

The Tribune was greatly moved by this reply, and as soon as he got home gave up everything he possessed, divided it up and gave it to the poor. He began to follow God and embraced the monastic life.

But there are many other marvellous things, as we have said, on the subject of the deeds of Macarius of Alexandria. Anyone looking for them will find many of them in the eleventh book of the Ecclesiastical History.

Chapter XXX

AMMON, THE FIRST MONK OF NITRIA

(cf. VIII. 8)

The first monastic dwellings in Nitria are attributed to a certain Ammon, whose soul the blessed Antony saw carried up out of the body to heaven, according to the book which describes Antony's life. (Book I, Vita Antonii, cap. 32). This Ammon was born of wealthy and generous parents, who arranged a marriage for him even though he did not want it. He was unable to defy his parent's will and accepted a virgin bride, but when they were left together in the marriage bedroom, he took advantage of the secret silence of the bedchamber to speak to the girl on the subject of chastity, and began to urge her to preserve her virginity.

"Corruption breeds corruption," he said, "but incorruption looks for incorruption. So therefore it would be much better for us to persevere in virginity, than for each of us to be corrupted by the other."

The girl agreed, and they kept secret the treasure of their incorruption. Content with the witness of God alone, they lived for a long time joined together more in spirit than in flesh and blood, until when the parents of both were dead he went off to a nearby desert place. She stayed in the house, where after a short time she gathered about her a great number of virgins, just as he gathered a congregation of monks.

While he was still hidden away in the desert a young man with rabies, because of having been bitten by a rabid dog, was brought to him bound in chains. His parents were with him beseeching Ammon to help.

"Why are you people bothering me?" he asked. "What you are asking is beyond what I am worthy of doing. But what I can tell you is that his health lies in your own hands. Give back the ox that you have stolen and your son will be restored to you whole." And it was forcibly brought home to them that their secret deeds were not hidden from the man of God. So they rejoiced that

this means of healing was open to them and without delay they made good the theft. And the man of God prayed, and the young man was restored to full health.

On another occasion, some people came to him, whose intentions he wished to test. So he told them he needed a dolium (i.e. a large globular water jar) in which he could store water for visitors. They promised to bring one, but then one of them became quite worried that he would endanger his camel if he were to place such a heavy load on it.

"You take it, if you can or if you want to," he said. "I am thinking of my camel lest it die."

"But I haven't got a camel, as you know," said the other. "I've only got an ass. What makes you think an ass can carry what a camel can't?"

"Do what you like. It's your business," he replied. "But I am not going to put my camel at risk."

"Right," said the other. "I will put this heavy load on my ass which you say is too much for your camel, and may the merits of the man of God make possible that which is impossible."

So he loaded the dolium on to the ass and led it to the monastery of the man of God, with the ass not feeling as if he were carrying anything very heavy at all.

"You've done well to load the dolium on the ass," said Ammon when he saw him, "for your friend's camel has died."

And when he went back home he found that it was even as the servant of God had said.

And the Lord did many other signs through him. When he wanted to cross the river Nile, it is said that he was too embarrassed to take his clothes off, but that by the power of God he was suddenly translated to the other side. The blessed Antony greatly admired his way of life and commemorates his uprightness and the virtues of his soul.

Chapter XXXI

PAUL THE SIMPLE (cf. VIII. 28)

Among the disciples of the blessed Antony was one Paul, nicknamed the Simple. His first conversion happened like this:

With his own eyes he saw his wife committing adultery one day, so without saying anything to anyone he left home, overwhelmed with sadness in his

heart, and fled to the desert. After wandering about there in distress, he came at last to Antony's monastery. He took comfort from this fortunate chance, because of what he had heard about the place. He met Antony and asked him how he could find a path to salvation. Antony sensed that he was a simple sort of man, and told him that if he would abide by the instructions that he would give him he would be saved. He replied that he would do whatever he was asked. To test this promise Antony said to him as he stood outside the door of his cell, "Wait here and pray until I come back again". He then went inside and stayed there for a day and a night, from time to time watching Paul secretly through the window. He saw that Paul prayed without ceasing, never moving at all, just standing there in the heat of the day and the dew of the night, so intent on what he had been told that he did not move from the spot in the slightest degree.

When Antony came out the next day he took him in and began to teach him about each sort of manual work customary in solitude. Work with the hands took care of the needs of the body, while the thoughts of the heart and the intention of the mind made room for what came from God. He told him to take food in the evening, but warned him never to satisfy his hunger completely, and to be particularly sparing in what he drank, for mental phantasies were encouraged just as much by too much water as bodily heat by too much wine. And when he had fully instructed him how to conduct himself properly in all things he built a cell for him not far away, that is, at a distance of three miles, where he ordered him to carry on doing what he learned. He visited him from time to time, and was delighted to see that he was keeping a firm grasp on what he had been taught, persevering wholeheartedly in his solitude.

One day some senior brothers came to visit the holy Antony, men very advanced in spirituality, and Paul happened to be visiting at the same time. There was a long conversation on deep and mystical subjects, and much discussion about the Prophets and the Saviour.

"Did Christ come before the Prophets?" asked Paul out of the simplicity of his heart. Antony was rather embarrassed for him for asking such a stupid question.

"Get away with you, say no more," he said, in the indulgent sort of tone of voice reserved for idiots.

But Paul believed that everything Antony told him to do was as it were a command from God, and obeyed immediately. He went back to his cell and

accepted this command and began to keep absolute silence, allowing not a word to pass his lips. When Antony realised this he wondered why he was behaving like this, for he was quite unaware that he had given Paul any command. He ordered him to speak, and tell him why he was keeping silent. "You, father," said Paul, "told me to get away and say no more."

Antony was amazed that Paul was taking literally the words which he had quite carelessly said

"This man puts us all to shame," he said. "For we fail to hear what is spoken to us from heaven, whereas he observes whatever comes out of our mouth."

Antony was determined to teach him a great deal about obedience, and was accustomed to give orders which seemed quite unreasonable and purposeless, in order to train his mind in the habit of obedience. He told him once to draw water from the well and pour it out on the ground, he told him to unravel baskets and then weave them together again, to tear his garment apart then sew it up again, then take it apart again. In all such practices, Antony bears witness that he remained totally receptive. He learned not to contradict in any of those unreasonable things which he was commanded to do, and so he was brought on by all these things and soon arrived at a state of perfection.

Antony used him as an example. "If anyone wishes to come quickly to perfection," he taught, "he should not be his own master nor obey his own will even if he thought he was in the right. According to the command of the Saviour he should take note that above all else he should deny himself and renounce his own will (Matthew 16.24), for the Saviour himself said, 'I came not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.' (John 6.38) The will of Christ, of course, could not be in any way different from the will of the Father, for he who came to teach obedience would not have been obedient himself if he had merely been doing his own will. How much more, then, will we be judged disobedient if we do our own will? Therefore this Paul is an example for us, for by the merits of his simplicity and obedience he has attained to such a height of spiritual grace that the Lord has shown forth a great number of much more powerful virtues in him than in Antony."

Because of the abundance of his gifts, many people came from all parts to be cured by him. Antony feared that the attentions of such a large crowd would overwhelm him, so he sent him deeper into the desert where it was not so easy for anyone to get to him, and Antony would thus be more able to deal with visitors. But if Antony himself could not cure anyone he would then send them to Paul as being more abundantly supplied with healing gifts. And Paul

cured them.

The simplicity of his faithfulness was great in the eyes of the Lord. They say that once someone suffering from rabies was biting like a dog everyone who was trying to come and see Paul. He was brought to Paul, who persisted in prayer that the demon troubling him should be put to flight. And after a while, when there did not seem to be anything happening, he is said to have cried out indignantly, like a small child, to the Lord, "If you don't cure him, I am not going to get anything to eat today!" And immediately God granted him his request, as if he were a favourite child. The rabies was instantly cured.

Chapter XXXII

PIAMMON THE PRESBYTER (cf. VIII. 72)

It would not seem to me to be right to pass over in silence those who live in the desert near the Parthian Sea, near the town called Diolcus. There we met a certain admirable presbyter called Piammon, a man of exceptional humility and benevolence, who had a gift of seeing. For once when he was offering the sacrifice to the Lord he saw an angel of the Lord standing by the altar writing down the names of the monks as they approached the altar, but there were some whose names he did not write down. Piammon took a careful note of those whose names were not written down, and after the mysteries were completed he called each one of them to him and demanded to know what secret sins they were guilty of. He found that each one of them was guilty of a mortal sin and urged them to do penance. Along with them he prostrated himself day and night before the Lord, as if he himself was guilty of their sins. He wept, and continued with them in penitence and tears, until once more he saw the angel standing there writing down the names of those going up to Communion. And after writing down all the names, he called out the names of the sinners, inviting them to be reconciled once more with the altar. Seeing this, Piammon knew that their penance had been accepted, and restored them to the altar with great joy.

They say also that once he was so beaten by the demons that he could not stand or move. So when Sunday came with the need to offer the sacrifice he told the brothers to carry him to the altar. While prostrate in prayer he saw the angel of the Lord standing in his usual place by the altar, who reached out his hands and lifted him up from the earth. And all his pain disappeared at once, and he was restored to his usual good health.

Chapter XXXIII

JOHN (cf. VIII. 73)

There was a holy man called John in that place, whose gifts of grace were overflowing. He had such a great gift of consolation that anyone whose soul was oppressed with sadness or weariness could be speedily and joyfully restored by a few words from him. Many gifts of healing were given him by the Lord.

EPILOGUE (cf. VIII. 151)

The dangers of journeying to the deserts

In many other parts of Egypt we came across holy men of God of great virtue doing marvellous things, totally filled with the grace of God. We have only mentioned a few of them. To describe them all would be beyond our powers. We learned only by hearsay of those who are said to live in the upper Thebaid, that is around Syene, but they were held by almost everyone whom we did see to be even greater and more wonderful still. But we were unable to visit them because of the dangers of the journey. All parts of Egypt are infested with robbers, but beyond the city of Lycos you are in danger from barbarians as well. So none of us managed to visit there, though in truth even getting to see those whom we mention above was not without its perils.

We ran into danger seven times in this journey and even in the eighth we suffered no harm, as it is written (Job 5.19), the Lord always protecting us. Once we wandered for five days and nights in the desert, suffering from thirst and near exhaustion.

Then we went through a valley which exuded a sort of salty liquid which the heat of sun turned into a salty deposit with sharp spikes just like winter hoarfrost turned to ice. The whole area was so rough that our feet were torn and scratched, as were the shoes we wore. Once we had got into this place we only managed to get out of it with great difficulty.

Thirdly, when we notwithstanding persevered onwards into the desert we came to a valley which again discharged a similar sort of liquid, but when we tried to cross through this place full of stones and stinking filth we sank up to our thighs. We were almost about to be covered in it when we cried to the Lord in the words of the psalm, "Save me, O God, for the waters have come in

even unto my soul. I am stuck in the deep mire where there is no ground"
(Psalms 69.1-2).

Fourthly, we suffered danger in the waters left behind after the flooding of the Nile, through which we struggled for three days, and were scarcely able to get through.

Fifthly, we were in danger from pirates when we were travelling by sea. They followed us for ten miles but failed to put us to the sword, but left us to flee almost dead [with fright].

Sixthly, we had an accident in crossing the Nile when we were almost drowned.

Seventhly, in the swamps named after Mary [Maræotis palus, just west of the Cells], a fierce wind cast us up on an island during a terrible storm in the middle of winter. It was during Epiphanytide.

Epilogue (continued), Book II (Book III begins further down this page)

Eighthly, when we were on the way to the monasteries of Nitria we came to a place where the floodwaters of the Nile were still lying, making a sort of bog, in which were a lot of beasts, especially crocodiles. When the sun came out they lay on the shore, seeming dead to us in our ignorance. We went closer in order to see and admire the size of these beasts which we thought dead, but as soon as they heard the sound of our feet they woke up and began to rush towards us. With a great shout and groan we called upon the name of the Lord. who had mercy on us, and the beasts rushing towards us were driven back as if by an angel and cast immediately into the bog. And we continued quickly on our journey to the monastery, giving thanks to God who delivered up from such great perils and showed us such wonders. To him be glory and honour unto the ages of ages. Amen.

End of Book II

De Vitis Patrum, Book III
by Rufinus of Aquileia, Presbyter

Prologue

Who can doubt but that the world is sustained by the merits of the Saints, that is, those whose lives shine out from this book, who spurned every mark of luxury with their whole mind, who left the world and penetrated the secret wastes of the desert, traversing dangerous cliffs, sleeping in fearsome caves but suffering neither hunger nor thirst for the right hand of the Lord sustained and fed them. You also are sustained by their merits, my Lord Fidusus, through their prayers you earn remission of your sins. Do not despise then my simple and uncultured words, for my purpose is not to weave eloquent and sophisticated expositions of divine scriptural doctrine, but to lead human minds into true faith and work. For were not even the faith and lives of the Fathers, that is, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Elias and John, written down not so much to glorify those whom God has already glorified and taken into his kingdom, but to provide the reader with true teaching and examples of salvation.

1. When one of the older holy fathers was asked by some monks to explain abstinence, he said, "My children you must despise all the comforts which this world has to offer, whether bodily pleasures or culinary delights. We have no need for honour to be paid us by other human beings, for the Lord Jesus will give us heavenly honour, eternal rest and glorious happiness with his angels.
2. The same old man said, "It is natural for human beings to feel hunger, but you must take food simply as something which is necessary to sustain the body, not in a disordered desire to fill the stomach to saturation point. Sleep is natural for human beings, but by not overdoing it we may be able to maintain bodily discipline and overcome the passions and vices of the flesh. Too much sleep makes the human mind and senses stupid and lazy. Vigils however make the mind and senses more subtle and pure. So said the holy fathers - holy vigils purify and illuminate the mind. It is also natural for human beings to feel anger, but don't be angry with passionate wrath. Be angry with yourself and your sins in order that you may cut them out and amend your life. And if we see other people doing wrong things contrary to the commandments of God we ought to be quite fierce against their vices and diligently plead with them, correct and warn them, that they may amend their lives and find salvation and come to eternal life".

3. There was an old man living in the inner desert who had spent many years in abstinence and every spiritual labour. Some brothers who admired his perseverance came to him and said, "How do you manage to put up with this arid and inhospitable place, father?" "He replied, "All the labour of the whole time that I have spent here cannot measure up to a single hour of the torments of eternal fire. So therefore in the short time that we have at our disposal in this life we ought to work hard and put to death our bodily passions, so that in that eternal age which is to come we may find that perpetual rest from our labours which never will fail.

4. (A longer version of V.iv.58) The holy seniors told us about a certain brother who was once so harassed by demons making him feel hungry and weak before the first hour of the day had passed that it seemed he would hardly be able to put up with it. But he said to himself, "However hungry I am I had better wait until at least the third hour and then I will eat something". When the third hour came he said to himself, "I must be strict and wait till the sixth hour." At the sixth hour he put some bread into soak in water, and said, "While this bread is soaking I need to wait till the ninth hour". When the ninth hour came he said all his customary prayers, and sang the psalms according to the rule, and only then took up the bread to eat it. He kept this up for many days. One day when he had carried on in this way from the first hour to the ninth and was sitting down to eat his bread he looked at the basket in which the bread was kept and saw a thick smoke coming from it and going out the window of the cell. From that day onwards he suffered neither from hunger or bodily weakness, but his heart was made so much stronger in faith and abstinence that he was quite happy to eat only every other day. So by the grace of God he was strengthened in his struggle and overcame through his patience the passion of gluttony, that is, greed and concupiscence.

5. (A slightly longer version of V.x.97) Some brothers once left the monastery to go and visit the fathers in the desert. They arrived at the hermitage of a senior who welcomed them with great joy, and according to the custom offered them a little food. Then he saw how tired they were from their journey, so although it was well before the ninth hour he brought out whatever else he had in his cell, and put it before them so that they might eat and regain their strength.

At Vespers they said the usual prayers and psalms, and did the same at the night office. The hermit retired to rest in a separate place by himself, but heard the brothers talking among themselves,

"These hermits certainly eat more food, and better," one said, "than we who have joined a monastery." The hermit heard, but said nothing.

Next morning as the brothers prepared to continue their journey to another hermit who lived not far away, the old man said, "Give him my greetings, and tell him to take care not to water the vegetables." When they arrived at this other hermitage they gave the message as they had been asked. The hermit grasped what the message meant, and he took the brothers and gave them some work weaving baskets. He sat down with them and kept on working without ceasing. At the Lighting of the Lamps at Vespers he added on more psalms than usual, and when the prayers had been said,

"Today it is not our custom to eat," he said, "but seeing that you have arrived we will eat something," and he put before them some dry bread and salt.

"Because you are here, we should eat a little more", he said, and he brought out a little vinegar and a little oil, and when the meal was over he began to sing psalms again and continued till it was nearly dawn.

"Because you are here we won't sing the whole canon," he said, "so that you can rest for a while as you must be tired from your journey."

At the first hour of the day they made as if to go, but the old man would not let them.

"Please stay a few days with us," he said. "I can't let you go today. Let me in charity keep you for three more days."

When they heard him say this, they got up before dawn and quietly fled.

6. (A longer version of V.iv.57) One of the holy seniors went out to visit another senior hermit, who greeted him joyfully and in honour of his visit prepared a cooked meal of lentils. They decided between them that they would complete the prayers and psalmody first and eat afterwards. So they went in and began the psalms and completed the whole psalter, after which, although they had no books, they recited two of the prophets as if they were reading them. A day passed, and a night, and a new day dawned as they were praying and psalmodising before they realised that the night had gone. But they carried on discussing the word of God and interpreting its meaning, until it got to be the ninth hour, at which point they embraced each other and the visitor went back to his own cell. They had forgotten to partake of the food which had been prepared for they had been refreshed by spiritual food, and at Vespers time the old man noticed the generous dish of food which had been prepared, and in great distress said, "Oh dear, However did we forget that lentil dish?"

7. (A slightly longer version of V.iv.17) Abba Zenon told us how once when he was going to Palestine, getting very tired because of his journeying, he sat down to rest under a tree next to a field full of cucumbers. He began to think about getting up and going to steal some of the cucumbers to eat. "After all", he thought, "I won't have to pick very much". But his thoughts went on, "When thieves are taken by the judges they are subjected to torture. So let me find out whether I can bear the sort of torture that thieves are given." He got up immediately and stood in the sun for five days till his body was dehydrated and he said to himself, "I can't stand this torture, so therefore I had better not commit theft but rather busy myself in manual labour as usual and, as the Psalms say, be content with that. "You shall eat the labour of your hands and you will be blessed and happy" (Psalms 128.2), as we sing daily in the sight of the Lord.

8. A certain disciple of one of the holy seniors was having a battle with thoughts of sex but by the grace of God he was able to resist evil and unclean thoughts by means of fasts and prayers, and vigorous manual work. When his holy senior saw his labours he said to him, "If you like, my son, I will pray to the Lord to take this battle away from you."

"I find, father," he replied, "that as I undergo these labours I feel them bringing forth good fruit in me, for as a result of this battle I fast more and undertake more vigils and prayers. So please pray to the Lord to have mercy on me and give me strength that I may endure and strive with integrity."

"Now I know that you really do understand how through your patience this spiritual battle will help you towards the eternal salvation of your soul," the holy old man then said to him. "As the holy Apostle says, 'I have fought the fight, I have run the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is a crown of righteousness prepared for me, and not only for me but for all those who look for his coming.'" (2 Timothy 4.7).

9. There was another brother fiercely attacked by a spirit of fornication who got up in the middle of the night in order to go and confess his temptations to a certain holy old man who had a reputation of great wisdom. When the old man had heard him he gave him some spiritual advice on the virtue of patience, quoting the words of Scripture 'Be strong and let your heart be comforted, all you who hope in the Lord' (Psalms 27.14). The brother went back to his cell where he was immediately attacked again, so he hurried off once more to the holy man. The old man again encouraged him to persevere faithfully and unweariedly, and said to him,

"Believe me, my son, the Lord Jesus Christ is able to send you all the help from heaven above in order for you to overcome this passion."

Encouraged by the old man's words he returned to his cell, where again the battle began to rage in his heart. He went back again to the old man and begged him to pray more fervently for him. The old man said to him, "Don't be frightened or relax your efforts, and don't keep your thoughts to yourself. This is the way to confuse the unclean spirit and make him depart. For nothing weakens the power of the demons so much as revealing the hidden unclean thoughts to the blessed and holy fathers. Be strong, brother, let your heart be comforted, trust in the Lord. The harder the fight, the more glorious the crown. Moreover the holy prophet Isaiah said, 'Is the hand of the Lord unable to save you, or are his ears plugged that he cannot hear you?' (Isaiah 59.1). Remember, brother, that the Lord is watching over your struggle and is preparing for you an eternal crown even as you are resisting the devil. The Scripture warns us that it is only through many tribulations that we can enter eternal life" (Acts.14.22).

As the brother listened his heart was strengthened in the Lord, and he remained with the old man, deciding against returning to his cell 10. (Also in V.xviii.12) The demon of fornication once waged such a fierce attack against the blessed abba Moyses, who lived in Petra, that he could not remain in his cell but went to see abba Isidore and told him how violent his battle was. Abba Isidore comforted him with words from the holy Scriptures and told him to go back to his cell. But Moyses was very unwilling to do so. Abba Isidore then took Moyses with him to the upper room of his cell.

"Look west," he said to Isidore. "What do you see?"

"I see a multitude of demons," he replied, "milling about ferociously, ready for battle, spoiling for a fight."

"Now look east," said Isidore. "What do you see?"

"I see a numberless multitude of holy Angels, more glorious and splendid than the light of the sun, an army of celestial power."

"What you saw in the west," said Isidore, "were those who fight against the saints of God. But what you saw in the east were those whom God sends to the aid of his saints. Know therefore that those who are for us are much greater in number, as Elias the prophet said. (2 Kings 6.16). St John also says, 'He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world'" (1 John 2.14).

Hearing these things the holy abba Moyses was strengthened in the Lord and returned to his cell giving thanks, and glorifying the suffering kindness of our

Lord Jesus Christ.

11. (Also in V.v.22) There was a certain brother in the desert of Scete who was keen and eager in the work of God and in the spiritual life. But the devil, the enemy of the human race, filled his thoughts with the memory of the beauty of a certain woman he used to know, leaving his mind in a turmoil. However in the providence of the Lord Jesus another brother came from Egypt to visit him in the charity of Christ. And as they were talking among themselves the brother from Egypt chanced to mention that that woman for whom the brother had been so much in love had died. A few days after hearing this he went to the place where the body of the dead woman had been laid, opened up the tomb, wrapped up some of her decaying matter in a linen cloth and returned to his cell. He put the rotten matter in a place where he could see it and said to his thoughts, "There you are, you have now got what it was you were wanting. Take your fill of it." And in this way he crucified himself by means of that fetid material until the sordid attacks died away.

12. (Also in V.v.27) Two brothers went into the neighbouring city in order to sell what they had produced during the past year. One of them went on to do some necessary shopping, the other stayed in the guest house and at the urging of the devil fell into the sin of fornication. The other brother returned later. "See," he said, "We've now got everything we need. Let us go back to our cell."

"I can't," the other brother said.

"What do you mean, you can't go back to your cell?"

"Because after you left me, I fell into the sin of fornication. So I can't go back."

"Well, I likewise fell into the sin of fornication," he said, in an attempt to win his brother over and heal him, "so let us both go back to our cell and do penance together. For with God all things are possible (Luke 1.37). He may grant us pardon through our penances, so that we will avoid being punished by the torments and agony of the everlasting fires in the lowest hell, where punishment does not end, and the fires and terrible tortures do not cease."

And so they went back to their cell. They prostrated themselves at the feet of the holy fathers, lamenting loudly with tears, and confessed to them the temptation which had led to their fall. The seniors told them what they must do in penance, and they carried out all their instructions. And the brother who had not sinned did all the same penances as his brother who had sinned, as if he had sinned himself. And he poured out an immense love towards his

brother. The Lord saw his labour of love and after a short time revealed the reason behind it to the holy fathers, that the one who had not sinned was punishing himself on behalf of the brother who had sinned, so that the Lord would grant him pardon. Thus was the scripture fulfilled: 'For he laid down his life for the salvation of his brother' (1 John 3.16).

13. (Also in V.v.19) Another brother in the grip of sexual temptation went to a certain well-respected senior and spoke to him about it.

"Be kind, most blessed father," he said, "and pray for me, for the passion of fornication is grievously afflicting me."

Hearing this the senior prayed earnestly, night and day begging the Lord's mercy for him.

The brother came back a second time, and begged the senior to pray even harder for him. With renewed compassion the blessed senior prayed even harder. The senior began to be depressed as he witnessed the brother coming to him again and again asking for his prayers, while the Lord did not seem to be listening.

At last the Lord revealed to him in a dream that this same monk was imprisoned in negligence and laziness and pandered to his body as his heart desired. The holy senior had a vision of the monk sitting down with the spirit of fornication playing around him in the shape of various women, and he was really enjoying it. He also saw the angel of the Lord standing near seriously angry with the brother because he did not prostrate himself in prayer to God, but rather continued enjoying his own thoughts. This was the revelation given to the holy senior, and he knew then that the brother was to blame, and it was cause of his negligence that prayers were not being answered.

"It's your fault, brother," the senior said to him, "because you keep on enjoying your own thoughts. It is impossible for the unclean spirit of fornication to depart from you, however much others may pray and beg God for you, unless you yourself join in the labour, in fasting and prayer and many vigils, praying with deep groans that the Lord will have mercy on you and grant you the help of his grace in enabling you to resist your thoughts.

However much doctors may devise and prepare medicines for the human body, and however much care and diligence they offer, there will be no cure unless the sick person is willing to forgo harmful foods or any other thing that is liable to make one sick. It is the same thing with diseases of the soul.

However much the holy fathers, doctors of the spirit, beg with wholehearted will for the mercy of the Lord and Saviour on those who have asked for their

prayers, the prayers of the saints will be of no use to those who are negligent and imprisoned and who take no thought for the salvation of their own soul, unless they themselves with a pure intention do what is pleasing to God in prayer and every kind of spiritual work."

Hearing this the brother was cut to the quick, and with great earnestness applying himself to fasting and prayer and vigils, as the senior had taught, he earned the mercy of the Lord, and the spirit of unclean passion departed from him.

14. (Also in V.v.24) There was a certain monk who had been living in the desert for many years when a certain girl whom he had known where he used to live made inquiries about where the monk lived, and at the instigation of the devil came into the desert in search of him. When she found him she went into his cell, reminded him of her family and parentage, and stayed with him. And so he fell into sin with her.

Now there was another monk also living in the desert who when the time for food had come found that a vessel of drinking water which he had prepared had fallen over and the water had been spilt. This happened for several days when it came time for eating; the water was spilt on the ground and he had nothing to drink. He turned it over in his mind and decided to go and tell that other monk about how the jar had fallen over and the water had got spilt.

Evening came on while he was journeying, so he bedded down in an old disused temple of idols, and he heard the demons boasting among themselves how they had enticed that monk into fornication, to which he listened in amazement.

When daylight came he journeyed on to that monk and found him very deeply depressed.

"What should I do, brother," he asked, "for when the time comes to eat, my jar of drinking water falls over and I have nothing to drink?"

"You've come to me asking me what to do because your jar of drinking water falls over? But what should I do, for I have fallen last night into fornication."

"Yes, I knew that," said the other.

"How could you possibly know?"

"While I was sleeping last night on my journey I heard demons talking among themselves and boasting about your lapse, and I was very sorry about it."

"Yes, I might just as well go back to the world."

"No, don't do that, brother. Much rather stay here patiently. Let's send the woman away, back to her own place. This is obviously all a trick of the devil.

Much better that we should remain where we are, in affliction of body and soul for the rest of our life, in tears and mourning, casting ourselves on the kindness of our Lord and Saviour, if perchance we may find mercy in the great and terrible judgment day of God."

Book III (continued)

15. There was a certain brother living in the Cells who was being grievously tormented by a demon of fornication. So he thought to himself, "Perhaps I should do more manual labour in order to extinguish these carnal thoughts." Now this brother was a potter, and he took some clay and moulded for himself a female figure and said to himself, "Now you have a wife so you will have to work harder than you used to". A few days later he took some clay and made as it were a daughter figure, and he said to himself, "Now look your wife has given birth to a daughter. You will need to work harder and harder in order to clothe and feed not only yourself but also your wife and daughter". And so by excessive labour he so weakened his body that he was not able to keep up with so much work any more. Then he said to himself, "Seeing that you cannot sustain this level of working it is obvious that to have a wife is not for you." And the Lord saw and accepted this mental struggle to preserve his chastity and took away from him the onslaughts of the demons. And he gave glory to God for his powerful grace.

16. A brother asked blessed Abba Poemen, "What shall I do, for the passion of fornication is attacking me and I get carried away by passionate anger. And the holy old man replied, "Hear what David the prophet said, 'I smote the lion and strangled the bear' (1 Sam.17.36). By this you must understand that anger has to be cut off out of your mind, and that you must extinguish fornication by hard work."

17. (A longer version of V.xv.31) The senior holy fathers told how a certain monk in the desert, who was also a senior, was actually a slave, and every year he would leave the desert and go down to Alexandria where his masters lived, in order to give them that due proportion of what he had earned which

slaves usually give to their masters. But his masters, who feared God, had a great reverence for him, and met him and welcomed him with great honour, and begged him to pray to the Lord for them. But he poured water into a bowl and hastened to wash the feet of these masters of his, wishing to show them all humility and respect. But they were unwilling to let him wash their feet.

"No, beloved father," they said. "That would seriously embarrass us."

"But I am your slave," he replied. "It is almighty God who has given you to be my masters, and I am grateful for your authority over me, for you have seen fit to let me serve the true and living God, the creator and master of heaven and earth. So naturally, I bring you the accustomed price of my servitude."

The masters remonstrated with him, unwilling to accept the money he had brought.

"If you are unwilling to accept the money," the slave replied, "I tell you I will not go back to the desert, but remain here and serve you."

Hearing this made the masters decide to accept the money, not only so as not to disappoint him, but also to make sure that he would go back to his own cell in the desert. And the money, which he forced upon them even though they did not want it, was no sooner in their possession than they gave it to the poor. The other brothers questioned this same senior.

"Tell us, please, father," they said, "Why are you so keen on your slavery that you forced that money upon your masters, even though they were unwilling to accept it and resisted very strongly?"

"I am punctilious about paying every year the money that I owe my masters in respect of my slavery, so that whatever I can do with the help of the Lord by way of fasts and prayers, holy vigils, and every kind of spiritual labour, Christ being my helper, will be of benefit to me in the life to come and in the salvation of my soul. If I had neglected to pay that slavery money all that spiritual labour of mine might well have been credited to their account, for it was they who sent me to serve Christ the Lord, and change my life."

18. (A longer version of V.xv.89) There were two brothers according to the flesh who lived the monastic life together, and the evil devil was doing his best to sow discord between them. One day the younger brother went as usual to light the lamp at vespers, and by the machinations of a demon he knocked the candlestick over and the light was extinguished. The evil devil used this occasion to sow strife between them, for the older brother began to scold his brother angrily. But the younger brother prostrated himself, and apologized to his brother.

"Forgive me, brother," he said. "I will go and light the lamp again."

Because the brother had not given an angry response, the evil spirit was confused and departed immediately, and he reported that same night to the prince of the demons.

"I have not been able to prevail against these two, because of the humility of this monk who prostrated himself on the ground before his brother. God saw his humility and poured out his grace upon him, and I am now tortured and tormented because I have not been able to split them up."

Now a pagan priest who lived nearby overheard this demonic conversation and he was pierced with the fear of God and love for Jesus Christ. Realising how the cult of idols seduced souls and led them to perdition, he left everything and hastened to the holy fathers in the monastery and told them everything that the malicious demons were talking about. The holy fathers instructed him in the wholesome doctrines of our Lord and Saviour, he was baptized and accepted the monastic holy rule of life. As he advanced with the help of the grace of God he became a most exemplary monk, excelling especially in the virtue of humility, so that he was greatly venerated, and everyone wondered at how great his humility was. He used to say that the practice of humility put to flight all the power of our adversaries the demons. The Lord Jesus Christ triumphed over the devil through his humility and brought all his power to naught. He added that he had often heard the demons talking among themselves, saying, "Whenever we arouse anger in a human heart, and someone suffers the injury patiently, preferring to try and make peace, saying, 'Sorry, I have sinned', we immediately feel all our power vanish at the approach of divine grace."

19. (A longer version of V.xv.66) The blessed senior monk Poemen told the brothers the following account of a monk who lived in Constantinople in the time of the Emperor Theodosius.

"He had a little cell in the suburb called Septimum, just outside the city, where the Emperors used to come out from the city to relax. When the Emperor heard that there was a solitary monk living there who never went out of his cell, he took a walk over to the place where the monk lived, warning the eunuchs who were with him to prevent anyone following him to the monk's cell. He went on alone and knocked on his door, and the monk got up and opened the door but did not recognize that his visitor was the Emperor, for he had taken off his crown to prevent recognition. After the prayer of welcome they sat down and the Emperor began to question him.

"How do the holy fathers in Egypt spend their time?" he asked.

"They all pray for your salvation," he replied.

"The Emperor looked around the cell and saw nothing except a few loaves of dry bread hanging up in baskets.

"Give a blessing, father," he said, "and let us have something to eat."

"The monk immediately brought water and salt, and a few little loaves and they ate together. He offered the Emperor water, and he drank.

"Do you know who I am?" the Emperor Theodosius then asked.

"No sir, I don't," the monk replied.

"I am the Emperor Theodosius," he said, "but I have come here simply as a pilgrim."

"At this the monk prostrated himself.

"Blessed are you monks" said the Emperor, "for you are free and safe from all the worries of the world and go through life in peace and quietness, concentrating on the salvation of your souls and how you may gain the heavenly reward of eternal life. I was born into royalty, and I live in royalty, and I tell you truly that I can never eat my food free from care."

"The Emperor then showed him every mark of respect before taking his leave. That same night the servant of God began to turn things over in his mind.

"I don't think I ought to live here any longer, for there will be many not only from the common people but also from the palace and the senators who will want to follow the Emperor's example and come to visit me, and honour me as some servant of God who deserves adulation. And although they will be doing this in the name of the Lord, I am fearful that the malignant devil will take advantage of this, I shall begin to enjoy welcoming them in, and my heart will be led astray by their praises and respect, and gradually I shall lose the virtue of humility, and I shall revel in their praises and respect."

"Turning these things over in his mind, the man of God that same night fled to the holy fathers in the desert of Egypt.

"So, my dear brothers, just think how much value that servant of God placed in the virtue of humility, by which he might be found worthy to receive from Christ the Lord eternal glory in the kingdom of heaven, because of the labours of a holy life, lived in the name of the Lord."

20. (A longer version of V.viii.13) On this subject, others among the holy fathers made the following mention of the holy Poemen himself.

"Once when the provincial judge arrived and heard of Poemen's reputation for holiness, he tried to pay him a visit, and sent a messenger to ask if Poemen

would be willing to receive him. Poemen was not very pleased.

"If the nobility are going to start coming to see me and pay me, respect,' he thought to himself, 'all sorts of other people will also want to come, and that will mean that the hidden quality of my life will be destroyed, and by the workings of the malignant devil I shall lose the grace of humility that with so much labour I have striven to cultivate, with the help of the Lord, from my youth up.'

"After a long struggle with himself he decided to excuse himself and refuse to accept a visit from the judge. The judge was very disappointed at his refusal to see him.

"I suppose it is because of my sins that I am not good enough to see the man of God,' he said to his deputy. Nevertheless he still fervently desired to see the holy man by any means that he possibly could. So he thought up a plan which would provide an excuse for seeing him; he arrested the son of blessed Poemen's sister and put him in prison, hoping that this would make Poemen willing to see him, or even to make him come and make a plea before the judge.

"To save the old man any worry,' he said to his deputy, 'tell him that he must make up his mind to come and see me. That is what is needed if we are to free the young man from prison. His case is such that we cannot pass over it unpunished.'

"When the young man's mother, holy Poemen's sister, heard of this she went out into the desert where Poemen was, stood at the door of his cell with much sobbing and weeping, begging him to go down to the judge and plead for her son. But the blessed Poemen not only said nothing to her, but he would not even open the door and go out to her. So she began to curse him.

"You are wicked and hard-hearted,' she said. 'You've got guts of iron. Can't my great grief fill you with pity? I only have the one son, who now stands in danger of death.'

"Poemen sent her a message by the brother who ministered to him.

"Go and tell her that Poemen has no sons and so therefore it is no concern of his.'

"When the judge got to hear of all this, he spoke to his scribes,

"Write him a letter to say that if only he will write to me with a request, I might be able to release the young man.'

"Faced with so many people urging him, the holy old man at last did write to the judge.

"May your honour inquire diligently into his case and if he has done anything worthy of death, let him die, so that by paying the penalty for his sin in this present life he may be spared the eternal punishments of everlasting hell. But if he has done nothing worthy of death, do you decide what is right according to the law."

21. (A longer version of V.x.10) Prominent among the great fathers was a man called Agathon, noted for his humility and patience. Some brothers once came to see him who had heard how very humble he was supposed to be and wanted to prove how humble and patient he really was.

"Many people are scandalized at you, father," they said, "because you are so proud, you despise others and count them nothing worth, and you never cease defaming your brothers. Many people say that you act like this because you are a fornicator, and lest you should seem to be the only one you are always accusing others of it as well."

"I know only too well," he replied, "that I have all these vices that you mention. I cannot deny my many wickednesses," and prostrating himself on the ground in front of the brothers, he continued, "I beg you, brothers, that you cease not to pray to Christ the Lord for the wretch that I am, loathsome as I am for my many sins. Pray that he will forgive me for my many great iniquities."

The brothers added a few more things

"And you can't deny," they said, "that many people are keen to accuse you of heresy."

"However hateful I may be for my many sins," he said in reply to this, "at least I am not a heretic. God keep my soul from that."

Then the brothers showed him respect by prostrating themselves on the ground in front of him.

"Please tell us, father," they said, "how it is that you were not angry when we accused you of so many vices and crimes, but you were visibly moved at the accusation of heresy and detested the idea, and could not even bear the thought of it?"

"I accepted the guilt of the sins you first mentioned in humility, so that you could believe that I really am a sinner. For we know that to preserve the virtue of humility is very wholesome for the soul. For when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ suffered many insults and reproaches from the Jews he bore them all patiently, to give us an example of humility. They sent false witnesses against him and said many things about him falsely, and he bore with them all

even unto death upon the cross. The apostle Peter bears witness to this, saying, 'Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his footsteps.' (1 Peter 2.21). So we also must bear patiently everything said against us. But I would not accept your accusation of heresy, which I detest, for heresy separates you from God. A heretic is cut off from the true and living God and joined with the devil and his angels. Alienated even from Christ, he no longer has God to whom he can pray for his sins, and so perishes utterly. But if he is converted to the true Catholic faith of the holy Church he is accepted by our good and loving Saviour Christ, the Son who is ever in the Father with the Holy Spirit. To him be the glory unto the ages of ages. Amen"

22. (Also in VII.xxxiii.2) The seniors and all the monks living in the desert of Scete held a meeting and agreed that Abba Isaac should be ordained presbyter for them in the church of that desert, and when the day and hour had been agreed a large crowd of the monks who lived there gathered. When Abba Isaac heard about all this, however, he fled into Egypt and hid in a thickly wooded region because he considered himself to be unworthy of the presbyterate. Many of the monks followed after him to try and find him. Tired with their journey, late in the evening they loosed the baggage ass they had brought with them to let it feed. As the ass was feeding it came near to the place where Abba Isaac was hiding. When daylight came the monks went in search of the ass and so came to that place where the old man was hidden. Marvelling at the way God had guided them, they seized him and would have bound him in order to compel him to come with them, but he prevented them, saying "Perhaps it is God's will that although unworthy I should be ordained presbyter".

23. There were two brothers living together in a cell whose patience and humility were universally praised by many of the holy fathers. Hearing about this a certain holy man decided to find out whether their humility was really perfect and went to visit them. They greeted him gladly and after the customary psalms and prayers he went out from the cell and saw a little garden where they had grown a few vegetables. He picked up a stick and fiercely attacked the vegetables, cutting them down and mutilating them so that hardly anything remained. When the brothers saw this they said nothing at all, nor did they look angry or sad. They all went back into the cell for the Vesper prayers, after which the brothers bowed to the visitor and said, "If it's all right with you, sir, we will now go and cook what is left of the vegetables, for it is time that we ate." The old man was amazed, and said, "I give God

thanks that I have seen the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and I urge you, beloved brothers, to take heed that you guard these virtues of holy humility and patience, for in the kingdom of heaven it will make you appear great and sublime in the sight of God."

24. There was a certain highly regarded old monk in the coenobium who fell seriously ill. A long period of extremely painful, burdensome and debilitating weakness followed, and the brothers were unable to find anything they could do to help him, since the monastery did not possess the necessary remedies for him. A certain devout virgin who heard about his illness asked the father of the monastery if she could take him to her own little cell to be nursed, where it would be easier to get the medicines for him in the nearby town. So the abbot gave instructions that the brothers should carry him to the woman's cell. She received the old man with great respect and nursed him in the name of the Lord, looking for reward only to the eternal life which she would receive from Christ our Saviour. She had looked after this servant of God for three years and more, when certain nasty-minded men in the lewdness of their own thoughts began to suspect that the intentions of the old man towards this woman who was nursing him were not above reproach. The old man heard about this and prayed to Christ, saying,

"O Lord our God who alone know all things and see the great pain and misery of my illness and are aware of the burden of such a great affliction which has been with me for such a long time that I haven't been able to do without the help of this servant of yours who nurses me in your name, grant her, O Lord, a fitting reward in the life to come such as you are accustomed in your goodness to promise to those who minister to the poor and needy in your name."

When the time came for him to die many of the holy senior brothers of the monastery gathered round him and he said to them, "I beg you, my lords, fathers and brothers, that when I am dead you take my staff and plant it over my grave, and if it roots and bears fruit then you will know that my conscience is clean as regards this servant of God who has been nursing me. If it doesn't grow you will know that I am not guiltless towards her. When the old man died the holy fathers planted the staff above his grave as he had asked, and it grew and in due time bore fruit, and all wondered, glorifying God. Many came from the regions round about and praised the grace of the Saviour for this miracle. We saw this little tree ourselves, and blessed the Lord who cares for all those who serve him in sincerity and truth.

25. (A longer version of V.xv.65) There were some people who brought to the

blessed abba Apollonius someone grievously vexed and tormented by a demon. They tended to his needs for three days while constantly beseeching the old man to cure him by pouring out prayers to God in the name of Christ. At last the old man replied.

"I am not of sufficient merit to be able to command demons," he said.

But when they persisted, weeping and earnestly begging him, he finally agreed to speak to the demon.

"In the name of the Lord our Saviour," he cried, "depart, O unclean spirit, from this man created in the image of God."

"If commanded by the power of Christ," replied the demon, "I would depart. But I challenge the validity of what you have said to me by asking you what is the meaning of what is written in the Gospel, 'Who are the goats and who are the sheep?'" (Matthew 25.32)

"The goats are the wicked," replied the old man, "among whom am I, a sinner, guilty of many sins. God knows who are the sheep."

"Because of your humility I am powerless," cried the demon, and he straightway went out of the man whom he had possessed. When they saw this all those who were there gave glory to God.

26. The holy seniors tell of how a certain monk of the desert of Scete came to visit the holy fathers in the Cellia where there were many monks living in separate cells. When it appeared that there wasn't a cell to put him in, one of the seniors who had a spare cell empty let him have it saying, "Stay in this cell for the meantime until you can find somewhere permanent". Many of the brothers came to speak to him, wanting to hear from him a word to help them find eternal salvation, for he had a great spiritual gift of being able to speak the word of God. When the senior who had lent him the cell became aware of this his heart was filled with envious spite, and he began to fume and complain, "Look how long I have been living in this place and now the brothers come to me only rarely, and that only on holy days, and yet lots of brothers are going to this impostor almost daily."

So he said to his disciple, "Go and tell him that he has to get out of that cell because I need it."

But when the disciple went to that brother what he said was, "My abba has a message for your holiness. He enquires through me how you are getting on, for he has heard that you are ill."

He replied, "Pray for me, father, for I have a nasty stomach upset." When the disciple got back he said to the abba, "He earnestly begs your holiness to give

him two or three days grace so that he can find another cell."

After three days he sent the disciple again, saying, "Go and tell him that he must get out of my cell, and if he delays any more tell him I will come with a big stick and drive him out of my cell."

But when the disciple came to the brother, what he said was, "My abba is very concerned about your illness and he has sent me to ask if you are feeling better".

Book III (continued)

He replied, "I am most grateful, father, for your kindness in worrying about me. Truly I am feeling a lot better because of your prayers"

When the disciple got back he said to his abba, "He is now asking if you can wait till next Sunday and then he will go at once."

And when Sunday came and he still had not gone the old man took a cane, burning with envy and anger, and got ready to hurry off to beat him and drive him from the cell. But the disciple came to him and said, "If you like, father, I will go on ahead to see whether there are any brothers visiting him, for if they were to see you like this they would be scandalised."

So the disciple went on, and said to the visiting brother, "Look, my abba is coming to see you so go out to meet him quickly, showing by your actions how grateful you are for his great kindness and consideration in coming to see you."

So he got up immediately and hurried out to meet him. When he came in sight he prostrated himself on the ground before he got very close, and showed his reverence for the old man by his grateful words, "May God pour out upon you an everlasting reward, beloved father, for lending me your cell in his name, and may Christ the Lord prepare for you a glorious and splendid dwelling place in the heavenly Jerusalem among his saints."

When the old man heard this his conscience struck him, and throwing away his stick he embraced him and kissed him, and invited him back to his own cell to have a meal. Later he called his disciple to him and asked him whether he had conveyed his message exactly to the brother in the borrowed cell. Then the disciple confessed all, saying, "You are my teacher, and because of the respect that ought to be shown to you as father and teacher I did not dare to

say anything to you when you sent me to that brother. But I did not tell him what you told me to tell him."

When the old man heard this he prostrated himself at the disciple's feet and said, "From today you shall be the father and I the disciple. Through the way you have quickly and discreetly acted in the fear and love of God, Christ the Lord has delivered the souls of both me and that brother from the snares of sin."

The thoughtfulness and good intentions of the disciple showed his faith and the perfect love he had in Christ for his abba. He had genuinely feared that through the vices of envy and anger his spiritual father might do something to cancel out all those holy labours at which he had persevered since beginning to serve Christ in the hope of everlasting rewards. And the Lord gave them grace to rejoice together in the peace of Christ.

27. (A longer version of V.xiv.4) The holy fathers used to say of John, the disciple of Abba Paul, that he possessed the virtues of great humility and obedience to such extent that he would make no objection whatsoever no matter how difficult the tasks the abba set him, nor did he ever grumble. When a certain tool was needed for the monastery workshop the abbot told him to go to the nearest village to buy it and bring it back as quickly as possible. Now although there was a fierce lioness in that place, the disciple John got up to go immediately as the abba asked. As he went out he said to the abba, "Father, I have heard that many people say there is a fierce lioness in that place."

The abbot half jokingly said to him, "Well if it comes upon you catch it, tie it up, and bring it back here!"

When he got to the place that evening the lioness rushed out at him and he tried to catch it, but the lioness slipped out of his grasp and ran off. John ran after her, crying, "But my abba commanded me to tie you up and bring you back with me." The animal immediately stood still, and he secured it and led it back in the direction of the monastery. By this time it was getting late and the abba was getting worried about him, when suddenly John appeared leading the lioness after him. Seeing this the abba was astonished and gave thanks to our Lord and Saviour.

"See, father," John said, "I have brought back the lioness as you said."

The abba decided to humiliate him lest the disciple should think he had done something marvellous and said, "Since you are so stupid, go and take this stupid beast back. Let it go, say goodbye to it, and let it go to its own place."

28 (A longer version of VI.ii.17) One of the senior holy men sent his disciple

to draw water from the well, which was quite a long distance from his cell. The disciple forgot to take a rope with him, and he was very annoyed about it when he arrived at the well, for it was a long way back to the cell. He did not know what to do, or which way to turn; it would not do to return to the cell without any water. Greatly agitated, he fell on his face in tears.

"Lord have mercy upon me according to thy great goodness' (Psalms 51,1)," he prayed. "You have made heaven and earth and everything in them, you alone do great wonders. Have mercy on me for the sake of your servant who sent me here. "

And when he got up from his prayer he addressed the well directly.

"O Well, O Well," he cried, "It is the servant of Christ, my abba, who has sent me to draw water!"

And immediately the water level rose up to the mouth of the well, so that he could fill his jar with water. And as he departed, glorifying the power of our Lord and Saviour, the water in the well sank down again to its own place.

29 (A longer version of V.xv.86) There was a brother called Eulalius in a monastery, who was adorned with great graces of humility. If some of the more careless brothers committed faults it was their custom to lay the blame on him, for when he was questioned by the senior brothers he would make no denials but would prostrate himself before them and admit that he was a sinner and should be found guilty. This happened again and again, but when condemned by the rules of the monastery to a fast of two or three days he simply bore it patiently. The most senior brothers did not realize that he was putting up with all this through the virtue of humility, and at last went in a body to the father of the monastery.

"Father," they said, "What is to be done? How much longer must we put up with all the breakages and general negligence committed in the monastery by this brother Eulalius? Nearly all the vessels and utensils in the monastery have been damaged or fatally broken through his negligence. Why should we put up with this?"

"Let us just bear with this brother for a few more days," replied the father of the monastery, "and then I shall decide what is to be done about him." And so saying, he dismissed them.

He went into his cell and prostrated himself in prayer, casting himself on the mercy of God that it might be revealed to him what should be said and done about this frequently accused brother. And the truth of the matter was then revealed to him.

He called all the brothers to a meeting.

"Believe me, brothers," he said, "I greatly prefer the mattula [probably a written list of monastic infringements] of brother Eulalius, with his humility and patience, to everything else that is done by those who, to tell you the truth, are nothing but grumblers as they go about their work in the monastery. And in order that the Lord may demonstrate how highly this brother is regarded in the eyes of God, I order that the mattulae of all the brothers be brought to me".

And when that was done he ordered that a fire should be lit and that they should all be cast into it. All were burnt except the mattula of brother Eulalius, which was found to be completely untouched by the fire. At this sight the brothers were very frightened and fell on their face on the floor, seeking pardon and forgiveness from Christ the Lord, at the same time commending with great admiration the patience and humility of brother Eulalius.

In the end they made such a fuss of him, singing his praises as one of the great fathers, that Eulalius found that he could not bear all this honour and praise.

"Woe is me," he cried. "I have been unlucky enough to have lost my humility, which for such a long time I have striven to acquire with the help and strength of Christ the Lord."

And he got up in the middle of the night, left the monastery, and fled to the desert where nobody knew him, and dwelt there in a cave. He had no desire for temporal human praise, but only for the celestial, eternal glory of our Saviour Christ in the world to come.

30. (Also in V.xvi.1) We must take note of the praiseworthy humility and virtuous patience of the blessed abba Anastasius, so that in meditating upon his generosity and peacefulness of soul we may follow his example. Now this Anastasius possessed a codex written in the most beautiful pergamenic script, worth eighteen solidi, containing the whole of the old and new Testaments. A certain brother came to visit him and saw the book in his cell, coveted it, stole it, and departed. Abba Anastasius that same day wanted to read from the book, and when he could not find it, realised that the brother had stolen it. But he did not chase after the brother and accuse him of it, fearing lest he might add perjury to the sin of theft.

The brother went down to the nearest city to sell the book, and asked for sixteen solidi from a prospective buyer.

"Lend me the book," said the buyer, "so that I can have it valued to see if it is worth such a great price."

The brother gave it to him and the buyer went straight away to show it to the holy Anastasius.

"Have a look at this book, father," he said, "and tell me whether it is worth sixteen solidi, the high price which the seller is asking from me."

"It is a very fine book," said Anastasius, "and well worth the money."

He went back to the person who wanted to sell it.

"I will give you your price for it," he said, "for I have shown it to abba Anastasius, who said it was a very fine book and well worth the money."

"Didn't the blessed Anastasius say anything else?" he asked.

"Hardly anything else," he replied.

"I've changed my mind," said the brother. "I don't want to sell the book at all."

Conscience stricken he went back to abba Anastasius, fell on his face before him weeping tears of repentance, and begged him to take back his book.

But the abba would not agree.

"Go in peace, brother," he said, "I give you my permission to keep the book."

But he tearfully persisted.

"If you won't take the book back, father, my soul will never be at peace."

At this, Anastasius took the book back, and the brother remained with him in his cell to the last day of his life.

31. (Also in VIII.lxxxvii & IV.iv.34) There was a certain hermit named Pior among the holy fathers who while still a young man had been initiated into monastic life by blessed Antony, but who lived with him for only a few years. For when he was twenty-five he went away to another secret part of the desert with Antony's full knowledge and permission. "Go, Pior," Antony had said, "and live where you will. But come back to me when God reveals to you that the time is right." Pior went to the region between Scete and Nitria and there dug a well, saying to himself, "Whatever the quality of the water here might be, with that I must be content." Doing this became the occasion of a great increase of merit in him, for the water proved to be so salty and bitter that anyone visiting him took care to take their own water with them in a flask. He stayed there for thirty years. The brothers used to say to him that he ought to go somewhere else because of the horrid taste of the water, but he said, "If in this life you seek rest and try to avoid the bitter labour of abstinence we shall not enjoy those truly beautiful and eternal good things after our departure from this world, nor enjoy the everlasting delights of that blessed paradise." The brothers also used to say that he would eat no more than one small bread roll and five olives, and that while walking about outside.

Many of the holy fathers also testify that for more than thirty years after leaving his parents' home he never sought to visit or even enquire about his relations, not even when he heard that his parents were dead. When his sister was widowed and left with two youthful sons she sent them into the desert to seek out her brother Pior. After going the rounds of various monasteries they at last managed to find him and said to him, "We are your sister's sons. She greatly longs to see you before she dies."

But he would not agree to their request. So the youths went to the blessed man of God, Antony, and told him of their request. Antony sent for him and said, "Why have you not come to me for such a long time, brother?"

"Blessed father," he replied, "you told me to come to you when God revealed to me that the time was right, and God has not revealed anything of the sort to me from that time to this."

"Go and let your sister see you," blessed Antony said to him. So he took another monk with him and went to the place and house where his sister lived and stood outside with his eyes shut so that he wouldn't have to look at this sister. She came out and threw herself at his feet, overcome with joy.

"See now," Pior said to her, "I am your brother, Pior. Look at me since that was what you wanted to do," after which he immediately went back to his cell in the desert. He did this in order to put to shame any monk who thought himself to be at liberty to visit parents or relations, even when given permission.

32. Abba John who lived in Mount Calamus also had a sister. She had been in a monastery from a very early age and had been instrumental in persuading this same Abba John to abandon the vanities of this world and enter a monastery. Once inside the monastery he did not leave it for twenty- four years, not even to visit his sister, although she greatly longed to see him and often wrote to him. She sent him a letter begging that he would come and see her before departing this life so that for the love of Christ she would be able to enjoy his actual company, but he made excuses, being unwilling to leave the monastery. This worthy servant of God, his sister, wrote again, saying, "If you won't come to me I must needs come to you, if only that after all this time I may be found worthy to be given your holy love."

On reading this Abba John was greatly disturbed and said to himself, "If I let my sister come to me it will be as good as giving permission for numerous other parents and relations to come visiting".

So he decided that it would be better for him to go and visit her, and he took

with him two other brothers from the monastery. Arriving at the door of his sister's monastery he cried out, "Pray come out to us pilgrims and give us a blessing".

His sister and another servant of God came out and opened the door, and she did not recognise her brother at all, though he recognised her. He did not say anything, however, lest she recognise his voice. The monks with him said to her, "Reverend Mother, please may we have a drink of water, for we are very tired from our journey."

When they had been given a drink they offered a prayer, gave thanks to God and left to go back to their monastery. A few days later his sister wrote that she would come and see him before she died and offer a prayer in his monastery. He wrote back, sending the letter by a monk of his monastery, saying, "In the grace of Christ I did come to you and nobody recognised me. You came out and gave us a drink of water, which I took from your very hands. I drank, and gave thanks to God and returned to my monastery. Be satisfied with the fact that you have seen me and don't bother me any further, but pray for me always to our Lord Jesus Christ."

33. (Also in V.iv.61) There was another monk who went to visit his sister in her monastery, having heard that she was ill. She was a servant of God well known for her holy manner of life, and she would not agree to receive her brother or see him, not wanting to be the occasion of his going inside a monastery of women. But she sent him a message, "Go, brother, and pray for me. By the ever-present grace of our God and Saviour I shall see you in the world to come, in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ."

34. We must also mention Abba Theodore as an example of virtue. This Theodore was a disciple of Pachomius, a holy man among the holy fathers, the father of a great number of monks, and father to many monasteries in the region of the Thebaid. He was a shining example of all the holy virtues, and was rewarded by the gift of prophecy from the Lord who showed him many of the things to come. The sister of this Theodore once came to the monastery where he lived in order to set eyes on this brother whom she had not seen for a very long time. When he was told that his sister had arrived he immediately sent two of the monks who looked after the gatehouse to give his sister this message, "Look, my sister you have been told that I am alive. Believe it, and don't be sad that you won't be seeing me. Think rather of the transient vanity of this present world. Strive after living a holy life so that you may come to

eternal life and the joys of heaven which the Lord has prepared for those that love him and keep his commandments. Think to yourself that the only true and firm hope lies in keeping the commandments of God and being found worthy of entering into the glorious and eternal promises of our Lord and Saviour Christ."

On hearing this she was conscience stricken and wept copiously in the sight of the Lord. Not long afterwards she entered a monastery of virgins, servants of God, which had been built in that same region, and as time went by she developed into a mature servant of God herself.

When their mother heard about all this she petitioned the bishops, who gave her a letter on the subject of her son which was addressed to the aforesaid Pachomius, father of the monasteries. She came and lodged at the monastery of virgins, from where she sent the letter to Pachomius, asking if she could see her son. The blessed Pachomius called Theodore to him and said, "I must tell you, my son, that your mother has come to see you, and we must comply with the letters which the bishops have sent me, so go and let your mother see you." Theodore replied, "You have told me, sir, to see my mother. But if I go and see her against all the wisdom of the spirit I fear lest I shall be found guilty before God. Nevertheless I suppose I must practise strength of mind as an example to the other brothers."

When the mother heard that he did not want to see her she was unwilling to go back home because of the great love she had for her son, but remained in the monastery of virgins, thinking that she would see him sometimes as he went out from the monastery with the other brothers on monastery business. "I shall be able to have spiritual talks with him," she said, "and profit from what he can teach me and advise me. His spiritual direction will strengthen my soul and help me to that eternal rest which the Lord Jesus Christ has promised to them that love him."

Many and marvellous were the miracles that the Lord did through the holy Pachomius. He frequently cured in the name of Christ our Lord those who were possessed of demons. Through his prayers the Lord had mercy on many paralysed people and those suffering from various diseases.

35. (cf Vita Pachomii ch 20). Like a good athlete in the service of truth, the blessed Abba Pachomius, just like blessed Antony, often fought a good fight against the unclean attacks of the demons. Indeed, for a time he asked the Lord with urgent prayers that he might carry on without sleep for a while and keep vigil day and night in battle against his demon enemies, until at last he

overcame them and threw them down, according as it says in the psalm, "I shall not turn till they are beaten" (Psalms.18.37). The Lord heard his prayers because of his persistence. How stupid and ineffective the demons are, for any one of us with unquestioning faith and a wholehearted burning desire is able to do battle with them, trusting in the help of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

It was the brothers who told us about this blessed father Pachomius, who as we have said was head of many monasteries in the Tabennisi region. They told us that he frequently used to say to the brothers, "As the Lord God is my witness I have often heard these filthy demons discussing among themselves the various tricks which they play against the servants of God and especially against monks. Some would say, 'I am having to fight against a terribly difficult person, for as often as I put evil thoughts into his head he gets up at once and prostrates himself in prayer, with many sighs begging for divine help. When he gets up after a short while all I can do is get out.' Another would say, 'When I put thoughts into the heart of the one I am looking after he consents to them, makes them his own, and puts them into practice. So I often get him to explode in anger, get involved in quarrels, neglect his prayer, go to sleep during psalmody, and he doesn't resist me one scrap.' Therefore, my beloved brothers, you must always keep watch over your feelings and your mind, calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in obedience to the commandments of God turn to prayer and psalms, as the Apostle says, 'Be instant in prayer and watchful.' (Romans 12.1). Our filthy enemies the demons will not be able to prevail against us if we keep constant watch over our hearts in fear and trembling."

So this blessed father Pachomius taught the brothers how to be always mindful of the words of God for the salvation of their souls, and the brothers departed each to his own cell, working with their hands and meditating on what they had learned from the sacred Scriptures. Idle words were out of the question among them, they discussed among themselves only what they had learned from the holy Scriptures, strengthening them in the fear of God and lighting up their souls.

36. (A longer version of VI.i.3) There was a certain man among the holy seniors to whom Christ had given, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the great gift of being able to see what others did not see. The holy seniors bore witness to the fact that when a number of the brethren were sitting down together talking among themselves and discerning in the Holy Scriptures what was necessary to salvation, this holy senior saw a crowd of holy Angels

around them, rejoicing with joyful countenances, taking delight in the wisdom of the Lord. But when they began to talk about something else the holy Angels were disappointed in them and immediately drew away, and miserable specimens of pigs appeared, full of diseases, cavorting about among them; for it was demons in the shape of pigs taking delight in the empty and unnecessary chatter.

Book III (continued)

When the blessed senior saw them he went away to his cell and wept with loud groans for the whole night in mourning for our wretchedness. So the holy fathers sent an urgent message of warning throughout the monasteries:

"Brothers, put a curb on your conversations, and ban unnecessary talk, through which openings for evil are made into our souls, without realising how hateful we become in the eyes of God and his holy Angels. The Scripture says: 'In many words you shall not escape sin' (Proverbs 10.19). For they make the mind and soul weak and worthless."

37. There was a certain marvellous man, Arsenius by name, who had a position in the palace under the emperor Theodosius who when he was baptised adopted Arsenius' sons Arcadius and Honorius. Arsenius then, burning with desire for the love of God, left behind all the fleeting glory of the world and fled to the desert of Scete, having turned his back on a debilitating life of sensual luxury in order to live a secluded life among the holy fathers, free from the pressure of the world, devoting himself wholeheartedly to the Lord, the Saviour, in accordance with the Scripture 'My soul longs for you, your right hand has sustained me' (Psalms 63.8).

(From here on duplicated in V.xv.6) The holy fathers also said whereas in the world he had always worn the most costly clothes above anyone else, in the desert of Scete he afterwards took care to wear meaner and uglier garments than any of the other monks

38. (A slightly longer version of V.xviii.2 and also in VII.xxxvi.3) Abba Daniel said that the holy Arsenius told the brothers the following story as if it were about someone else, although it was obvious that it was himself who had had this vision:

"One of the seniors," he said, "suddenly heard a voice in his cell, saying, 'Go outside and I will show you what human beings do.' So he got up and went

out. He was taken to where a black Ethiopian was cutting wood with an axe and making a big bundle of it, and then trying to lift it up but was unable to do so because of its size. But he still went back and cut some more to add to the bundle. Again he was shown another man standing by a lake, drawing water from it and putting it into a jar, but there was a hole through which the water was escaping and running back into the lake.

"The voice said. 'Come with me and I will show you something else.' And he saw two men on horseback outside a temple, each of them carrying on their shoulders a long wooden pole, and trying to go into the temple but unable to get through the door because they were carrying the pole crossways. Nor were they giving way to each other, but were both trying to get in at the same time; neither of them was humble enough to give way to the other.

"And the visions were explained to him. Those carrying the long poles are those who bear the holy yoke of monastic life, but they justify themselves proudly in their own estimation, they don't give way to each other, and have no desire to walk humbly in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest unto your souls' (Matthew 11.29). Because of the pride in their hearts they remain outside, excluded from the kingdom of Christ the King. He who was cutting wood and making his bundle even bigger is one who is burdened with many sins but keeps on adding more of them without repenting of what he has already done, preferring to pile sin upon sin. And he who was drawing water from the lake is one who does some good works, but his evil deeds are more numerous, so that even the good that he does is wiped out and perishes.

"It is absolutely necessary, therefore, as the Apostle says, to 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling'" (Philippians 2.12).

39. (A longer version of V.iv.5.) Abba Daniel had a story about Abba Arsenius, that when he was making baskets out of palm leaves he would put water into a bowl to soak the palms in, and when the water became pungent and stinking he would not let anyone tip the water out, but he simply put fresh water into it, so that it remained just as stinking as before.

"Why is it, father," some of the brothers asked him, "that you would rather let the whole cell be filled with this terrible stink rather than let the water be changed?"

"Since in my secular life," the old man said, "I constantly enjoyed sweet smelling herbs and ointments and such like, it behoves me now to endure a stink like this instead of sweet perfumes, so that the Lord will save me from

the unspeakable stink of hell, and my soul will not be condemned along with that rich man who in this world feasted splendidly" (Luke 16:19)

40. One of the brothers said to the blessed Arsenius. "Look, blessed father, I meditate earnestly on what I learn from the holy Scriptures but I feel no compunction in my heart, so that I am not able to understand the power of the divine Scripture, and this is a great sadness to my soul."

"What you must do," said the blessed Arsenius, "is to meditate unceasingly on the words of the Lord, for I know what the blessed abba Poemen and many other holy fathers have said about soothsayers who use serpents in their incantations. They themselves do not understand the meaning of the words they use, but the serpents who hear understand the power of the word, and are tamed and subdued. Let us do the same. Even though we ourselves do not understand the power of the divine Scriptures, the listening demons are terrified by the power of the divine word and are scattered and put to flight, unable to bear the words of the holy Spirit spoken by his servants the apostles and prophets."

41. A murder was once committed near where Macarius lived and a certain innocent person was deemed to have been guilty of the crime. The victim of this calumny fled to the cell of the blessed Macarius. His accusers followed him and tied him up, saying that they themselves would be in danger unless this murderer were arrested and handed over to the law. But the accused person swore that he was not guilty of anyone's blood. They argued about it for some time until Macarius asked where the allegedly murdered person was buried. Having told him the place they all went off to the grave, where Macarius fell on his knees and calling upon the name of Christ said to those with him, "Now let the Lord show whether the accused person is guilty or not."

And he lifted up his voice and called upon the dead person by name. A voice came from the grave and the blessed Macarius asked, "In the faith of Jesus Christ I demand that you now tell us whether you have been killed by this man who stands accused before us."

From the grave came a loud voice saying; "I was not killed by this man."

Dumbfounded, they fell to the ground in a circle around his feet and began to ask him to question the dead man about who really had killed him, but the holy man said, "I won't ask him that. Let it suffice that the innocent is freed; it is not for me to bring the guilty to light. By now he might well have repented of the evil deed and done penance to the salvation of his soul."

42. On another occasion a certain brother gave Macarius a bunch of grapes, who of his charity gave it to another brother whom he knew to be somewhat weaker in strength through sickness, thus putting another's good before his own. The sick man gave thanks to God for his brother's kindness, but nevertheless he too thought more of his brother than himself and gave the grapes to another sick brother, who gave it to another, and so on until that bunch of grapes had gone the rounds of all the cells scattered throughout the desert. Eventually, without anyone realising it, it came back to the original giver, and Macarius was delighted to see such abstinence in the brothers, such charity, that it inspired him to even greater levels of achievement in his own spiritual life.

43. (Also in II.29) We were given further proof of his faith by those who heard of the following incident from his own mouth. One night a demon in the shape of a monk came and knocked at the door of his cell and said, "Get up, Abba Macarius, and come to the meeting where all the brothers are gathered together for the Vigil."

But filled as he was with the grace of God he could not be deceived. He recognised him as a lying demon and cried, "Liar! Enemy of the truth! What benefit or fellowship are you likely to get from the meeting of the saints when they gather together?"

The other replied, "You must realise, Macarius, that no meeting goes on without us, let alone a gathering of monks. Come along, and you will see for yourself what we are doing"

The holy Macarius said, "May the Lord strike you down, you unclean spirit!"

And he turned to prayer, begging the Lord to show him the truth about this boast of the demon. He went down to the meeting where the brothers were celebrating the Vigil, and again begged the Lord to show him the truth.

Suddenly he saw something like black little Ethiopian boys running about hither and thither through the whole church, almost as if they were flying. As these Ethiopian boys ran about they were sporting with each of the brothers as they prayed or sang psalms. If they pressed two fingers on to anyone's eyes he went to sleep, if they put a finger into anyone's mouth he yawned. After the psalm, when they prostrated themselves for the prayer they ran about among them and would turn themselves into the appearance of a woman near one as he lay there in prayer, near another into someone building or carrying something, while others performed various different antics. Whatever images the demons produced those at prayer took deep into their thoughts. But when

they tried any of these tricks on some of the other brothers they were violently driven back and thrown to the ground, no longer able to stand in front of them or walk past them. On other brothers they danced about on their necks and backs. When holy Macarius saw this he sighed deeply and wept copiously before the Lord, saying, "Look down, O Lord, don't keep silent, don't condone, O God (Psalms 83.1), but arise and scatter your enemies, make them flee from before your face (Psalms 68.1), for our souls reject their deceits." When the service was over, to satisfy himself of the truth, he approached each one of those whom the demons had been mocking with their various shapes and appearances and asked them whether in their prayers they had had any thoughts of building anything, or going on a journey or any other of the various phantasms which he had seen being given to each one by the demons. Each one admitted that he had thought these things just as he described them. Thus it became absolutely clear that all the evil, unnecessary and empty thoughts each one had had while singing psalms or praying or sleeping had all been instilled by the wiles and illusions of the demons, but those dark Ethiopians and the thoughts they peddled had been driven back by those who had kept custody of their hearts in the fear and love of God. For if the mind is fixed on God, especially at the time of prayer, nothing evil, nothing else can enter in.

44. (Also in VII.i.1) A certain brother asked Abba Sisois how he ought to conduct himself in his own cell. And he replied, "Eat your bread with salt and water and you will have no need to cook anything, or to wander off to any great distance."

45. (Also in V.x.44 but attributed to Abba Pastor) Abba Pastor was asked how one ought to fast.

"I would have monks eating a little every day," he replied, "but so as not to be satiated. Two-day or three-day fasts only serve to encourage vainglory. The holy fathers looked into all these matters and decided that it was good to fast daily by eating moderately, and still feeling a little hungry. They have mapped out for us this royal road, which is by no means burdensome."

46. (Also in V.iv.40) Abba Silvanus and his disciple Zacharias arrived at a certain monastery, and before they continued their journey the monks gave them a little food to eat. After they had gone on a little way the disciple noticed a pool of water and would have drunk from it, but abba Silvanus said, "Zacharias, today is a fast day."

"Haven't we just eaten, father?" said Zacharias

"That was out of charity, " the old man said. "For us, let us keep to our fast."

47. (Also in V.xiii.1, slightly different) Some of the brothers in Panephus came to abba Joseph and asked him about giving hospitality to visiting brothers.

"Is it right to welcome them confidently and joyfully?" they asked.

Now before they had asked him this he had spoken to his disciple telling him not to be surprised at what he was going to do that day.

He put out two chairs for the visitors, asking them to sit. He put one of them on his left and the other on his right, then went in to the cell and came back wearing some ragged old clothes that he had put on. Then he went back into the cell and came out again having put on the better clothes which he usually wore on feast days. He went in again and came out wearing his everyday clothing and sat down between them. They were mystified and astounded at what he had done.

"You see what I have been doing?" the old man asked. They nodded.

"Tell me," he said.

"You came out first of all wearing old ragged garments and then wearing better ones."

"Did I change into being a different person, between the mean clothes and the good ones?"

"No," they said.

"So then, I am still the same person wearing either this or that. The former do me no harm, and the latter don't make me any better. Let this be a model for meeting with brothers. When they are with us, let us welcome them with confidence and joy. When we are alone that is the time for abstinence and mourning."

What they were hearing was what had been in their own hearts before they had even asked him, and they happily went on their way glorifying God.

48 (Also in V.x.99 & VII.i.3) One of the fathers said: "There was one man who ate quite a lot, but even though he still felt hungry he restrained himself so as not be satiated. Another ate much less, but was fully satisfied. The man who ate a lot but disciplined himself while still feeling hungry earns a much greater reward than he who eats little and is satisfied."

49. (Also in VII.i.4) A certain old man said, "Don't be choosy about what you eat. Eat what God sends you and give thanks without ceasing."

50. (Also in V.iv.60) The brothers told a story of how a certain old man had a hankering after cucumbers, and when he got one he hung it up where he could see it, but did not touch it lest he should be conquered by his desires. In this

way he did greater penance by punishing himself for what he had desired.

51. (Also in V.iv.59) One of the seniors fell ill and was unable to take any food for many days.

"If you will let me, father," urged his disciple, "I will make you a few little cakes." The old man nodded, and the disciple did as promised. Now there were two little vessels, one containing honey and the other containing flax seed oil, which had become rancid. It was impossible to distinguish between them except in a good light. The brother was deceived and mixed the old man's food with oil, thinking it was honey. The old man tasted it, and said nothing, but went on to eat it without a word. But when he was offered it the third time he demurred.

"I can't eat it, my son," he said

"Come on, abba, it's good for you," said the disciple, trying to urge him on.

"See, I'll eat some too."

But as soon as he had tasted it he realized what he had done, and he fell down on his face.

"Woe is me, abba," he cried, "I might have killed you! You have made me guilty of a great sin by not saying anything!"

"Don't worry about it, my son, " said the old man. "If God had wanted me to eat something tasty you would have put the honey in, and not what you did put in."

52. Abba Poemen said, "If Nabuzardan, that prince of cooks, had not entered Jerusalem, the temple of the Lord would not have been destroyed by fire.

What this means is that if the urge to gluttony had not entered the soul the senses of mankind would not have been set aflame by the attacks of the devil."

53. (Also in V.iv.26) Abba Macarius made a resolution that whenever the brothers in charity asked him to dine with them, for every cup of wine that he drank he would go a whole day without tasting any water. So when the brothers offered him wine he enjoyed it, but afterwards punished himself for it. When his disciple realized what was happening he revealed what the old man was doing and begged them not to offer him wine, showing them that it was punishments he was receiving more than cups of wine.

54. (Also in V.viii.21) The monks were all gathered together in the church on a feast day, and when they were eating, one of the monks spoke to a servitor:

"I don't eat anything cooked. Please just bring me salted."

The servitor shouted out the order to another in the hearing of all, "This brother doesn't eat anything cooked. Bring him a little salted."

The blessed Theodorus then said, "It would have been better, brother, for you to have sat in your cell eating flesh than for all these brothers here to have heard what you said."

55. (Also in V.x.69) A pilgrim brother visited Abba Silvanus in Mt Sinai and noticed that the brothers were doing manual work.

"Why labour for the food that perishes?" he asked. "Mary chose the better part."

The old man said to his disciple, Zacharias, "Give this brother a book to read and put him in an empty cell."

At the ninth hour the brother looked out to see whether the old man was going to invite him to eat. When the ninth hour had long passed he went to the old man, and said, "Are the brothers not eating today, father?"

The old man assured him that they were.

"How is that you did not call me?" he asked.

"You are a spiritual man and have no need of food. We however are quite carnal people and need to eat, so therefore we work. But you, of course, have chosen the better part. You spend all day reading and feel no need for food."

These words led him to repentance.

"Forgive me, father," he said.

"Mary has great need of Martha," said Silvanus, "for if it hadn't been for Martha, Mary would not have been praised."

56 (Also in V.x.27) Abba John said to his senior brother: "I would like to be as free from care as the Angels, who do nothing except continually praise God."

And he picked up his pallet and went off into the desert. He endured this for a week, but then came back to his brother and knocked on the door.

"Who is there?" said the brother, without opening the door.

"It's John," he said."

But he still would not open the door.

"It is me," he protested.

But he still would not open the door until dawn the next day, when he said,

"You are only human, and you need to work if you are going to eat."

John prostrated himself at the old man's feet.

"Forgive me, abba," he said.

57. (Also in VII.i.5). A certain brother attacked by a spirit of blasphemy was too much ashamed to be able to talk about it, and although he tried to obey the seniors by going to them in order to bring his thoughts into the open he found

that once he got there he was too frightened to talk. After he had come several times to Abba Poemen the old man realised that he was having trouble with his thoughts and said, "Now look, you have come to me several times burdened by a whole lot of thoughts and you have gone away again, despondent, still carrying them with you. Tell me, my son, what is it all about?"

He replied, "There is a devil of blasphemy attacking me and I have been ashamed to speak about it." And as soon as he had opened up about it, the burden of his battle seemed lighter.

And the old man said, "Don't be too worried, my son. When these thoughts come to you say, 'I don't accept this. May this blasphemy be upon your own head, Satan, I want nothing to do with it.' For whatever your soul rejects will not find a permanent home. "The brother went home cured.

58. (Also in VII.i.6) Abba Moyses said, "There are four things which give rise to the passions, over indulgence in food and drink, excessive sleep, idleness and jesting, and strutting about in fancy clothing."

59. (Also in V.v.8) Abba Poemen said, "Just as the Emperor's armour-bearer always stands before him in full armour, so should the soul always be likewise prepared against the demon.

60. An old man said "Just as there are stronger herbs and pigments to drive out the poison from beasts so do prayer and fasting drive out unclean thoughts."

61. (Also in V.xviii.9 and VII.i.8) Abba Macarius was living by himself in an isolated part of the desert, although lower down it was full of many brothers. He was looking out along the pathway late one day when he saw a demon in the shape of a man coming along wearing a linen tunic with many pockets in it, and in each one there was little vessel.

"Where are you going, evil one?" asked Macarius.

"I'm going among your brothers lower down."

"And what are those little vessels for that you are carrying?"

"I cater for the brothers' tastes," he said. "I carry so many of them that if they don't like one I can offer them another, and it is impossible that there should not be at least one that they will like." And so saying he went on his way.

Book III (continued)

The old man kept a watch on the road for his return, and when he came into

sight he greeted him and the demon replied,

"What would you say if everything had gone amiss with me and no one sampled my wares?"

"You didn't make any friends there then?"

"Well, I did get one to go along with me. Whenever he sees me he is soon dancing about hither and thither."

"What was his name?"

"Theopemptus."

After he had gone, Macarius immediately went down to the lower desert. When the brothers heard him coming they went out to meet him, each one ready in the hope that Macarius would come to him. But he asked to be shown the cell of Theopemptus, and went straight there. He was welcomed gladly and as soon as they were alone together the old man began to question him.

"How is it going with you, my son?"

"Thanks to your prayers, I'm fine."

"Your thoughts not bothering you at all then?"

"I'm fine, mostly," blushing as he said it.

"Just think how many years I have been in the desert, honoured by all, and even now in my old age my thoughts bother me."

"Oh, yes, father, they do bother me as well."

Then the old man went through all the thoughts which he pretended to be attacked by himself, until finally Theopemptus confessed all.

"How much do you fast?" the old man asked him next.

"Until the ninth hour."

"Fast then until vespers, and meditate constantly on something from the Gospel or the other Scriptures, and whenever any unclean thoughts occur don't look at them, but rise above them, and the Lord will come to your aid."

And abba Macarius then went back to his solitude.

Some time later, as he looked out, he saw the demon coming once more.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Down among the brothers as before," he replied.

When he came back he asked him how the brothers were getting on.

"Peasants, the lot of them," he said, "and what's worse, even the one obedient friend I did have has somehow or other been converted and is harder on me than all the others."

And he swore that it would be a long time before he ever went back there again, and having said that, he went on his way.

62 (Also in V.v.31) "What shall I do, father," a brother asked an old man, "for I don't know how to bear with my thoughts."

"I am never embattled in that area," the old man replied.

Scandalised, the brother went to another old man.

"Look at what that old man said to me. I am scandalised at him, for he boasts of something beyond the power of human nature."

"What that old man told you was not all that straightforward. Go and apologise to him so that he can tell you what was behind what he said."

So he went back to the first old man.

"Forgive me, father," he said, "I have acted foolishly in leaving you without even saying goodbye. But please tell me, explain to me how it is that you never feel embattled?"

"Ever since I became a monk I have never completely satisfied my desires for bread, for water or for sleep. And so I think so much about those things, that my thoughts do not allow me to enter into the battles that you have told me about."

And the brother went on his way greatly helped by him.

63. (Also in V.v.9 & VII.i.9) Abba Poemen made this reply to another person asking about thoughts, "If a monk guards his stomach and his tongue and does not hanker after wandering about let him be quite certain that he will not die but live for ever."

64. (Also in VII.i.10) Two brothers who were worried about their thoughts came to abba Elias, and when the old man saw that they were rather fat he spoke laughingly as if to his own disciple, "Truly brother I blush for you that you have nourished your body so, when you profess to be a monk - monks should be thin, pale and humble."

65. (Also in V.ii.7) At the time when Arsenius was living in the plains, a certain woman came to Alexandria from Rome hoping that she might be found worthy of visiting him. She was a virgin, rich, godfearing, well aware of Arsenius' fame. She was hospitably received by Archbishop Theophilus of that city, whom she asked if it would be at all possible to persuade the blessed Arsenius to grant her an interview. So Theophilus went to Arsenius and said, "There is a certain excellent wealthy Roman woman, whose reputation excels all others, who would dearly love to see you and get your blessing. She has come such a long way, I hope you will grant her request."

When she realized that Arsenius had not agreed to meet her, she ordered her horses to be saddled, saying, "I trust in God's help that I will see him, and I

will not be defrauded of this intention. I have not come to see a mere man. There are plenty of them in Rome. It is a prophet that I want to see." So she marched off to the blessed Arsenius' cell and happened to see him walking about outside. She prostrated herself face down at his feet.

Immediately he made her rise, saying, "If it's only my face you want to see, here it is, look at it." For she from sheer shamefastness had not dared to look up.

"If you had been aware of any of the things I have done," he said, "you would have done better to look at them. And why have you bothered to cross such a great ocean? Don't you realize that you are a woman, with whom it is not lawful for any of us to have any dealings? You have probably only come here so that you could go back to Rome and boast to all your women friends that you have seen Arsenius, and thus encourage a whole flock of women across the sea to visit me"

"May it be God's will that he allows no one to come," she replied. "But pray for me, I beg you, keep me in mind."

"I pray to God that he will wipe out the memory of you from my heart," Arsenius replied.

Once she had taken these words in, she returned to Alexandria, quite ill because of what she had suffered. The bishop came to visit her because of her illness and asked what the matter was. She told him what the old man had said about herself and his memory which had upset her so much that she felt she would like to die. But the bishop comforted her in this way, "Don't forget that you are a woman, and the devil uses women to attack men. That is why he said that he would wipe the memory of your face out of his heart. But he will nevertheless pray to the Lord for your soul."

By these words the woman was restored to her usual self.

66. Abba Moyses said, "If the Emperor wants to attack an enemy city he first of all cuts off their food and water supply, so that his enemies will suffer from hunger and want and surrender to his rule. In the same way, if you live in fasting and hunger, the carnal passions grow weak and bring no strength to bear against the soul. Who is so strong as a lion? And yet even he through hunger may hide in his den with all his power laid low."

67. (Also in VII.ii.1) A certain young man kept on thinking he would renounce the world, but as often as he went out to do so, various considerations turned him back, involved as he was in business deals. He was, in fact, very rich. One day as he decided to go the demons stirred up a dust cloud around him. He

immediately divested himself of everything he had, including his clothes, and fled naked to the monastery, where the Lord appeared to a certain old man telling him to "get up and go to meet my athlete". The old man went out to meet the naked man and upon learning his story gave him the monastic habit. The other brothers came to the old man and reminded him of the usual conditions, but he had an answer ready for them, and to those who thought they knew all about renunciation he said, "Ask this brother about that, for I have not yet arrived at his level of renunciation."

68. (Also in V.vi.i) There was a brother who renounced the world, gave all his possessions to the poor except for a certain amount which he kept for himself, and then went to abba Antony. The old man soon understood what the situation was.

"If you will," he said, "please go into the village and buy meat. Dispose it all over your naked body and come back to me."

When he had done this, birds as well as dogs attacked his whole body to get at the meat, and tore him with beak and claw. On coming back he was asked by Antony if he had done what was asked of him.

"Just look at my torn flesh," he replied.

"Anyone who renounces the world," said Antony, "and keeps money back for himself, is torn as you are, but by demons."

69. (Also in V.vi.22) A certain brother asked a question of one of the old men. "Is it all right if I put two solidi by in case I get ill?"

The old man could see that the brother did want to save the money, so he told him to do so.

But when the brother returned to his cell he began to think things over.

"Have I really got the old man's blessing for this, or not?" he asked himself. And he got up and went back to the old man.

"In the name of God tell me the truth," he said. "I am really bothered in my mind about these two solidi."

"I could see that in your mind you wanted to keep them," said the old man, "so I agreed with you that you should. But it is not a good thing to hang on to anything more than what is strictly necessary for the body. If you have put your whole hope in these two solidi and then perhaps you lose them, won't God still keep on thinking of us? 'Cast all your care upon God, for he cares for us'" (1 Peter 5.7)

70. (Also in V.vi.5) Serapion, one of the monks, who possessed a copy of the Gospels, sold it and gave the money to the poor, acting in obedience to a

memorable text.

"For," he said, "I have sold that word which constantly tells me to sell what I have and give it to the poor." (Matthew 9.21)

71. (Also in V.vi.17) Someone urged abba Agathon to accept some money for his own needs, but he refused.

"I don't need it," he said, "for I feed myself by the work of my own hands."

"Perhaps you might accept it to give to the poor," persisted the man

"That could be doubly shameful," he replied, "for I should be accepting something I don't need, and then run the risk of vainglory by giving it to someone else."

72. (Also in VII.ii.2) Abba Paul used to say, "If a monk wants to have things in his cell apart from what he needs to keep alive he often thinks of going out from his cell, and is in this way deceived by the demon." This same Paul while making a mat one Lent found that he had only a small vessel of water left and very few rushes, so rather than go out for more he unravelled the mat and rewove it.

73. (Also in V.xvi.6 and VII.iii.1) Abba Macarius in Egypt had occasion to go out of his cell one day, and when he returned he found there was someone in the process of stealing the contents of his cell. So as if he were a passing pilgrim he helped the robber load up his beast, with complete equanimity, and sent him on his way.

"We brought nothing into this world," (1 Tim.6.7), he said. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. As it pleases the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the Lord in all things" (Job 1.21) .

74. (Also in V.xvi.19 & VII.iii.2) A brother who used to visit the cell of a certain old man was in the habit of stealing his food. The old man realised what was happening and did not make a fuss, but took a wider view.

"Perhaps this brother is in need," he said, although he was suffering severe hardship, for lack of bread.

But when this old man was dying, with all the brothers gathered round him, his eye chanced upon the brother who used to steal his bread. He bade him come closer, took his hand and kissed it.

"I give thanks for these hands of yours, brother, for I believe they have helped me into the kingdom of heaven."

He was conscience-stricken by these words and repented. He became a most fervent monk as a result of the old man's actions, which he had witnessed.

75. Abba Agathon kept a strict curb on himself and managed everything with

great discretion, both in his manual work and in what he wore. His clothing was such that nobody noticed whether it was either over elaborate or over untidy.

76. (Also in VII.vi.1) An old man said, "Anger arises in four different situations. Firstly through greed when either paying or receiving money, secondly through loving one's own opinion and defending it even when to anyone else it doesn't seem to be either very good or very bad, thirdly when wanting to be promoted to high honour, and lastly when wishing to be thought of as a teacher wiser than anyone else. Anger also causes confusion through four human attitudes, dislike of your neighbour, envy, contempt, character assassination. Likewise the remedy for this passion lies in four areas, firstly in the heart, then in the facial expression, thirdly in the tongue, fourthly in actions. For if you are able to suffer evil without letting it enter into the heart it won't show in your face. If however it shows in your face guard your tongue so that you say nothing. But if you do say something take care that you quickly apologise so that it does not develop into deeds. Human beings attacked by the passion of anger fall into three categories. Anyone who is harmed or injured and forgives has the nature of Christ. Anyone who does nobody any harm and therefore suffers no harm has the nature of Adam. But whoever harms others or injures them or slanders them or seeks revenge has the nature of the devil.

77. (A slightly longer version of V.xvi.10 and VII.vii.1) One of the brothers had suffered an injury from another brother, and came to abba Sisois to give him an account of his grievance, adding that he would really like to avenge the insult.

"You should leave judgment to God," the old man urged.

"I shan't give up," he said, "until I am avenged."

"Seeing that you have made up your mind about that," said the old man, "let us now say a prayer."

And he prayed thus:

"God, we do not need you any more to look after us, for as this brother says, we are quite able to avenge ourselves."

Hearing this made the brother fall down at his feet and beg forgiveness, and promise not to quarrel with the brother who had angered him.

78. (Also in VII.vii.2) A certain brother when insulted by another came to an old man and told him all about it. The old man said, "Calm yourself down with the thought that it was not you he was getting at but your sins. In every

trial which comes to you from another human being, don't argue, but say to yourself, 'It is because of my own sins that this is happening to me'"

79. Abba Poemen often used to say, "Never let yourself be overcome by malice. If someone does evil to you, give him back good, so that the good may overcome the evil.

80. (Also in VII.vii.4 and V.xvi.12) There was a brother who always rejoiced the more when anyone harmed him or insulted him.

"They are giving me an opportunity to advance towards perfection", he would say. "Those who praise us up to the skies put our minds in a turmoil. The Scripture says, 'Those who flatter you are deceivers.'" (Isaiah.3.12)

81. (Also in VII.vii.5) Another old man, if anyone slandered him, would go and visit the slanderer if he lived nearby and thank him personally. If he lived at a distance he would send him a gift.

82. (Also in VII.viii.1) A certain brother asked Abba Sisois, "If robbers or barbarians attacked me and tried to kill me, should I kill them if I had the opportunity?" He replied, "Not on any account, but commit yourself totally to God. Whatever the misfortune think that it comes because of your sins, ascribe it all to divine providence."

83. (Also in VII.vii.2) There was a famous hermit in Mount Athlibeus who was attacked by robbers. He called for help so loudly that some brothers who lived nearby came rushing in and overpowered them. They were then taken to the city where a judge sent them to prison. Now the brothers began to be very upset because they had caused the robbers to be handed over to the judge, and they came to Abba Poemen and told him all about it. Poemen wrote to the hermit urging him to look carefully into where the mistake first originated, "for", he said, "if you had not first been deceived in your heart the second mistake would not have happened." The hermit was so conscience-stricken by this that, famous though he was for not having gone out for such a long time, he immediately got up and went to the city and got the robbers publicly exonerated and freed from the prison and the tormentors.

84. (Also in VI.iv.12) The disciple of a certain wise man (philosophus) sinned and asked for pardon.

"I shan't forgive you," said the wise man, "until you have spent the next three years carrying burdens for others."

After three years he came back, having made satisfaction for his sins, but the wise man said,

"I will not forgive you for your sins yet, not until you spend another three

years earning money for those who insulted you and quarrelled with you."

When he had done all this his sins were forgiven.

"Come with me, now," said his master, "into the city of Athens, where you may learn some wisdom."

Now there was a very wise old man (*senex sapientia studiosus*) who sat at the gate, testing the mettle of all those who entered by offering them insults.

When he gave the young man this treatment it provoked nothing but loud laughter.

"How is this, then?" asked the old man. "I insult you and all you do is laugh?"

"And wouldn't you expect me to laugh?" he replied, "I've spent three years having to make payment to those who insulted me, and shouldn't I suffer what you have given me today for free?"

"Go into the city," the old man said. "You are worthy of it."

Abba John used to tell this story, and would add,

"This is God's gateway, through which our fathers entered into the city of God by means of many tribulations and injuries."

85. (Also in V.xv.83) A brother asked an old man if he could give him one guideline to keep and be saved.

"If you can suffer insults and injury in silence, this is a great thing above all the other commandments."

86. (Also in V.xv.17) When some of the brothers asked abba Moyses for a word, Moyses bade his disciple Zacharias say something. Zacharias threw his mantle down on the ground and stamped on it.

"You can't be a monk unless you are willing to be trampled on," he said.

87. Abba Macarius used to say, "A true monk is one who is in control of himself in all things. For if in arguing with anyone he is moved to anger he has been conquered by his own passions. Nor must he consent to imperilling his own salvation even though it were to save someone else."

88. (Also in V.viii.2) A certain brother was being praised by other brothers in the presence of abba Antony, but when Antony examined him he found that he could not put up with insults.

"You are like a building beautifully ornamented in front, brother," he said,

"but attacked by robbers through the back door."

89. A certain brother asked abba Isaac, "Abba, why are the demons frightened of you?"

"Ever since I became a monk I made up my mind that anger should never come out of my mouth. That is why the demons fear me."

90. (Also in V.iv.9) One of the fathers visiting abba Achillas saw that he was spitting blood and asked him what was the matter.

"I was deeply saddened by something that one of the brothers said to me," he said, "and struggled hard not to say something in reply. So I prayed to the Lord to lift this burden from me, and he turned the brother's words into blood in my mouth. After I had spat it out, I was at peace, and no longer remembered either my sadness or what the brother had said."

91. Some brothers came to a holy old man living in solitude and found there some children feeding the cattle, some of whom were using very bad language. After getting answers to some of the questions that the brothers asked the old man about their thoughts, they said to him, "How is it, father, that you can put up with the voices of those children without telling them not to speak like that?"

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And the old man said, "In actual fact, brothers, I have been thinking for some days that I should say something to them, but then I argue with myself that if I can't put up with this little matter how will I manage if I get some major trial to bear? So I say nothing to them, and thus get accustomed to putting up with things."

The same old man said, "If you can't hold your tongue when angry you won't be able to control yourself either when tempted by lust."

92. (Also in V.xvi.3 where there is a shorter version) Abba John was one day sitting in the midst of the brothers who were asking him about their thoughts. He gave a reply to each one of them, whereupon another old man said out of envy, "This John is like a harlot dressing herself up in order to attract a whole lot of lovers."

John replied, "Well yes, you are quite right. God has revealed to you the truth."

The other old man continued, "Yes, and your vessel, John, is full of poison."

John replied, "It is just as you say, abba, and what you have said is because of what you have seen of my outside. How much more you might have said if you could only have seen what I am like inside!"

One of the brothers then said to him, "Aren't you upset inside, abba, by what

this old man has said?"

He replied, "No. Inside I feel exactly as I outwardly appear."

93. (Also in V.xvii.8) There was an old man in Egypt, who before abba Poemen came upon the scene was held in great regard by everyone. But when abba Poemen arrived from Scete many left the old man and went to Poemen, which made him envious and say derogatory things about him. When abba Poemen heard about this he was very sad.

"What shall we do?" he said to the brothers. "Why have people caused me such great distress by leaving that holy man and coming to me who am nothing? How shall we make peace with this great man? Let us make some small rolls and take them to him, and a little wine, and share them with him. Perhaps by this we shall be able to quieten his soul."

So they went and knocked on his door. His disciple asked who was there.

"Tell your abba that Poemen is here wanting to receive his blessing," they said.

When he had heard what the disciple had to say, he replied, "Go and tell them to go away. I'm not free at present."

They were very disappointed at this, but they still persisted.

"We shan't go from here," they said, "until we have been able to pay him our respects."

Seeing their humility and patience he was conscience-stricken, opened the door and embraced them. And they all ate together.

"Truly," the old man said, "what I have seen in you today is a hundred times greater than everything I have ever heard about you."

And they were close friends from that day onwards.

94. (Also in VII.x.1) There was a time when Abba Muthues built a cell for himself in the place called Heracleona. But when he found the presence of so many other people irksome he went somewhere else and built himself a similar hut. By the wiles of the devil he came up against another brother there who enviously quarrelled with him, so he left and went back to his original neighbourhood where he built another cell, inside which he shut himself up. After a while the old men in the place that he had left gathered together and decided to go and ask him to come back, taking with them the brother who had quarrelled with him. When they got near to where he was they left that brother in charge of their cloaks and went themselves to knock on the old man's door. He saw them through the open window, and said, "Where are your cloaks?"

They replied, "They are nearby with that brother who quarrelled with you." After the old man had heard this and recognised who they were he joyfully took an axe to break down his door behind which he had shut himself up and ran to where the brother was. He apologised first, and embraced him, and invited them all into his cell where he entertained them for three days, even though he had the reputation of never being in the habit of relaxing his fast. In the end he got up and went back with them.

95. (Also in V.xvii.6) Abba Agathon used to say, "I have never gone to sleep holding a grudge against anyone, and as far as I have been able I have never allowed anyone having a grudge against me to go to sleep before making peace with me."

96. (Also in V.xvii.11) There were two old men living in a cell together who had never had any kind of quarrel between them.

"Let's have a quarrel," one of them said to the other, "just like other people do."

"I don't know how to do that."

"Well, I put this brick in between us and say, 'this is mine', and then you say, 'it's not yours, it's mine', and this causes trouble and strife."

So they put the brick between them.

"This is mine," said the first one.

"No, I think it is mine," said the other.

"It's not yours, it's mine!"

"Well, if it's yours, take it, then" said the other, after which they found that they had nothing else to quarrel about.

97. (Also in VI.iii.17) As blessed abba Macarius was praying, a voice once came to him saying, "You have not yet arrived at the stature of two women who live together in the nearby city."

So he picked up his staff and went out to visit that city and seek them out.

Having found the house he knocked at the door, and one of the women came out and welcomed him in with great pleasure. When the two of them were together with him he asked,

"I've gone to quite a lot of trouble coming to visit you from the distant desert, in order to learn about your way of doing things. I hope you will agree to tell me all about it."

"Oh, come, most holy father, we have both been in the beds of our husbands this last night. What could you possibly learn from our way of going on?"

But the old man persisted in praying that they should tell him their rule of life.

"We are not related to each other, " they said, persuaded at last by his pleas, "but it so happened that we married two brothers, and for the last fifteen years we have lived together in this house and never said an angry word to each other. We have never quarrelled, but lived in peace with each other right up until now. And we agreed between us that if our husbands both were willing we would join a community of religious virgins. But our husbands have not allowed us to do that, in spite of all our pleas, so we made a vow between us and God that we would not indulge in any worldly chatter until the day of our death."

Having listened to all this the blessed Macarius said, "In truth, it is not important whether you are virgin, married, monk or secular; all God wants is a firm intention, and he gives his life-giving Spirit to all."

98. (Also in V.vii.33) There was a brother living in a coenobium who was often subject to angry moods.

"If only I had no one to quarrel with," he said to himself, "perhaps I would get some respite from this passion. I'll go and live in the desert."

But one day after having gone to live alone in a cave, he filled a jar with water, put it down, and suddenly it tipped over. He filled it up three times and the same thing happened. He flew into a temper and picked up the jar and smashed it. He had a few things to think about when he came to himself.

"I have been deceived about the spirit of anger," he said. "Here am I, all alone, and I am still overcome by anger. I'll go back to the coenobium, where you need patience in the battle, but where also there is help from God. "

And he got up and went back to his former place.

99. Also in V.xv.25) Blessed Macarius told this story about himself:

When I was a young man living in a cell, they took me and made me the cleric for the village. But I did not want this and fled to another place, where a certain devout secular ministered to me by selling my work for me. It so happened that a local girl had lustfully become pregnant, and when the parents forced her to say who was responsible, she said, "It's that anchorite of yours who has done this wicked deed".

The girl's parents seized me, hung earthen jars around my neck and dragged me through all the village streets, beating me unmercifully, and shouting, "This monk has forced our daughter!"

They had almost beaten me to death when one of the seniors intervened.

"Why are you beating this pilgrim monk so unmercifully? He has always dealt

with me with manifest modesty, which calls into question the severe treatment you are giving him. What has he done that you make these accusations?"

"We will not release him," said his parents. "Not unless someone is willing to come forward as surety for our daughter's maintenance."

He said he would take me into his service, to which I agreed, upon which he gave his word on my behalf. We got back to my cell, where we agreed on how many baskets I could contribute, and who they would be sold to, and he would buy the food for 'my wife'.

I said to myself, "Macarius, you have found a wife for yourself. You will have to work very hard in order to support her." And I did work day and night that she could have her daily ration of food.

When it came time for her to give birth, she was in agony for several days with no result.

"What have you done" she was asked.

"It's because my accusation of that anchorite was false," she admitted. "It was the boy next door who did it."

The man who was looking after me was overjoyed when he heard this "That wretched girl," he said when he came to see me, "has said that it's because she had falsely blackened your reputation that she was unable to give birth, and all the neighbours are coming to ask your forgiveness."

When I learnt this, I hastily fled, lest these people should do me any more harm. And so I came to this place. So there you have the reason for my coming here.

100. (Also in V.ix.8 & VII.xxxix.2) A brother asked abba Poemen how to overcome his depression.

"Don't decide anyone is worthless, don't condemn anyone, don't slander anyone, and God will give you rest."

101. (Also in VII.xi.3) Abba Poemen used to say that Abba Isidore was the only one who truly knew himself. Whenever his thoughts told him how great he was he replied, "Do you compare with Antony, or Abba Pambo or the rest of the fathers who were all pleasing to God?" These thoughts quietened him down. When a demon worried him with thoughts of despair and punishment, saying, "After all this you will have to go to the place of torment", he replied, "Even if I am sent into torment, at least I shall find that you are lower down than I."

102. (Also in VII.xi.4) Demons often appeared to Abba Moses and cursed him, saying, "You have beaten us, Moses, and we can't do anything to you, for

as often as we try to humiliate you into the depths of despair you are uplifted, and as often as you are uplifted you humiliate yourself in such a way that none of us can get near you."

103. (Also in VII.xi.5) A certain brother frequently used to come to Abba Sisois saying, "I have fallen. What shall I do, father?" To which he replied, "Get up again."

"But I have got up again, and also fallen again."

"Just go on getting up."

The brother kept on confessing his fallings and risings and the old man kept on telling him not to fail to get up again, until at last the brother said, "Explain to me, father, how long it is possible to go on getting up."

And the old man said, "Until you die - caught either in the midst of a good deed or a bad one. For in whatever kind of deed you are taken, by that you will be judged."

104 (Also in V.vii.42) There was an old man who was grievously troubled by his thoughts for the space of ten years until driven to despair.

"My soul is lost," he said, "So seeing that I am to perish anyway, I might as well return to the world."

But as he went on his way he heard a voice.

"Those ten years of struggle are your crowning glory. Go back to your own place and I will set you free."

So he went back and took up his labours again.

It is not a good thing for anyone to fall into despair because of his thoughts. They provide us with a greater crown if we tread them under, no matter how much they bother us.

105 (Also in V.vii.1) When abba Antony was living in the desert, he was greatly troubled by dryness of spirit. Tied in knots by the multiplicity of his thoughts he cried out to God.

"Lord, I earnestly desire to be on the path of salvation but my chaotic thoughts don't allow me. What shall I do in this tribulation, or how may I become worthy of salvation, please tell me!"

A little later, as he looked out, he saw someone like himself, sitting down weaving ropes, then getting up from his work to pray. It was an Angel sent to help Antony.

"If you do likewise, Antony, you will be saved," he heard the Angel say. He was overcome with the greatest feeling of joy, and with renewed confidence was reassured.

106. (Also in V.vii.34) A brother had a question to ask an old man:

"What shall I do, father, for I don't conform to all the things a monk is supposed to do. I am sunk in negligence about my food and drink, and in my hours of sleep, and from hour to hour I flit about from thoughts of this to thoughts of that, and it saddens me that I fail."

"Sit in your cell," the old man said, "and do peacefully whatever you can, and put your trust in God. Anyone who sits in his cell for God's sake will find himself in the same place as abba Antony."

107. (Also in V.vii.28) Another brother had a question to ask abba Achillas:

"Why do I suffer from dryness of spirit as I sit in my cell?"

"Because you have not yet understood, brother, either the eternal rest that we hope for, or the torments that we should be frightened of," said the old man.

"If you were to address these matters carefully, even to imagining the cell being full of serpents up to your neck, you would have no difficulty in staying in your cell without boredom."

108. (Also in V.i.1) A brother had a question for abba Antony:

"What should I do to please God?"

"Listen carefully to what I am telling you," said the old man. "Always keep God before your eyes, and whatever you are doing, look in the divine Scriptures for your examples, and wherever you are living, don't be in too much of a hurry to move somewhere else, but patiently endure in the same place. If you observe these three things, you will be safe."

109. (Also in V.ii.1, attributed to Antony) When a brother asked abba Moyses for some instruction, the old man said:

"Go and sit in your cell, for your cell will teach you everything, as long as you stay there. For just as a fish dies when taken out of the water, so does a monk perish if he lingers long outside his cell."

110. (Also in VII.xii.2) A certain brother asked Abba Poemen whether it was better to live by yourself or with others, and the old man said, "If people are critical of themselves they will persevere anywhere, but if they exaggerate their own importance they will never endure. People should not boast about any good they might have done, for it might well be perishable."

111. (Also in VII.xii.4) On one occasion a certain brother from Egypt visiting Abba Zeno in Syria began to accuse himself of his own thoughts in the old man's presence. And the old man marvelled, saying, "These Egyptians conceal the virtues which they do have and display vices that they don't have, whereas Syrians and Greeks preach about virtues which they don't possess and keep

hidden the vices which they do possess."

112. An old man said: "Anyone freely praised by people is in not a little danger to his soul. But anyone not held in honour among people will finally be given glory from God."

113. The same man said: "Seed will not germinate among weeds, and it is impossible for those who get praise and glory from the world to enjoy the harvest of heaven."

114. The same man said: "If you flaunt your riches, you are in danger of being robbed. Similarly, if you boast about your virtues, they will perish. Just as wax melts in the fire, so does a soul softened by praise fall from its first integrity."

115. The same man said: "When you are assaulted by thoughts of vainglory or pride, examine yourself whether you have obeyed all God's commandments, loved your enemies, rejoiced in the success of your enemy and been saddened at his fall. If you constantly realise that you are an unprofitable servant and a greater sinner than all others, you will never then think highly of yourself however much good you may do, for you will remember that any boastful thought undoes all the good."

116. One old man said to another, "I am dead to this world."

"Don't be too sure of yourself," said the other, "until it is time for you to depart from out of your body. However much you may say that you are dead, the devil is not dead, and his wiles are without number."

117. There was one old man who after living fifty years in the desert, living sparingly on bread and water, said that he had overcome vainglory and avarice. When abba Abraham heard about this he went to visit him.

"Is it true that that is what you said?" he asked.

"Yes it is."

"See now, if you are walking along the road and you see a lump of gold among the stones and broken bricks, do your thoughts tell you that each one is the same as the other?"

"No, but on the other hand I do battle with my thoughts. Avarice is still there, but controlled."

"Suppose one man likes you and praises you, another detests you and slanders you, do you have the same regard for one as you do for the other, if they come to see you?"

"No, but again I do battle with my thoughts and serve diligently the one I don't like."

"So then the passions do still live in you, but controlled by holy thoughts,

which seem to be permanently part of you because of your way of life."

118. There was an old man living in the inner desert who stayed quietly in his cave, ministered to by a devout secular man. It so happened that the son of this man fell ill, and with many prayers he begged the old man to come to his house and pray for the child. The old man got up and was walking back with him when the man ran on ahead to his house and went in crying, "Come out to meet the anchorite." When the old man saw them from afar, carrying torches, he realised that they were coming to meet him, so he stripped off his clothes and plunged them into the river, and began to wash them as he stood there naked.

When his friend saw it he blushed, and cried to his companions, "Go back, for the old man has lost his wits."

And going up to the old man he asked him what he was doing, for everyone who saw him had said "The old man has a demon!"

"And that is exactly what I wanted to hear," he said.

119. When abba Moyses heard that a certain provincial judge desired to come and venerate him, he fled from his cell, but happened to meet the judge on the road.

"Can you tell me where abba Moyses' cell is?" he asked.

"What do you want to go and see that person for?" he asked. "He's not only stupid but a heretic."

The judge went back to the church and consulted the clergy.

"Having heard quite a lot about abba Moyses I thought I would go and get his blessing, but a monk who met me on the road told me he was a heretic."

The clergy were very sad to hear this and questioned him about the monk who had said that to him.

"Well he was black, and very tall, wearing the most ancient of garments."

"Why that was Moyses himself," they said, and when he realised this he went on his way in astonishment.

120. When abba Sisois was living on the same mountain where Antony had hidden himself, a man was hurrying to him with his small son to ask for a blessing, when it so happened that the child died on the way. The father with a completely untroubled mind carried him to the old man in faith, went into his cell and prostrated himself and the child on the ground, as is the custom for those seeking a blessing. At the conclusion of the prayer the father got up and left the cell leaving the body of his son at the abba's feet. The old man thought that he was just lying there to pray.

"Get up, my son, and go," he said, not realising that he was dead. And the boy immediately got up and went out. When his father saw him he was astounded, and went back into the cell to venerate the old man, and faithfully explained to him first how the son had been ill and then that he had been mourning his death. The old man was very worried, for he did not want such tales as this to be noised abroad about him. And through his disciple he told the man never to reveal to anyone what had happened until after he was dead.

121. A secular man came to the church suffering from an unclean spirit. They all prayed for him but the unclean spirit would in no way depart.

"How can we deal with this spirit?" the brothers asked among themselves.

"No one except Besarion can drive this one out. But if we tell him that, he will refuse to come to the church. But he is accustomed to coming to church with us, so let's get this poor sufferer to sit here, and later we will say to Besarion, 'Abba, wake up this sleeper.'" So that is what they did. Abba Besarion came to church, they all stood for prayer, and then they said, 'Abba, wake up this sleeper.'

"Wake up, and go outside," said Besarion, shaking him. And immediately the spirit went out of him, and the man was healed from that same hour.

122. A man in Egypt who had a paralysed son carried him to the cell of the blessed Besarion and left him at the cell door weeping, while he went off some distance. At the sound of his weeping the old man looked out through the window and said,

"Who has left you there, my son?"

"My father put me here, and then went away."

"Well, get up and go and join him," said the old man, and the boy was immediately healed and went to join his father.

123. Abba Muthues said, "The closer anyone comes to God, the greater sinner he realises himself to be. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord he called himself an unclean wretch (Isaiah 6.5). Let us not be unmindful of this. For the Scripture says, 'Let him who stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor.10.12).

We navigate through uncertain waters in this world, though we monks are seen as navigating through a calm sea, whereas seculars face great dangers. We walk in the daylight, lit up by the sun of righteousness, they in ignorance, as if in darkness. But it often happens that seculars sailing through the darkness of the night, by keeping watch and shouting warnings are able to save the ship, whereas we are often negligent through the security of sailing through calm waters, and we perish because we have relinquished our hold

upon the tiller of humility. Just as it is impossible to keep the ship safe without a rudder, so it is impossible for people to be saved without humility."

124. Macarius was once returning to his cell at daybreak carrying a bundle of palm leaves, when the devil met him carrying a sharp reaping hook. He tried to strike him down but failed.

"I suffer a great deal from you, Macarius," he said, "for every time I want to harm you I am unable to do so. For whatever work you do I am forced to do even greater. You fast sometimes, I am never able to partake of any food; you frequently keep vigil, but I can never allow sleep to overcome me; I declare that there is one thing in which you always come out the winner."

"And what may that be?" inquired Macarius.

"Your humility alone it is that beats me."

As the devil said this, the blessed Macarius lifted up his hands in prayer, and the unclean spirit vanished into thin air.

125. One of the old men was a hermit monk. Someone frothing at the mouth, because possessed by an evil spirit, struck the hermit hard on the cheek. The old man however offered the other cheek to be struck, and the devil immediately fled, unable to endure the fire of his humility.

126. One of the fathers said, "Everything a monk labours at is worth nothing without humility. Humility goes before love just as John Baptist went before Christ, drawing all people to him. Humility draws you towards love, that is, to none but God, since God is love."

127. Once when Abba Macarius was going up to Mount Nitria, he told his disciple to go on before him a little way. After he had gone on a little distance he met a pagan priest hurrying along towards him carrying a heavy piece of timber.

"Where are you running off to, you devil" the disciple shouted. The priest felt so insulted by this that he beat Macarius' disciple again and again, and went on his way leaving him almost half dead. After a little while he came upon Abba Macarius.

"I wish you well, struggling with that heavy load, I wish you well," said Macarius in greeting.

Astonished, he replied, "What do you see in me that you should wish me well?"

"I saw you were struggling, and also that you were running you know not where."

"I must say that I am greatly moved by your greeting and I can see that you

are a great servant of God. Some other miserable nobody of a monk insulted me when he met me, but I gave him back blows for his words."

Then grasping Macarius' feet he cried; "I won't let go until you make me a monk."

They went on together till they came to where the injured brother was lying. He was unable to walk so they lifted him up and carried him between them until they came in to the church. When the brothers saw that priest in company with Macarius, they were astonished, and ended up by gladly accepting him as a monk. Many pagans became Christian because of him. As Abba Macarius said, proud and spiteful words can even make good men behave badly, whereas kind and gentle words can induce even evil men to behave well.

128. The blessed Antony often used to say, "If the miller does not blindfold the eyes of his animal it will consume the fruits of his labour. In the same way, by the dispensation of God, we put a blanket over our good deeds so as not to pay any attention to them, lest we beatify ourselves, and become puffed up, and lose our due reward. And when we are assailed by evil thoughts it is necessary that we should always condemn ourselves and our attitudes, lest the evil things in us should obscure what little good we have done. Even if people have good intentions, they cannot be really good unless God dwells in them, for no one is good save God. We must therefore always accuse ourselves honestly. Anyone who rebukes himself will not lose his reward."

129. Again, he said that he had seen the snares of the enemy spread out over the whole world, and he sighed and said, "Who can possibly find a way through them?"

And a voice came to him saying, "Humility alone can walk here, Antony. Here the proud can in no way prevail.

130. Once when blessed Antony was praying in his cell he heard a voice saying, "Antony you are not yet equal to the leather worker in Alexandria." When he heard this, the old man got up next morning and taking his staff hastened off to Alexandria where he sought out the leather worker, who was absolutely astonished to be visited by such a great man. The old man said, "Tell me what it is you do, for I have left the desert in order to come here and see you."

"I don't know that I have done anything special. In fact when I get out of bed in the morning, before I settle down to work, I reflect that everyone in this city from greatest to least will enter the kingdom of heaven because of their goodness. I alone for my sins will suffer eternal punishment. And before I go

to bed I truthfully repeat these words from the bottom of my heart."

When he heard this, the blessed Antony replied, "Truly, my son, like a good workman sitting peacefully at home, you have arrived at the kingdom of God. But I who have spent my time badly in solitude have not arrived at equality with you."

131. A certain brother asked Abba Poemen, "What does the Apostle mean, father, when he says, 'To the pure all things are pure'?" (Titus.1.15) And he replied, "To succeed in being able to understand this you must first see yourself as the least of all creatures."

"How could I possibly see myself as less than a murderer, say?"

"If you want to understand this saying of the Apostle, and you see someone who has killed someone else, you should say to yourself, 'This person has committed just this one sin, but I commit homicide every moment, for I am killing myself by reason of my sins.'"

And when the brother queried this he replied, "A person is righteous only when he blames himself. He is righteous because he condemns his own sins."

132. Some of the brothers were sitting with Abba Poemen when one of them praised one of the brothers, saying, "He's a good man, that brother, for he hates what is evil".

"What does it mean, to hate evil?" the old man asked.

Not being quite sure how to answer that the brother said, "You tell me, abba, what hating evil means."

"He who hates evil", said the old man, "hates his own sins and lovingly blesses all his brothers."

133. A brother asked Abba Poemen how it was possible to avoid speaking evil of one's neighbour, and he replied, "My neighbour and I each have an image. If I look at my own image and condemn it, the image of my brother seems to be praiseworthy by comparison. But when I praise myself the image of my brother seems contemptible. So therefore I can never disparage my brother as long as I always blame myself."

134. Abba Hyperichius said, "Better to eat flesh and drink wine than devour the life of your brother by slandering him. Just as the hiss of the serpent drove Eve from paradise, so anyone who slanders his brother not only loses his own soul but the soul of anyone listening to him."

135. Abba John used to say, "To condemn ourselves is a small sacrifice to make, but to justify ourselves and condemn others is to choose a heavy burden to carry."

136. Once there was a meeting in Scete when the fathers were discussing many things, including the way many of them were living their lives. Abba Pior, however, said nothing. After a while he went out and filled up a bag with sand, which he dragged behind him, and put some more sand in a small basket, which he carried in front of him.

"What is that supposed to mean?" asked the other brothers when they saw what he was doing.

"This bag which contains a great quantity of sand represents my sins, and see, I have pushed them away behind my back, because I don't want to look at them or grieve or weep for them. And see, these few sins of my brother I put in front of my eyes and I go to a great deal of trouble to condemn him. But this way of judgment is not right. I should put the greater quantity of sins before my eyes, and think about them, and ask God to have mercy."

When the fathers heard this, they said, "Truly this is the way of salvation."

137. Abba Isaac once visited the coenobium and was angry because one of the brothers was negligent. He ordered that he should be expelled. When he went back to his cell an angel of the Lord came and stood before the doorway.

"I do not allow you to enter," the angel said.

"Why, what have I done wrong?"

"God has sent me to ask you where we should send that brother who has sinned."

At once he was sorry and prostrated himself

"I have sinned; Lord, forgive me," he said.

"Rise. God has forgiven you. But do not again condemn anyone before God has judged him. 'Men take it upon themselves to judge, and don't allow me to do so,' says the Lord."

This was said so that if a mature monk happened to transgress in some small matter he should not be frightened of it being revealed.

138. It so happened that a certain brother in the coenobium committed a crime, and when he was condemned by the brothers he fled to Abba Antony. Some brothers who wanted to reform him went after him, and began to make out a case against him because of his crime, even though he denied having done anything wrong. Among those present was Abba Paphnutius, nicknamed the Chief (Cephalas), who told the assembled brothers a parable they had not heard before.

"I saw," he said, "a man on the banks of the river up to his knees in mud. Some people came with outstretched hands trying to get him out but only

succeeded in burying him further up to his neck."

Then blessed Antony said this about Abba Paphnutius, "Now there is a man who can heal souls by speaking the truth."

The brothers were conscience-stricken by this saying and apologised, and took back into the coenobium the brother who had departed.

139. One of the seniors said, "If you see someone sinning don't put the blame on him but on the one who caused him to sin. Say, 'Woe is me! That person all unwillingly has been overcome, just like me.' And weep, seeking refuge in God, for we are all subject to deception."

140. A certain anchorite called Timothy heard about a brother who had been negligent, and when asked by the abbot what should be done about it replied that the brother should be expelled from the monastery. After he had been expelled Timothy himself was beset by temptation. He wept in the sight of God and cried, "Have mercy on me", and he heard a voice saying, "Timothy, you are in the midst of this crisis because you despised your brother in the time of his temptation."

141. One of the fathers in ecstasy saw four ranks of people standing before God. The first was made up of those who were not very strong but who constantly gave thanks to God, the second was of those who were given to hospitality and were constantly serving in this way, the third was of those who lived in solitude apart from the sight of mankind, the fourth was of those who sought to be obedient and who were subject to the fathers. This rank of people who were obedient was higher up than the others. They wore golden neckbands, and were more glorious than the others.

"This fourth rank, why were they more glorious than the others?" asked the person to whom this was being told.

"All the others find their fulfilment in exercising their own will," he replied, "albeit in doing good works. But the obedient depend upon the will of the father who instructs them. Therefore their glory is greater than that of the others".

142. An old man said, "If someone asks his brother to do something with humility and the fear of God, his request will seem to be as if coming from God and will persuade the brother to comply and do what he has been asked. But if someone gives orders in a desire to exert his own authority and willpower, and not in the fear of God, God who knows the secrets of the heart will not help the brother to understand what he is being told or help him to carry it out. It is obvious that what is done for God's sake is the work of God;

just as it is obvious when a person's commands spring from arrogance. Whatever is of God is grounded in humility; tyranny, anger and turmoil are of the enemy.

143. Abba Silvanus had a disciple called Mark, whom he especially loved because of his great obedience. He had eleven other disciples who were disgruntled because he was the favourite. Some of the other old men were sad when they heard about this and came to Silvanus to clarify with him why his disciples were disgruntled. But before they could say anything, he took them to the cell of each one of his disciples in turn, and called each one of them by name asking him to come out because he had some work for him to do. None of them was willing to come out, until he came to Mark's cell and knocked on his door, and called him by name. Mark came out as soon as he heard his name called. Abba Silvanus went in to Mark's cell, and found that Mark, who was a scribe, had left a letter unfinished in the manuscript he was copying, the moment he had heard his name called. His obedience was such that, hearing the old man's voice, he would not complete the letter that he had already begun.

"Indeed," said the other old men, "He whom you love we love also, for God himself loves him for his obedience."

144. An old solitary used to use the services of someone in the neighbouring village to bring him food and materials for his work. When this man was a few days late and he was running short of food and materials he was worried and asked his disciple to go into the village. In obedience he said he would, though he was fearful about it lest he commit some offence.

"I trust in the God of our fathers," said the old man, "to keep you safe from all temptation." And having said a prayer, he sent him on his way.

The brother arrived in the village, enquired where the supplier lived, found the house and knocked at the door. He found no one at home except the man's daughter. When she opened the door the brother was about to enquire why her father was so many days late, but she asked him to come in and took him by the arm. When he demurred, she showed her strength and dragged him in. He could see that he was being led into sin and his thoughts were in a turmoil and he groaned.

"Lord," he cried out to God, "by the prayers of him who sent me here save me in this hour!"

And as soon as he had said it, he suddenly found himself by the river near the monastery and went back to his father unstained.

145. Two brothers according to the flesh joined a monastery. One of them kept religiously to the rules, the other had a great capacity for obedience. When the abbot said "Do this" he did it; "Do that" and he did it. And he was very highly regarded in the monastery because of his obedience. His "religious" brother was envious and promised himself that he would put his obedience to the test. He went to the abbot and asked that he and his brother could be sent to a certain place where he was needed, and the abbot agreed. As they went out together they came to a river in which there were many crocodiles.

"Go into the river and cross over," he said, wanting to test him. He went in and the crocodiles came and began to lick his body but did him no harm.

"Come out of the river and let's go on," he said when he saw what was happening. And as they went they came across a dead body lying in the road.

"If we had some kind of cloak we should lay it over him," said the religious one.

"Let us pray," said the other. "Perhaps God will revive him." And as they stood in prayer the dead man arose, and the religious one took all the credit to himself.

"It is because I observe the rules strictly," he said, "that this dead man has been raised up."

Now God revealed all this to the abbot in the monastery, both how he had tested his brother with the crocodiles and how the dead man had been raised.

"Why did you do this to your brother?" he asked when they returned to the monastery. Let me tell you, it was because of your brother's obedience that the dead man was raised."

146. One of the old men of Scete sent his disciple into Egypt to bring back a camel so that all the baskets he had made could be carried back into Egypt. As he was bringing back the camel he met another old man who said to him, "If I had known you were going into Egypt, brother, I would have asked you to bring back a camel for me too." He told this to his abba, who with great kindness said, "Go and take this camel to him, brother, and say that we are not yet ready to use it, load it up with his goods, and take it down to Egypt. Then bring it back again to carry our load." The brother did so and said to the old man, "Abba Pambo says we are not ready yet and for you to load it up with your goods." So the old man loaded up the camel and the brother took it down to Egypt. Once he had unloaded it he brought it back again and prepared to leave the old man, who asked him where he was going. "I'm going back to Scete again," he said, "in order to bring our own baskets here." When the old

man heard this he was conscience-stricken and apologised in tears, saying, "Forgive me, my dear friend, for presuming on your charity to carry my goods."

147. There was another old man who had finished his baskets and put handles on them all, when he heard his neighbour saying,

"What shall I do, for it is nearly market time and I have not got any handles to put on my baskets?"

So he went in and took all the handles off his own baskets and took them to this brother.

"I've got too many of these," he said, "use them for your own baskets."

So of his great charity he made sure that his brother's work was completed, leaving his own unfinished.

148. Abba John, thanks to his great charity, was completely free of guile. He once borrowed a solidus from one of the brothers in order to buy some linen to work with, some of which he quite cheerfully gave to another brother who came to him begging a bit of linen to make a bag with. He gave some more to another brother who asked him for some, and to several more as well to whom he gave quite freely. Later the lender of the solidus came seeking repayment. And he said, "I'm going away, but I'll bring it to you".

Not having the wherewithal to repay him he set out for Abba Jacob to ask him to lend him enough to pay what he owed, but on the way he saw a solidus lying on the ground, which he did not touch, but said a prayer and went back to his cell. A second time the brother repeated his request, to which he replied, "I won't keep you waiting much longer." He went out again and saw the solidus still lying in the same place, but he said a prayer and returned home. The brother came for a third time badgering him about the solid. At last the old man said, "I'm going now and I'll bring it to you." He went out and found the solidus still lying in the same place, but this time he said a prayer, picked it up, and took it to Abba Jacob. "As I was coming to you, abba, " he said, "I found this solidus in the way. Could you do me a favour and publicise it in town so that if the person who has lost it can be found you can give it back to him." The old man went out and made announcements about it for three days, but could find nobody who had lost the solidus. Only then did John say to Abba Jacob; "If no one has lost it I will give it to that brother I am in debt to. For I was coming to you, either to borrow or ask you to give me enough to pay my debt, when I found this solidus."

And the old man marvelled that John, even though he was in debt when he

had found this solidus, did not pick it up immediately in order to repay his debt, but turned back from it twice, and the third time made his find public. Another wonderful thing about him was that if anyone wanted to borrow anything from him he would not pick it up to give them with his own hands, but would just say, "Go in and take what you need." And when they brought it back again, he would just say, "Go and put it back in the place where you found it." But if they did not bring anything back he just said nothing.

149. Abba Poemen said, "Don't feel you always have to get your own way, but rather humble yourself to do what your neighbour wants."

When this same Abba Poemen was bidden to the common meal he wept, but would still go lest he offended his brothers by disobedience.

He sacrificed his own will and humbled himself to follow the will of another.

150. An anchorite living in a cell near the coenobium practised many virtuous acts. When some monks from the coenobium visited him, he was obliged to eat outside his usual fixed time.

"Were you not upset, abba, because today you have not kept to your usual rule," the monks asked him.

"The only time I am upset is when I follow my own self-willed inclinations," he replied.

151. Abba Paphnutius did not drink wine. As he was on a journey one day he came across a group of robbers who were drinking wine as they went along. The leader recognised him, knew that he did not drink wine, but seeing that he was tired from the effort of his journey, he filled a large cup with wine and offered it to him, standing there with a sword in his right hand.

"If you don't drink this wine, I will kill you," he said.

The old man knew that the robber chief really wanted to keep the commandments of God, so in order to win him over he took the wine and drank it.

"Forgive me, father," said the robber, "I'm afraid I have abused you."

"I trust in God," he replied, "that by means of this one cup of wine he will have mercy on you both now and in the world to come. "

"And I trust in God," said the robber, "that from now on I will not molest anybody."

So the old man won over the whole band of robbers.

152. There were two brothers, the elder of whom said to the younger. "I would like us to live together."

"You could not live with me," said the younger, "I'm such a sinner."

"We could do it," he said.

Now the older man was very pure and rejected any idea that a monk could entertain any depraved thoughts.

"Let me think about this for a week," said the younger, "and then we can talk again."

At the end of the week the elder came back to him and the younger, wanting to test him, said,

"I have succumbed to a great temptation during this week, abba. I had occasion to go into the village, and while there I sinned."

"Do you want to do penance for it?" he asked.

"I do," he said.

"I will carry with you a share in the punishment for your sin," the elder said.

"If that is the case, we would be able to remain together," he said. And they remained together until the time that one of them died.

153. An old man said,

"Any act which a man holds in abhorrence he is not likely to do to anyone else. Would you hate it if someone robbed you? Don't rob anyone else. Would you hate it if someone slandered you, or despised you? Don't you do likewise in any of these things to anyone else. Keeping this rule suffices to keep you in the way of salvation.

154. After abba Poemen and abba Nuph came into the desert, their mother longed to see them and often came to their cell, but they would not allow her to see them. She took advantage of the time when they would be going to church and went to meet them, but when they saw her coming they went back and shut the door of their cell, leaving her outside calling to them with many tears.

"Whatever shall we do about this mother of ours," abba Nuph said to abba Poemen, "crying away outside the door?"

Abba Poemen went to the door without opening it, listening to how loudly she was crying.

"For an old woman you are making a lot of noise. Why are you crying so much?"

She recognised the voice of her son and cried out all the more.

"Because I long to see you, my son," she said. Why won't you see me? Did I not give you birth? Did I not feed you at my breasts? I am tired of the way you keep on putting me off, and now that I have heard your voice my whole being is churned up with longing."

"Would you rather see us now, or in the world to come?" said Poemen.

"What makes you think that if I don't see you now, I will be sure to in the world to come?"

"If only you could contain your desire to see us now, without doubt you will see us there for ever. "

She went away quite happy, saying, "As long as I shall assuredly see you there I do not need to see you now."

155. John the Less of Thebaeus, the disciple of abba Ammon, looked after the old man in his illness for twelve years, and although the old man could see that it was hard work for him he never gave him a kind word of praise. But on his deathbed, with the other old men sitting round, he took John 's hand and said three times, "You will be saved, you will be saved, you will be saved."

And he commended him to the old men, saying,

"This is not a human being, he is an Angel, for he has looked after me for such a long time in my illness without ever hearing a word of praise from me."

156. Once when Abba Agathon went into the town to sell his goods he found a pilgrim lying sick in an alleyway with no one to care for him. The old man stayed with him, renting a room where he could work with his hands and minister to the sick man. He stayed four months till the sick man was well again before returning to his own cell.

157. A certain great old man said to his sick disciple, "Don't be depressed, my son, because of bodily sores or illness, for it is especially devout to be able to give thanks to God even in illness. If you are made of iron, the fire will burn off your rust. If you are made of gold, you will progress from great things to greater. Therefore, don't be anxious, brother. What may become of you if you bear it ill? Endure it therefore and ask God to give you whatever it is that he wills."

158. There was an old man who was frequently ill and weak in body, but for the whole of one year he had no illness at all.

He took this badly and wept freely.

"You have abandoned me, Lord," he said, "you have not visited me for this present year."

159. When some brothers were standing around the bed of an old man dying in Scete, bidding him farewell and weeping, he opened his eyes and laughed. A second time he opened his eyes and laughed, and a third time he did the same thing.

"Tell us, abba," they said, "why are you laughing when we are weeping?"

"The first time, I laughed because you are all frightened of death. The second time because you are not prepared for it. The third time because I am passing from labour to rest."

160. Abba Pammon on his deathbed said to the other holy men standing round,

"From the time that I first came to this desert place, my brothers, and built my little cell," he said, "I do not recollect that I have ever eaten bread that I did not earn with my own hands, nor had to repent of any word that came out of my mouth, and yet now that I go to God it is as if I have not begun to serve him at all."

161. When abba Agathon was dying he lay for three days with his eyes open and without moving. The brothers touched him and said, "Where are you now, abba?"

"I am in sight of the judgment of God," he replied.

"Are you not afraid?" they asked.

"In this life I have always studied how to keep the commandments of God as far as it lay in my power. But it is only as a human being that I think what I have done is pleasing to God.

"You don't trust that what you have done has been according to God's will?"

"In the presence of God I have no such trust," he said. "Human judgment is one thing, the judgment of God is another."

162. When the time of his departing came upon abba Sisois, many of the old men gathered round him and saw his face shining with a sort of radiance.

"Abba Antony is coming to us," he said.

And a little later, "Look, the company of the prophets."

And his face shone with an even brighter light as he said, "The blessed apostles are here."

He seemed to be talking to someone and the brothers asked him whom he was talking to.

"The Angels have come to take my soul," he said, "and I have been begging them to wait a little to give me more time for doing penance."

"You have no need to do penance any more, abba," said the fathers.

"I tell you truly," he said, "I think I have not yet even begun to do penance."

They understood from this saying that he had arrived at perfection. Then, his face shining with the splendour of the sun, he cried, "See, see, the Lord is coming!"

And with this word he gave up his spirit and the whole place was filled with a

sweet scent.

163. When the time came for the blessed Arsenius to depart from this world, he said to his disciples, "Let no offerings be made for me except one single service. It would look as if I had caused them to be performed."

His disciples were worried that his time was approaching.

"My hour has not yet come," he said to them. "When it does, I will tell you. But you will stand with me in the divine judgment before the tribunal of Christ, if you give to anyone else any part of my miserable body as if it were a relic."

"How shall we go on then, father," they asked, "for we do not know how a body should be buried."

"Wouldn't you know how to tie a rope about my feet and drag me up into the mountain?"

His eyelashes had all fallen out because of his constant weeping. All his life through, when sitting at his work he kept a basin in his lap to catch his tears. When he was dying, he began to weep.

"Why are you weeping, father?" they asked him. "Surely you are not afraid?"

"Indeed I am afraid," he replied, "and this fear has been with me ever since I became a monk."

When abba Poemen saw that he was on the point of going, he said,

"Blessed are you, abba Arsenius, for having wept so much in this life. Anyone who does not weep in this life will weep for ever in the next. Human beings must needs weep, either in this life of their own free will, or in the next because of the torments."

164. The blessed bishop Athanasius once asked abba Pammon to come down to Alexandria. And when he saw some secular people as he was going down with his brothers, he said, "Come and greet the monks and get their blessing. For they are ever speaking with God, and their voice is holy."

And when he saw a woman of the theatre he wept, and the bystanders asked him why.

"Two things make me weep. First, that this woman is a lost soul. Second, that I have never put as much effort into pleasing God as this woman has into pleasing sinful men."

165. It was said that for one old man his thoughts were always saying to him, "Don't bother today, repent tomorrow," to which he always replied, "Not so, today we must repent, and let the will of God be done in us tomorrow."

166. One of the fathers related how a certain bishop had heard that two men of his flock were disgraceful adulterers, and he asked God to show him if this were true. So after the consecration of the offering, when they both came up for Communion, he looked carefully at the faces of each one. The faces of sinners always appeared to him as black as charcoal, with bloodshot eyes, others always appeared with clear faces dressed in white garments. And after receiving the body of the Lord, the features of some seemed to be lit up, the others in flames.

In order to find out which of them had committed the crime he gave them Communion, and saw that the face of one of them was fair and honest, the other's black and ugly. And as the grace of the divine mysteries began to take effect he saw a beam of light illumine the face of one, while flames burnt all over the other. The bishop prayed that he might know the meaning of what he had been shown about each one. And an Angel of the Lord came and stood beside him.

"Everything that you have heard about them is true," he said. "But one of them persists in his disgrace and is determined to go on sinning. That is why you saw his face was black and all in flames. The other has also done exactly as you have heard, but you saw his face illumined with a clear light because it is recorded that he has renounced those evil deeds which he formerly committed. With tears and groans he has begged pardon from God, promising that if his sins might be forgiven he would not commit them again. So his former sins have been wiped out and he has come into that state of grace which you have seen."

"I marvel," said the bishop, "that the grace of God has not only rescued this man from the torments due to such a disgraceful life but that it has rewarded him with such honour."

"You do well to marvel," said the Angel, "for you are only human, but your God and ours is naturally good, and kind to those who cease from their sins. Those who come to him in confession, he not only forgives, but crowns with honour. For God so loved mankind that he gave his only begotten son for sinners, and for sinners he gave him up to death (John 3.16). While we were yet sinners he chose to die for us (Romans 5.8), so how much more must he love us when we have become his own! Know therefore, that there is no human sin which can extinguish the love of God, if only each one can wipe out his past evils by penitence. For the Lord is merciful, and knows how strong the passions are, and how strong and malicious is the devil. He cares

for his children when they fall into sin, and offers them amendment of life, he has compassion on those who are slow to repent, but when he has loosed them from their sins he bestows upon them the rewards of the righteous."

Hearing this the bishop marvelled and glorified God.

167. Abba Paul the Simple had this gift that as he looked at the faces of those going in to the church he could tell whether their thoughts were good or bad. As they came to church the old man saw them going in with bright faces and cheerful minds and their Angels joyfully going in with them. But he saw that one person was very black, the shape of his body shrouded in mist, with demons dragging him this way and that by a rope through his nose, and his holy Angel standing sadly a long way off. As he sat in front of the church the blessed Paul began to weep bitterly and beat his breast at such a sight. All the other old men who saw him weeping begged him to tell them if he had seen anything amiss in them, and to come with them into the church. He would not go in, however, but continued to weep for the man he had seen.

A little later, when the congregation had been dismissed he again looked at people's faces to see whether they were the same as they had been when they went in. And the man whom he had formerly seen as black and shrouded in mist he now saw with a bright face and gleaming body, the demons a long way off from him and his Angel right beside him, happy and greatly rejoicing. Paul then rose up and joyfully blessed the Lord.

"How great is the mercy and kindness of God!" he said. "How great is his compassion!"

And going up to higher ground he shouted out, "Come and see the works of the Lord (Psalms 46.9), come and see how he wills all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2.4), come let us adore him saying, "You alone can forgive our sins."

When all had gathered near him Paul described to them what the man was like that he had seen before church and what he was like afterwards. And he asked the brother whom he had seen to declare what his thoughts and deeds had been, and how God had granted him such a great change of heart.

"I am a sinful man," he began to say, "and have often committed fornication. But as I came into the church today I heard the words of the prophet Isaiah, or rather the voice of God speaking through him, 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, cast out from your hearts the evil in the sight of my eyes. Learn to do good, seek judgment. And though your sins be as scarlet yet shall they be washed white as snow. And if you will be willing and obedient you

shall partake of the good things of the land' (Isaiah 1.16-19). And I, a miserable fornicator, was conscience-stricken by this word of the Prophet, and I looked into my heart and said to God, 'Lord, you are he who came to save sinners. So what you have today promised through the Prophet, fulfil in me an unworthy sinner. Look, I make a promise to you, and confess from the bottom of my heart, that I will no longer do evil, but renounce all my wickednesses, and serve you from now on with a clear conscience. Now, O Lord, from this moment accept my penitence, as I adore you and renounce all my sins. I have sworn in my heart that I will keep all your commandments' (Psalms 119.145). With this vow I came out of church determined never to go back to my former sins."

Then all the old men shouted with a loud voice, "How great are your works, O Lord! You have done all things in wisdom" (Psalms 104.24).

168. When abba Joseph and some other old men came to a meeting with abba Poemen, the parent of abba Poemen brought along a child with a deformed face and sat with him outside the monastery, weeping. One of the old men heard the sound of weeping and went outside to ask why.

"I am abba Poemen's parent," said the man, "and I have come here so that he could see this child, afflicted by such a sore trial. I have hesitated about bringing him here up till now, because I thought he might not want to see me, and if he knew that I were here now, he might well try to drive me away. But seeing that all you fathers are here, I decided to come. Please, abba, have pity on me and take this child inside with you, so that Poemen may pray for him."

The old man took him inside and devised a clever plan. He did not take the child straight to Poemen, but went first to the younger brothers, asking them to sign the child with the cross and pray for him, and after that to the seniors with the same request. Last of all he took the child to abba Poemen, who at first did not want to have anything to do with it. But when he was asked to do as everyone else had done and pray for the child, he gave in, and groaned and prayed.

"O God, make your servant whole, and free him from the domination of the devil." He signed the child with the cross, and he was immediately returned to his father, cured.

169. Someone asked one of the fathers, "Is it a good thing to live in need?" And he replied, "Penury is a great thing. For although he who embraces it willingly may well suffer in the flesh, he will nevertheless find peace in his soul."

170. A brother asked an old man whether he should seek for repayment if a brother owed him some money. The old man said, "You could gently remind him, but only once."

"What should I do if I ask him once and he gives me nothing?" he asked

"Don't ask him again," the old man said.

"But what shall I do if I can't stop thinking about it unless I bother him again?"

"Just let your thoughts rattle on, only don't upset your brother. Remember you are a monk."

171. A brother asked an old man how the soul could acquire humility, and he replied, "By thinking only of your own sins and not other people's."

He also said, "Humility is the mark of a perfected person. The more a person humbles himself, the greater his honour. Pride exalted to the heavens is cast down to hell, but to descend into the depths is to be exalted to the heavens."

When Macarius was walking in the desert he came upon a man's head lying on the ground. He touched it with his staff and a voice seemed to come from it.

"Who are you?" the old man asked.

"I used to be the leader of the pagan priests in this place," he said. "You are abba Macarius, full of the divine spirit. Whenever you have pity on those in torment and pray for them, they gain a little comfort."

"What sort of comfort do you get? And what is your punishment?"

"As far as the heavens are from the earth," he said with a deep groan, "so deep is the fire in the middle of which we are immersed from head to foot, nor can we see each other's faces, for they are turned back to front. But when you pray for us we are enabled to see each other's faces, and that gives us comfort."

"Woe to the day in which human beings transgress the commandments of God!" cried Macarius, pouring forth tears as he heard these words. "Can there be any greater punishment than this?"

"There are others much lower down than us."

"Who would those be?"

"We who did know God are granted a little relief. Those who knew him and denied him are tormented with much more severe and unspeakable punishments lower down."

Having heard this, Macarius buried the head deeper in the earth and went on his way.

173. A brother asked an old man why monks were more severely attacked by the devil.

"Because we throw our weapons at him," he replied, "patience, humility, gentleness and obedience."

174. A brother asked a question of abba Sisois.

"Do you think, father, that the devil persecutes us more than he did the ancients?"

"Much more," he said, "for he knows that the time of his punishment is approaching and he is worried. And he does not bother to seek out the weaker brethren, for he knows how to get them whenever he wants. It is the strong and great that he attacks."

175. Some brothers asked abba Silvanus how he had acquired such great prudence.

"I have never allowed evil thoughts, which provoke God to such anger, to dwell in my heart," he replied.

176. Blessed Antony used to say that a monk ought to tell the seniors how far he travels, or how many cups of water he drinks in his cell and not deviate from this.

177. Abba Poemen said that the enemy delights in nothing so much as the person who is unwilling to be open about his thoughts.

178. A certain brother said to an old man,

"Look, father, I often ask the senior fathers to give me some instruction for the good of my soul, but I can never remember what they have said."

Now the old man had two empty vessels

"Take one of these vessels," he said, "put water in it, wash it, pour out the water and put the vessel back in its place when cleaned."

The brother did this not once, but twice.

"Now bring me both vessels together," said the old man. And he did so. "Now which of these is the cleaner?"

"The one I washed with water," he said.

"So it is with the soul, my son. He who frequently hears the word of God, even though he can't remember the things he was asking about, is always cleaner than someone who never asks."

179. One of the old men said that when a monk is striving to do good things the devil comes, and finding no foothold in him departs. If however he is doing evil the Holy Spirit often comes and seeing his evil ways doesn't enter into him but departs. But if from his whole heart he seeks the Spirit once more

he will speedily return.

180. One of the old men said, "A monk ought to work hard at possessing Christ, but once he has possessed him he labours no more. But the Lord does allow his chosen ones to labour at keeping the trials of those labours in mind. They take care that they don't forget these labours. Even so God led the children of Israel through the desert for forty years, so that remembering their tribulations they would not want to go back there again."

181. A certain brother had a question for an old man.

"Tell me, father, how is it that we who labour today in the monastic way of life are not given the grace that was given to the fathers of old?"

"In those days their charity was so great," he replied, "that each one drew his neighbour upwards. Today our charity has grown cold, and the whole world is in the power of the devil, and each person drags his neighbour downwards. That is why we are not given so much grace."

182. A certain brother said to an old man, "Do you think, abba, that holy men are always aware when they have been filled with grace?"

"They aren't, always," he said. "There was a disciple of one great old man who transgressed in some way or other, and the old man got angry and shouted at him 'Go away and die'. And immediately he did fall down dead. When the old man saw that he was dead he was filled with a great fear, and in great humility prayed to God, saying, 'Lord Jesus Christ, bring him back to life again, and I won't ever speak to him again like that so sharply.' As he was speaking the disciple revived."

183. Abba Poemen said, "A man who teaches others and who does not practice what he preaches, is like a deep well which provides water for washing and the quenching of thirst, but which has mud and filth at the bottom of it."

He also said, "Teach your soul to observe what your tongue teaches to others."

184. A certain anchorite came to visit abba Poemen who greeted him with joy. And when they had embraced each other the anchorite began to speak about the holy Scriptures, and the things of heaven. The old man turned his face in the direction of another brother and replied to the anchorite not a word. The anchorite realised that he was not going to say anything, and sadly went outside.

"What a waste of time to have made this long journey," he said to Poemen's disciple, "only to meet with someone who would not even bother to speak with me!"

The disciple went back into abba Poemen.

"This abba came to see you," he said, "a great man with a high reputation in his own country, and you wouldn't speak with him?"

"That man is a very exalted being," said the old man, "and is able to speak about heavenly things. I am much lower down the scale, and am barely able to speak about earthly things. If he had spoken to me about the passions which monks suffer, perhaps I might have been able to say something, but when he talked about heavenly things, I have to confess that I am very ignorant."

The disciple went out and spoke to the anchorite.

"Our old man would not talk about things which are too high for him," he said, "but if you were to speak to him about the passions he would answer."

Conscience-stricken at these words, he went back in to the old man.

"What should I do, abba," he asked, "about the passions which dominate my heart?"

The old man now looked on the anchorite more favourably.

"Now you are being sensible, father," he said. "Now I will open my mouth and fill it with good things for you."

And from Poemen's instruction the anchorite was greatly helped.

"Truly, this is a great and true road on which you are travelling," he said, and giving thanks he went back to his own place.

185. One of the old men said, "If anyone speaks about Scripture, or anything at all, agree with him if he speaks accurately, but if not, just say, 'I'm sure you know what you are talking about.' In this way you will act in humility and avoid hostility. If you argue and persist in defending your own opinions you will start a quarrel. Whatever the circumstances if you have not steered clear of contention you will in no way be able to find peace."

186. A brother asked an old man how long he had been observing silence.

"Right up until the time you have asked me about it," he replied. "Wherever you are, if you keep silent you will be at peace."

187. One of the old men used to say, "Just as the bee gathers honey wherever it goes, so should a monk build up a beautiful series of good deeds as long he is concerned to do God's work wherever he goes."

188. Abba Muthues came with his disciple from the place called Ragitham in the Gebalon district. When the bishop of that place knew, he took him and ordained him presbyter against his will.

"Forgive me abba," said the bishop, "I know you did not want this to happen, but I presumed to do it because I longed to receive your blessing."

"My thoughts were a little against it," said he in great humility. "What

exercises me is that it makes a division between me and the brother who is with me. I shan't be able to do all the prayers by myself."

"If you think he is worthy I will ordain him as well," said the bishop.

"I don't know whether he is worthy," said abba Muthues. "What I do know is that he is better than I am."

The bishop ordained the disciple as well, and they remained with each other to the end, but neither of them ever presided at the offering [of the Eucharist].

"I put my trust in God," said Muthues, "though I am not sure about this ordination, which is why I have not presumed to make the offering.

Ordination is for those who are blameless, just, and spotless. I know myself too well."

189. A brother asked Abba Macarius for a word whereby he might walk safely and the old man said, "Flee from human beings, sit in your cell and weep for your sins. Most important virtue of all - put constraints on both your tongue and your stomach."

190. While abba Arsenius was still living as a secular in the Emperor's palace he prayed to the Lord,

"Lord, show me the path of salvation." and he heard a voice,

"Arsenius, flee from humankind and you will be saved."

After he went into solitude he made the same prayer and again heard a voice saying,

"Fuge, tace, et quiesce (Flee, be silent, be at peace). These three things are the beginning of salvation."

191. Archbishop Theophilus came to visit Arsenius in order to profit from what he might say, and Arsenius said to all who were there,

"If I make a suggestion, will you carry it out?"

They freely promised, and he went on to say,

"Wherever place you hear that Arsenius might be in, stay well away from it."

On another occasion the Archbishop wanted to see him but sent first to find out whether he would open the door to him. Arsenius sent back a message, "If you come alone I will see you, but if you come with a lot of other people, Arsenius is not going to stay here any longer." When he heard this, the Archbishop broke off his journey lest he should be the cause of this hermit leaving the district.

192. Some brothers wanting to go to the Thebaid in order to buy linen thought that this would give them a chance to see the blessed Arsenius. When Arsenius was told by his disciple Daniel that they had arrived, he told him to ask them

why they had come. When they replied that they had come to buy linen, Arsenius replied,

"Well I won't see them then. They came here because of their work, not for my sake. Go and give them some hospitality, make my apologies and send them on their way, telling them that the old man can't come out to see them."

193. When one of the brothers came to visit the blessed Arsenius and knocked on his door, Abba Arsenius opened up thinking it was his disciple. When he saw it was someone else he threw himself face downwards on the ground. The brother begged him to get up, but Arsenius said, "I'll not get up till you go away." The brother begged him for several hours, but he would not get up till he was gone.

194. Abba Besarion when travelling through the desert with his disciple came to a cave and went in, where they found a brother sitting in the process of weaving a rope. He neither looked at them nor greeted them, but said nothing. "Let us go," abba Besarion said to his disciple, "this brother evidently does not want to speak to us." And they went on to abba John.

On the way back they arrived at the same cave.

"Let us go in to this brother again," said abba Besarion to his disciple.

"Perhaps God will persuade him to speak to us."

But when they went they found that the brother had died.

"Come, brother," said Besarion with a sigh, "let us lay him out for burial. The Lord has brought us here for that very purpose."

As they were carrying out the funeral rites they found that it was a woman, and they marvelled.

"Women as well can strive and conquer the devil!"

And they went on their way praising and glorifying God, the protector of all.

195. Two youths came once to abba Macarius. One of them had been fairly well instructed, the other was a beginner. They fell at his feet and asked if they could stay with him. Looking at their rather delicate bodies he wondered whether they would be able to survive in the desert.

"No, brothers, you can't stay here," he said.

"If we can't stay with you, father, what should we do?"

"If I send them away," Macarius said to himself, "they will come to some harm. So I will say to them, 'Come then and build yourselves a cell, if you can.'"

They asked him where they should build it, so he took them and showed them the rock from which they could carve out a cell and brought rushes from the

swamp for a covering. Macarius thought that faced with all this work they would quickly depart.

But they next asked him what work they should do. So he gave them some leaves and showed them how to weave ropes, which they were to sell in order to buy food, and so left them to it.

And with the greatest patience, whatever they were asked to do, they did it. The old man could see that they were developing daily, and were often to be seen in silent prayer in the church, and he wanted to know more about how they went about their work. He fasted for seven days and prayed to the Lord that he would reveal to him their inner motivations. Then he went and knocked on the door of their cell. They welcomed him in with great reverence and said the customary prayer. The elder then nodded to the younger who went out, while the elder sat weaving ropes without saying anything.

At the ninth hour the younger brother knocked at the door and came in with some food for their meal. At a nod from the elder he laid a little table with three small loaves and silently stood. When they had eaten they asked Macarius whether he wished to stay longer or not. He said he wished to stay. They laid out a mat for him in one corner opposite their work, and stretched out as if for sleep in the other corner. Macarius again asked the Lord to show him more of what they did, and as if the roof had been pierced a brilliant light filled the cell as if it were broad daylight, although the two brothers did not seem to be aware of it. When they thought that Macarius was asleep they arose and gave themselves to prayer, lifting up their hands to the heavens, which Macarius was able to see, though they could not see him. As he watched intently he saw crowds of demons like flies trying to rest on the mouth and eyes of the younger man but the Angel of the Lord with a fiery sword surrounded them and defended them and drove the demons back outside, so that they were not able to get anywhere near the elder of the two. When it was nearly dawn they lay down again.

Then Macarius got up as if he had just awoken, and the two brothers rose too as if from a deep sleep.

"Do you want us to say the twelve psalms, father?" the elder brother asked.

As they were singing the psalms, a fiery dart went up to heaven from the mouth of the younger every other verse, and when the elder was singing it was as if a column of fire was likewise ascending out of his mouth to the heavens. When the office was finished Macarius begged them to pray for him, but they said nothing except to fall at his feet and commend themselves to his prayers.

So Macarius discovered that the elder was perfected in the fear of God, although the younger was still being attacked by demons. A few days later the elder rested in peace, followed in three days time by the younger.

196. Abba Moyses instructed his brothers that there were four main things that a monk ought to observe: silence, keeping the commandments of God, humbling of self and strict poverty. A monk ought always to mourn, ever mindful of his sins, and keep the hour of his death always before his eyes.

197. The holy fathers, especially one called Squirion, were gathered together and were prophesying about the final generation [of people on earth].

"We indeed have kept the commandments of God up till now," said Squirion.

"What about those who come after us?" some of the fathers asked.

"They will seek God and keep the commandments of God but only half as fervently,"

"And those who come after them, what will they do?"

"The people of that generation will not keep the commandments of God and will forget the precepts of God. Iniquity will then flourish, and the charity of many will grow cold (Matthew 24.12). A time of testing will come upon them and those who endure that testing will be better, and more blessed, and more commendable than us and all our fathers."

198. A brother asked abba Agathon a question.

"Father I would like to go into a community of brothers. Tell me how I should conduct my life among them."

"Observe this above all," he said. "From the day you enter among them until your very last day, act always with humility."

199. When the Mazices invaded Scete and killed many of the fathers, abba Poemen and another senior abba called Nub, together with five others fled to Therenuthum, where they came upon a deserted temple. They stayed there for seven days until they could decide whereabouts in Egypt each one of them would settle.

"Let each one of us," said abba Nub, "keep to himself for seven days, without speaking to each other."

Now there were some statues of idols in the temple, and every morning Nub would batter one of them, and in the evening would go up to it and say "Forgive me. I have sinned". And he did this for the whole seven days.

"Why," said abba Poemen to him on the Saturday when they met together,

"did you, a man of the faith, ask pardon from a statue for the whole seven days?"

"I did this for your sakes," he said. "Tell me, when I was striking this idol, did it say anything? Was it angry? Or again when I asked its pardon did it get conceited? Did it think itself better than it should be?"

"No, it didn't," said abba Poemen.

"Look, brothers," said the old man, "there are seven of us. If you decide that we should stay together, we should follow the example of this idol. Let us not be angry if we have a grievance, and if anyone asks our pardon, let us not be conceited or boastful. But if we are not capable of this let each of us go our separate ways."

And they prostrated themselves, saying that they would keep to this plan, and so they remained together for many years in humility and patience. During the night they slept four hours, psalmodised for four hours and worked with their hands for four hours. During the day they worked till the sixth hour, read till the ninth hour, and after that prepared their food, collecting herbs from the earth.

200. There were seven men of great integrity who lived in the desert near the Saracens. Their cells were some way apart but they were united in bands of love. One was called Peter, another Stephen, a third John, a fourth George, a fifth Theophilus, a sixth Felix, the seventh Laurus. Their desert was bare and vast, scarcely capable of sustaining human life. They met together once a week, for on Saturday at about the ninth hour they came each one from his own place to an agreed location, bringing with them whatever [food] they could. One brought nuts, another lactorones, another dactyls, another figs, another herbs such as lapsanum, pastinicas, caricac and petrofelinum. This was their principal diet; they had no bread or oil or wine. They ate only the herbs and fruits mentioned above; palm trees provided them with clothing. Water in this place was in short supply. In fact their only drink was the dew which fell abundantly. Each morning they would go out and gather it from the various plants and drink it only at that time. When they met together (as we have said) they gave thanks to God and took food. After the meal they sat till Vespers meditating on the holy Scriptures. There were no worldly tales exchanged, no worldly cares, no talk of what was going on in the world around them, but only spiritual conferences concerned with the longed for kingdom of heaven, future bliss, the glory of the righteous, the punishment of sinners and the peace of the saints. As they talked they sighed from the bottom of their hearts and wept copiously. They kept vigil the whole night through, proclaiming the praises of God, until at about the ninth hour on Sunday they

brought their conference to an end. Each one then returned to his own cell where, alone with God alone, they served him day and night.

The Saracens found them engrossed in such occupations when they were racing everywhere through the desert. They rushed in on them and dragged them out of their hermitages, tied them up and hung them up by their feet. Tortured to the very limit with many beatings, they at last had a fire of bitter herbs lit under them, the acrid smoke from which destroyed their eyesight. They were at last released after many torments and driven off half dead. We knew one of them who lived for quite a long time afterwards in a certain place. But we hardly know anything about where the others went.

201. A brother had a question for abba Poemen.

"What does it mean when the Lord in the Gospel says. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends' (John 15.13). How do you do that?"

"If you are insulted by your neighbour," said the old man, "and are tempted to reply in kind, but take the force of it in your heart while working hard at forcing yourself not to return the insult and upset him, that is when you are laying down your life for your friend."

202. An old man said, "If what you do is not in agreement with how you pray, you labour in vain in your prayers. It is only when you renounce your desire to sin and walk in the fear of God, that God will then accept you with joy."

203. A brother asked an old man what he should do in all the temptations which came upon him and in all the thoughts which came from the enemy. He replied, "You should always weep in the presence of the goodness of God. Run to him and he will help you. It is written, 'The Lord is my helper, therefore I pour contempt upon my enemies'" (Psalms 118.7)

204. A certain old man said, "A fly will not go near a pot when it is on the fire, but once it has cooled the fly will alight on it and produce maggots. Likewise the demons flee from the monk on fire with the love of God, but if he cools down they buzz into him and lead him astray."

205. Once when abba Silvanus was sitting in his cell he fell flat on his face in a trance. And after a few hours he got up and wept violently.

"What is the matter, father?" asked his disciple standing nearby.

He said nothing but continued to weep. His disciple urged him to tell him why he was weeping.

"I was caught up to the seat of judgment," he said at last, " and I saw many in our monastic habit condemned to punishment, but many of the laity going into

heaven."

And as he said this he wept even more.

206. A certain old man said to a brother, "Think every day that your death is not far away. Don't worry about anything in this world, as if you are already enclosed in the tomb. Let the fear of God be clearly before you at every moment. Consider yourself to be of less importance than anyone else. Don't slander anyone, for God knows all things. Be at peace with everybody and God will always give you peace."

207. Some of the brothers asked the blessed Macarius how they should pray. "You don't need a lot of words," he said. "We should just lift up our hands to heaven and say, 'Lord, as you will, and how you will, let your will be done.' And if beset by temptation or battle, just say 'Lord help us'. He knows what is best for us."

208. Abba John used to say, "A monk ought to be like someone sitting under a tree who sees various wild beasts and serpents coming towards him, and because he is not able to resist them he climbs up into the tree and escapes. So should the monk sit in his cell, and when he sees unhealthy thoughts coming at him which he is not able to fight against let him flee to the Lord by prayer and he will be safe."

209. He also used to say, "A monk ought to be like someone who has a fire on his right hand side and water on his left. When the fire burns up too fiercely he takes water and puts it out. So this is what a monk should always do, when unhealthy thoughts are kindled by the enemy pour the water of prayer over them and put them out."

210. When abba Zenon was in Scete he went out of his cell one night to go for a walk in the desert, and he walked quite a distance and wandered for three days and nights before he fell exhausted and nearly dead. And suddenly he saw in front of him a child with bread in his hand.

"Rise and eat, said the child.

Fearing that this was a phantom, he got up and began to pray.

"You do well to pray," said the child. "But now, come and eat."

Abba Zenon would not accept his invitation but prayed a second time and then a third. The child praised him again for praying, and finally he accepted and ate.

"You have wandered a long way," the child said next, "but come, follow me." And immediately he found himself outside his cell.

"Come in to the cell with me and pray," he said to the child. But as he went in

himself, the child disappeared.

211. Abba Daniel affirmed that the blessed Arsenius at vespers on Saturday used to turn his back on the setting sun, and lifting up his hands to heaven persevered in prayer till the rising sun came into view.

He would keep vigil on other nights, but near dawn, when the weakness of his human nature demanded that he sleep a little, he would say, "Come on then, you unprofitable servant," and shutting his eyes would take a little sleep sitting down before getting up again.

When sitting down to work he always had a little basin on his lap to catch the tears which continually flowed from his eyes because of the longing he had for the life eternal.

212. Abba Lucius asked some brothers who came to him about the way they worked with their hands.

"We don't work with our hands," they said, "but do as the Apostle says: 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5.17).

"Don't you eat?" said the old man

"Well, yes, we eat," they said.

"Who prays for you while you are eating?" And they could find nothing to say in reply.

"Don't you sleep?" he asked.

"Yes, we sleep," they said.

"Who prays for you when you are asleep?" And they could not find anything to say.

"I'm sorry," said the old man, "but you are not practising what you preach.

Now let me tell you how I pray without ceasing while working with my hands. In the morning I sit for a fixed time soaking a few palm leaves and weaving ropes from them, and pray continually saying, 'Have mercy on me O God after your great goodness, and according to the multitude of your mercies blot out my sins' (Psalms 51.1). And when I have worked long enough to have completed baskets or ropes to the value of ten coins, I sell them, keep eight coins for myself and give two coins to the poor. They satisfy my obligation of perpetual prayer when I am eating or sleeping."

213. Once when abba Macarius was carrying out of Scete the baskets he had made, his journeying made him very tired and he sat down

"God, you know I can't walk any further," he said. And immediately he found himself by the river bank which before had been a long way away.

214. Abba Ammon came to a certain oasis for a drink and came face to face

with a basilisk. He fell on his face and prayed to the Lord, "Lord unless this monster dies I shall die." By the power of God the basilisk immediately shrivelled up.

215. Dulas, abba Besarion's disciple was walking with him once along the seashore, and he began to feel thirsty.

"I am perished with thirst, father," he said.

The blessed Besarion prayed, then told him to take some water from the sea and drink it. Which he did, and found it beautifully sweet, and so he filled up a little flask that he had with him.

"Why are you filling that flask with water, my son," asked the old man when he realised what he was doing.

"Let me do so, father," he said. "I am frightened that I might be thirsty again later on."

"May the Lord forgive you, my son," he said. "God is everywhere, and can always provide sweet water."

216. There was a brother who wanted to go into the desert but his mother would not let him.

"Please let me, mother," he would say. "I want to save my soul."

At last his mother realised that she would not be able to hold him back and let him go. So he went into the desert, but through negligence began to waste his whole life.

Now it so happened that his mother died. And a little later he became ill and fell into a trance and saw his mother among those being judged.

"What's this, my son?" she said. "Have you also been brought here to be judged? And what about those words of yours about wanting to save your soul?"

He blushed at these words, and stood there, not able to reply. And there came a voice calling him back here, as if it should have been someone else from the coenobium instead of him who had been summoned to pass over. When he came to, he related to all those near him what he had heard and learned. To confirm what he said, he asked one of those near him to go to the coenobium to find out whether someone there of the same name as himself had passed over. And he found that it was so.

When he was restored to health he became a recluse, and began to take his salvation seriously, doing penance, and weeping over those things which he had previously done through negligence. So great was his compunction that many people asked him to ease up a little lest he should do himself harm by

his incessant weeping, but he refused.

"If I cannot bear in mind the reproaches of my mother," he said, "when the day of judgement comes in the presence of Christ and all his angels, how shall I then bear reproaches and torment?"

217. There was a brother in Egypt noted for his great humility, who had a sister working as a prostitute in the city, leading many souls to perdition. The old men frequently urged the brother to go to her and perhaps persuade her by his admonitions that it was possible for her to give up the sins she was committing.

When he came near to her place someone who knew him ran on before him and announced his arrival.

"Look, your brother is coming to see you from the desert" he called.

When she heard this she joyfully left her clients and ran out to meet him with her head uncovered. And when she saw him she ran to embrace him.

"Dearest sister," he said to her, "Spare a thought for your soul, and for the many you are leading to perdition. Think of the torments prepared for you unless you hasten to repent."

"Do you think, brother," she asked, trembling, "that there is still hope of salvation for me?"

"If you really want it," he said, "salvation is still there for you."

She threw herself at his feet and begged him to take her with him into the desert.

"Put something on your head, then," he said, "and come with me."

"No, let's go at once," she said. "I would rather appear among people improperly dressed than have to go back into that house of shame."

As they walked along he gave her some instruction on how to do penance, until they saw some brothers coming towards them.

"Not everyone knows that you are my sister," he said, "so move away from the road for a while until they have gone past."

After they had gone he called out to her.

"Come sister, let's be on our way."

There was no reply. He went off in search of her and found her dead. Her footprints were all full of blood for she had not been wearing shoes. Weeping and crying he went back to the seniors and told them everything that had happened, and they began to wonder about her salvation. And God revealed to one of the old men that because she had taken no thought for her bodily needs if only her own wounds might be healed, because she had abandoned

everything she had, mourned deeply and repented of her sins, therefore God had accepted her repentance.

218. At the time when blessed Antony was persuaded by Saint Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, to go into the city to combat heresy, a certain learned man called Didymus visited him who was blind. They talked about many things from the Holy Scriptures and other passages which they had gleaned from holy books. Antony was impressed by his intelligence and quick thinking, and asked him, "Are you not sad that you lack eyes?"

He shamefacedly made no answer, until Antony had asked him three times, whereupon he did admit quite simply to being bitter.

"I'm surprised," Antony said, "that such a wise person could lament the loss of something which ants and flies and midges have, rather than rejoicing in something which he shares with saints and apostles. It is much better to see with the spirit than with ordinary eyes, and better to have eyes into which the dust of sin cannot enter, than those which simply by what they see can lead people through concupiscence into the lowest hell."

219. A certain brother in Nitria died and left behind him a hundred solidi which he had got together and hidden wrapped up in some linen. He had been miserly rather than greedy, and forgetful of the thirty pieces of silver which betrayed the Lord Jesus. The monks began to discuss what should be done about the money (there were in that place about five thousand monks living in scattered cells). Some thought it should be given to the poor, some to the church, others to their families. But Macarius, Pambo and Isodore, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said that it should be buried with its owner, saying, 'Your money perish with you' (Acts 8.20). But don't let anyone think that this was a heartless thing to do, for there was as much horror and consternation among the monks if even one solidus only had been misused.

220. A certain Greek youth entered a coenobium in Egypt but was unable to extinguish the flames of lust no matter how much he fasted or punished himself. He revealed the extent of his temptations to the superior of the monastery, who embarked on a plan to save him. He instructed a respected and very strict monk to belabour the young man with all sorts of insults and reproaches, and after the first accusation to continue in his complaints. When these commands had been carried out he called others to testify against him, heaping further reproaches upon the young man. All these falsehoods made him weep; day by day he groaned and shed tears, for he was filled with bitterness, until at last deprived of all other help he cast himself at the feet of

Jesus. What more needs to be said? At the end of a year when asked about his former thoughts and whether they still bothered him he replied, "Father, I'm not even fit to live, so why should I be free to fornicate?" So by the actions of his spiritual father his lusts were overcome and he was put on the path of salvation.

End of Book III

De Vitis Patrum, Book IV

By Severus Sulpitius and John Cassian

Excerpts from Dialogue 1 of Severus Sulpitius
and from the Institutes and Conferences of John Cassian

Prologue

(Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.1) Since I returned from overseas, my brothers, you have often begged me to give an account of my journeying: how the faith of Christ flourished in the East, whether the rulers preserved the peace, whether the saints lived undisturbed, what was the state of the monasteries, what sort of way of life the hermits were leading, whether indeed it was lawful for Christians to live in the desert, what were the signs and virtues Christ was working in his servants, whether indeed I had found my journey profitable, and where my journeys had taken me. Supported by your prayers, therefore, I shall do so, seeing that is what you want, and I hope you will be pleased to hear what I have got to say.

Chapter 1 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.2)

The solitary monk living in a small hut in the region of Cyrenia

We left here three years ago, taking ship from Narbona, and God smiled so favourably on our journey that we entered port in Africa on the fifth day. I had particularly wanted to go to Carthage in order to visit the shrines of the saints, especially the tomb of the martyr Cyprian.

On the fifteenth day we returned to port and set sail for Alexandria, but the southerly wind failed us and we would have been driven on to the sandbanks

of Syrtis if the careful watch of the sailors had not noticed in time for them to lower the anchors and heave the ship to. We came ashore in the ship's boats, the continent lying open before our eyes, empty of any human habitation as far as we could see. But I wanted to explore the place more closely, and moving further inland I caught sight of a small hut about three miles from the shore among the sandhills. The roof of this hut looked like the upturned keel of a ship, constructed of fairly stout planks coming right down to the ground, not for protection against rainstorms, for rain is hardly ever heard of in these parts, but because the force of the wind is such that when any breeze begins to blow, even on the most beautiful day, the danger of shipwreck is greater than in any sea. Nothing germinates there, there is no seedtime. The ground is unstable because the parched sand moves about with every movement of the wind. Only where headlands reaching back from the sea give a little protection from the wind and provide ground a little more solid do rough grasses find some foothold, sufficient to feed a few sheep. The natives live on their milk. The more skilful among them, or I should say, richer, make a sort of rough barley bread. This is their only crop. It grows quickly because the effect of the sun and air is to prevent it being damaged by the force of the wind. It matures within thirty days of being sown. That people should live there makes no sense apart from the fact that they pay no taxes, for this farthest edge of Cyrenia is next to the desert between Egypt and Africa, through which Cato once led his army as he fled from Caesar.

We hastened towards a hut which we had perceived from a distance, where I found an old man dressed in skins, turning a hand mill. He greeted us and welcomed us kindly. We told him that we had disembarked upon these shores perforce, unable to continue our journey till the weather should improve. Human curiosity had brought us inland eager to learn what the place was like and how the inhabitants lived. We were Christians and would especially like to know if there were any Christians in these solitudes, upon which he wept for joy, embraced our knees, and kissed us over and over again before asking us to pray with him. Then he spread out some skins of wild beasts on the ground, bade us sit, and brought out quite a generous meal, half a loaf of barley bread. There were four of us, he made a fifth. He added a small bundle of herbs whose name escapes me but was rather like mint, its leaves giving off a smell rather like honey. We satisfied our hunger and were delighted by this act of gentle kindness. We stayed seven days with him, until on the last day some of the other desert dwellers began to gather there, and we realized that

our host was in fact a presbyter, something which he had concealed from us. Then we went to the church, about two miles off, which we had not previously been able to see because of an intervening hill. It was built of rough branches woven together, hardly more ambitious than the hut of our host, in which you would not be able to stand except in a stooping position.

Upon enquiring about the way of life of these people we learned, amazingly, that they neither bought nor sold anything, fraud and theft was unknown among them, they possessed neither gold nor silver nor any desire for it. For when I offered that presbyter ten golden pieces he refused them. When we saw he would not accept them we pressed some of our clothes upon him. These he accepted gratefully, and so we departed from him, the sailors summoning us back to the ship.

Chapter 2 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.3)

The heretical opinions of Origen

Favourable winds brought us to Alexandria on the seventh day, where an unseemly controversy was raging among the bishop and the monks. The basic reason for this was that the clerics had got together and in various synods had frequently decreed that no one ought to read or possess Origen's books.

Origen was a most learned translator of the Holy Scriptures, but the bishops pointed to several really outrageous passages in his books. Origen's supporters did not presume to defend these things but claimed that they had been maliciously inserted by heretics, and that the body of his works should not be condemned simply because some parts of them were rightly to be deplored; the faithful had sufficient discrimination in their reading to avoid following what was false and would not accept anything which was contrary to the Catholic faith.

It was not in the least surprising that in some of the new avant-garde writings there should be some heretical deceit involved, even daring to impugn the truth of the Gospel in some places. The bishops firmly set their faces against such writings and used their power to condemn all the wholesome parts as well as the bad, and their author with them, for there were quite enough books already which were acceptable to the church, whereas those writings were to be thoroughly condemned which might be harmful to the simple even if profitable to the learned. For myself, as I teased out the meanings of his books, I found it rather strange that there were so many things which were quite admirable together with other things which were not acceptable.

There was no doubt that he held to some of the opinions which his advocates claimed had been falsely inserted. I myself was amazed that one and the same person could hold ideas so much at odds with each other. In the wholesome parts there was none since the apostles to equal him, but in the parts which were to be condemned there was no one who had gone more sadly astray. The bishops quoted many things out of his books which they agreed were contrary to the Catholic faith, but the extract which provoked the most anger was the claim that whereas the Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh for the redemption of humanity, suffered on the cross for human salvation and died to gain for humanity eternal life, the same power of the passion could win redemption even for the devil. He maintained that just as Christ had reformed lost humanity, so it would be compatible with his goodness and piety to restore a fallen angel.

When the bishops pointed this out, and other things of similar nature, great controversy arose among those who studied his works. The authority of the priesthood was powerless to stamp it out. The governor of the city was called in, and he used such severe measures in order to impose discipline upon the church, that the brethren were scattered in terror of their lives, and the monks fled abroad, but were unable to find a secure haven anywhere because of the edicts which had been decreed. It weighed very heavily with me that whereas Jerome, a thorough Catholic deeply versed in doctrine, had at first been reckoned among the followers of Origen, he now condemned him and everything he had written. I did not dare presume to judge these matters, seeing that many most learned and outstanding people were on different sides. But whether his writings were simply mistaken, as I take them to be, or heretical, as they were accused of being, it is certain that the condemnations of the priests stood no chance whatever of suppressing them, nor would his fame have spread so far and wide had it not been fed by their very opposition. Alexandria was agog with all this turmoil when I arrived there, but the bishop of that city received me very kindly, better than I expected, in fact, and even tried to keep me there. But I had no mind to stay long in a place where victimization had so recently caused such havoc among the brethren.

Chapter 3 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.4)

The lifestyle of Jerome in Jerusalem

I set out therefore on a sixteen-day journey to Bethlehem, which is six miles from Jerusalem. The church there is a parish of the bishop of Jerusalem and is

in charge of the presbyter Jerome. On a previous journey I had soon discovered that there could be no one whom it would be more enjoyable to meet. He is a man who deserves praise for his faith and his many gifts of virtue and his skill in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Nobody can be compared to him in all branches of learning. I had already spent six months with him, and his never-ending opposition towards evil people involved him in perpetual strife, which brought down upon him the hatred of the ungodly. To tell you the truth, I could see how in various little treatises he pointed out the vices of so many people, how he seized upon them, exposed their falsity and tore them to shreds. He was especially fierce on avarice no less than vanity; he discussed the many aspects of pride and superstition. And is there anyone who has more truthfully and boldly laid bare the familiarities which have taken place between monks and virgins, and even among clerics? No wonder that some people do not love him, or that he is hated by clerics whose vices and crimes he has brought out into the open.

Anyone who calls him a heretic is mad. Let me make it quite clear, the learning of the man is always Catholic, his doctrines are completely sound. He is always involved in some study, he gives himself to his books with his whole heart, he is forever either reading or writing something. If I had not already decided, and indeed made a promise to God, that I would visit the desert, I would not have wanted for an instant to be separated from this man.

My family, much against my will, had embarrassed me by following me here, but I was able to hand them over, together with everything I had, to his care, and freed in a way from a great burden I was able to return to Alexandria. I renewed acquaintance with the brothers there and set out for the Thebaid, the most distant parts of Egypt. There, the vast open spaces of the desert are said to contain a great number of monks. It would take a very long time to tell you everything that I saw there. I will confine myself to just a few.

Chapter 4 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.5)

How the abbot provides for the food of those brothers who with the abbot's permission go to live in solitude

Next to the Nile and not far from the desert there are many monasteries, usually of about a hundred monks. The chief point of their rule is that they live in obedience to an abbot. They do nothing of their own will, but depend on his authority. If any of them wish to seek a higher path of virtue, they move on to a solitary life in the desert, but not unless the abbot gives his permission,

for obedience to the will of another is for them the primary virtue. Once the abbot has approved of their moving on to the desert, he provides them with bread and any other food they need.

Chapter 5 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.5)

A brother in the desert has bread from heaven

It so happened that during the time when I was there the abbot had told two boys to take bread to a solitary who had only recently left the monastery to build his cell about six miles away. The older boy was fifteen, the younger twelve. As they were coming back they came upon a very large asp, but they were not in the least bit frightened of it. Before it came near to their feet it stretched out its blue-green neck as if charmed by some incantation. The younger of the boys picked it and put it in a fold of his garment, and came back to the monastery very pleased with himself. He went into the gathering of the monks, shook out the fold of his garment and put the captive beast down, with a visible air of pride. There were some who praised the boy's faith and virtue, but the abbot took a wider view and subjected them both to punishment lest at their tender age they should think too much of themselves. He blamed them for making a public spectacle of what the Lord had done through them, for it was not their own faith that had done it, but the power of God; they must learn rather to serve God in humility than boast about signs and wonders; to know your own weakness is much better than taking pride in your own power.

When the solitary heard that the boys had been put in danger by meeting a serpent, and also that their victory over it had earned them a beating, he begged the abbot not to send bread or any other food any more. After a space of eight days the man of Christ found that he was very hungry. His limbs were wasting because of his fast, though his thoughts were continually fixed on heaven. His body may have been fatigued by lack of nourishment, but his faith never wavered. Meanwhile the abbot was warned by the Spirit to visit his disciple. He had a genuine concern for him, and wanted to ask him what kind of life-giving force was sustaining this faithful man who did not want to be given human bread.

So off he went, and when the solitary saw him coming while still some way off, he ran to meet him, gave thanks, and led him back to the cell. As they were going in together they noticed a basket of palm leaves, full of warm bread, hanging from the doorpost. It smelt and felt as if it had just come out of

the oven, but it did not look in the least bit like Egyptian bread. They were both overwhelmed with amazement, recognizing this as a gift straight from heaven. The solitary asserted that it was occasioned by the abbot's arrival, but the abbot ascribed it to the faith and virtue of the solitary. And with great joy they broke the heavenly bread together. When the abbot got back to the monastery he told the brothers all about it, and they began to rival each other in burning desire to hasten themselves to the desert and sacred solitude. In this monastery I saw two old men who I was told had been there for forty years without going out at all. If I were to say anything else about them, it would simply be to relate what every body by common consent said about their virtues, including the abbot himself, that one of them had never been known to overeat, the other had never been seen to be angry. Now that you have been told the virtue of one of these hermits I must tell you something about many others.

Chapter 6 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.7)

A lioness accepts food from an old man as if it were tame.

In entering the nearest part of the desert I had as guide one of the brothers who knew the area well. We came to an old monk, living at the foot of a mountain, who had a well, a most rare thing in these parts. He had an ox whose sole task was to turn a wheel which drew the water up. The well was reputed to be a thousand feet deep or more. There was a garden with many vegetables of various different kinds, contrary to what one would expect in a desert where the soil is dry, burned up by the heat of the sun, incapable of sustaining the smallest seed or root. By the ingenuity of this holy man and the labour of both him and his ox, they were able to irrigate the sand regularly, providing sufficient fertility for the vegetables that we could see growing and coming to maturity so wonderfully in that garden. The ox and his master both lived off them, and the holy man was able to provide us with a meal from his plentiful store.

After the meal, as it drew towards evening, he took us to a palm tree about two miles away the fruits of which he often gathered. This is the only sort of tree which grows in the desert, albeit rarely. Whether wise people of old planted them, or whether the soil produces them naturally, I know not, unless God in his providence prepared them for his servants against the time when the desert should be inhabited. For those who settle in these lonely places live off the fruit of these trees for the most part, since nothing else will grow there.

As we approached the tree towards which our host was leading us we suddenly came upon a lion. My guide and I were terrified, but the holy man went up to it quite casually. We followed, though still frightened. At his command the beast stopped and sat down, while he picked some of the fruit within easy reach on the lower branches. When his hands were full the beast came up to him and accepted fruit from him as easily as any domestic animal, and having eaten, departed. As we watched, still trembling, we were not quite sure which was the greater, the virtue of faith in this man, or our own weakness.

Chapter 7 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.8)

A she-wolf is fed by an old man, and begs pardon for her sin of theft.

We found another remarkable old man living in a small hut with room for only one person. A wolf had the habit of coming to him for food, and it was rare that she failed to turn up for her meal at a regular hour. She used to wait outside for him to give her what bread he had to spare out of his store, then lick his hand before departing as if to show her respect for the kindness offered her. But one day it so happened that a brother had been visiting him and that holy man had walked back with the brother for such a distance that it was nighttime before he returned home. Meanwhile the animal had come to the empty cell at the usual time to be fed, and when she saw no sign of her familiar benefactor, went inside, curious to discover where he was. Now there happened to be a basket of palm leaves hanging up containing five small loaves. She took one and devoured it, then, the crime committed, went away. When the hermit came back he saw the basket had been disturbed and contained fewer loaves than there should have been. His house had been despoiled, and he noticed fragments of the stolen bread on the threshold. He had a pretty good idea of who had been responsible for the theft. But the next few days the animal did not come at the usual time; no doubt ashamed to come near the person to whom she had done harm, and the hermit missed greatly the pleasure of her company. He prayed earnestly for her return, until at last on the seventh day she appeared outside at the usual time to be fed. But you can always easily tell when someone feels guilty, and the wolf herself did not dare to approach very close, but stood there shamefacedly with her eyes cast down to the ground, as if to make it clear that she was asking pardon for her fault. The hermit took pity on her embarrassment, called her closer and gently stroked her sorrowful head. He restored their relationship by giving her

a double ration of bread, and thus by his forgiveness was able to dispel all sadness and reinstate their usual custom.

Just think, I beg you, of the power of Christ in this affair. To him everything brutish is made wise, everything savage becomes gentle. A wolf is aware of her duty, a beast acknowledges the crime of theft, a wolf is thrown into confusion by a sense of shame, she comes when called, she bows her head, and is as much aware of having her sins forgiven as of shame at what she had done. Yours is the power, O Christ, yours are these miracles! Even though it is your servants who do these things they do them in your name; the wonder is yours. And it saddens us that wild beasts can know the power of your majesty while human beings show you no respect. And if all this seems unbelievable I shall show you even greater things. As God is my witness I am not making these things up, but simply telling you what I have seen.

Chapter 8 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.9)

An anchorite restores the sight of
five blind lion cubs

There are numbers of people called anchorites living in the desert with no roof over their heads. They live on roots, far from the haunts of human beings, and are not confined to any one particular spot. Two monks from Nitria heard of the virtues of one particular person whom they had formerly liked and respected in the life of the monastery, and went on a journey through this extensive region to try and find him, now that he was living in this kind of way. It was a long search, but at last after seven months they found him in a most distant part of the desert not far from Memphis. He was said to have been living in these solitary places for the previous twelve years. Now although he had fled from human intercourse, he did not run away when he recognized the brothers, but welcomed them for the next three days.

On the fourth day he had escorted them a little way on their return journey when they saw an extremely large lioness coming towards them. The beast had no doubts about which one she was looking for, even though there were three of them, for she went straight to the feet of the anchorite. Then she went off a little way, and stopped and looked back, clearly giving them to understand that she wanted the anchorite to follow her. So they did all follow her as she set off. What more can I say? They arrived at the beast's cave, where the unfortunate mother had been caring for five fully grown cubs,

whose eyes had naturally been closed on coming forth from their mother's womb but which had never opened. One by one she brought them forth from the cliff and laid them at the anchorite's feet. The holy man realized what she was asking, and calling upon the name of Christ he touched the cubs' eyes. At once their blindness was healed, and with open eyes they enjoyed the light so long denied them.

And so the brothers, having fulfilled their desired visit to the anchorite, were able to return to the monastery bearing a great reward for their trouble, for they were able to tell of the faith of that holy man, and the glory of Christ which they had seen in him.

Chapter 9 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.10)

A brother learns from the example of an ibex what plants to eat and what to avoid.

There was another anchorite in that region, living in the part of the desert known as Syene. When he first went to the desert he had intended to live on the sweet and tasty plants and their roots, which the desert sometimes brings forth, but he did not know how to choose between these plants, and often picked those which were harmful. It was not easy to discern the effect of any particular root for they all seemed to be equally palatable, though they often contained a hidden poison. After he had eaten them they tortured his insides, all his vital organs shivered in extreme pain, he frequently vomited in great agony, threatening the very basis of his life. His stomach completely exhausted, he was like to die. Terrified of eating anything at all, he didn't dare pick anything to eat.

After fasting for seven days with his strength gradually failing, an animal called an ibex appeared, who came and stood near a heap of plants which the hermit had picked the previous day but had thrown away, not daring to taste them. The wild beast cast aside the poisonous ones with his mouth and chose the ones which were harmless. The holy man learned from this example what to eat and what to avoid, and so escaped the danger of hunger by avoiding the plants which were poisonous.

Chapter 10 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.11)

A brother who had been in Mt Sinai for fifty years is annoyed by the arrival of some other brothers.

It would be a long task to tell of what I learnt about all the hermits in the

desert. I spent a whole year and almost seven months in these solitudes, more often than not with the old man who had the well with the ox. I visited two of the monasteries of the blessed Antony, which today are kept up by his disciples, and I got to the place where the most blessed Paul the first hermit lived. I saw the heights of Mt Sinai whose peak almost touches the heavens, too steep to be climbed.

An anchorite was said to be hidden away in this mountain, whom I did not manage to see, although I searched very hard for him for quite a long time. He had lived apart from human intercourse for almost fifty years, wearing no clothes, bristling hair the only covering to his body. Whenever any religious people came near him he quickly took to the trackless ways to avoid meeting other humans. It is said that he did allow a meeting with one person about five years ago, and I believe it was granted to that man by the power of his faith. When he was asked, among many other things, why he so vigorously fled from human beings, he is reported as saying, "The company of human beings prevents you from being visited by Angels." Not surprisingly in the opinion of many people, his reputation for being visited by Angels was widely spread abroad.

Leaving Mt Sinai, I came back to the river Nile, whose banks are thronged with many monasteries. I wandered about among them all. As I have already said, I found that the monks generally lived in groups of a hundred. It is well known that there are two or three thousand living in these little townships. And don't imagine for a minute that the virtue of those living in these various monasteries is any less than those who, as you know, live cut off from human company. As I have already said, their first and greatest virtue is obedience. Nobody seeking to be accepted into a monastery could expect anything else than to be tested and proved, and never to refuse anything the abbot ordered, however difficult, arduous and even humiliating it might be.

Chapter 11 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.12)

The incredibly great miracles of obedience.

I must tell you about two incredibly great miracles of obedience. There was a brother who renounced the ways of the world and sought admittance to a monastery with a very strict rule. The abbot warned him what hard work it was to live under their discipline, what heavy demands it made, such that nobody found it easy to endure with patience. Better to go to another monastery where the rule was not so severe, than to attempt to take on

something which he would not be able to fulfil. Undeterred by these terrors, he began to promise such obedience that even if the abbot should order him to walk through a fire he would do so. The abbot lost no time in putting this claim to the test, and told him to go into a furnace which was being prepared to cook bread. He did not hesitate about obeying, but without delay jumped into the middle of the flames. Conquered by such bold faith, the flames died down and the fire went out, as it had done for the Hebrew children of old (Daniel 3. 24-25). He who jumped in had expected to burn, but was amazed to find that he was drenched in a cold dew. But what great wonder is it, O Christ, that the fire did no harm to your young novice (tiro), that the abbot had no cause to regret having given such hard commands, nor that the disciple had cause to regret his obedience! It shows how much God values obedience. He who came that day as a weak person to be tested was found by his ready obedience to be perfect, deservedly blessed, deservedly glorified by the test of obedience, glorified by suffering.

Chapter 12 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.13)

Another miracle of obedience

(cf. V.xiv.3) Another young man came to the same monastery to be received by the abbot. When this most important law of obedience was outlined to him, he promised to obey everything, even the most extreme, with unflinching patience. It so happened that the abbot was holding a withered rod of storax in his hand. He planted it in the ground and told this newcomer to keep on watering this dry stick until it began to take root in the desert soil. Quite contrary to nature, of course! But the brother gave himself to this impossible command, and daily carried water on his own shoulders from the Nile almost two miles away.

A year went by while he persisted in this work. There was no hope of his work bearing any fruit, but the virtue of obedience sustained him in his labours.

Another year went by; mockery was the only result of the brother's useless labour. At last, as the third year was coming to its close, with the brother never ceasing to water night and day, the rod began to throw forth a shoot. I myself saw the little tree which that rod grew into. It remains today in the forecourt of the monastery, spreading its branches in testimony to the merits of obedience and the power of faith.

Chapter 13 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.14)

One casting out demons is possessed himself by a demon. He is restored, but

not without agony

One of the holy fathers performed many miracles with his incredible powers of casting out demons from the bodies of the possessed. He could cure possessed bodies not only when present but also when absent, by a word, or even by sending them a letter or some threads from his garment. As his fame spread among the people, crowds came to him from many different places. Prefects, courtiers, judges of various ranks, without mentioning the many people of humbler origin, all came to lie at his doors. He hardly ever had anything to drink, and for food he was contented with seven dry figs. But in time his virtue was undermined by the respect in which he was held, and respect grew into vanity. When he first felt this evil growing in him, he tried hard for a long time to dispel it, but was completely unable to do so, for the demons were spreading his fame about everywhere. He did not have the strength to drive away the people who flowed towards him. A hidden poison festered in his breast. He was able by a word to put to flight the demons in other people, but could not liberate himself from his own hidden thoughts of vanity. So he prayed with all his heart to the Lord, begging that the power of the devil might be so directed against him, that he should become like those whom he had cured.

What more can I say? This pre-eminent man, famed throughout the East for his signs and wonders, around whose doors the people had been in the habit of crowding, was himself snatched up by the devil, and was kept locked up in chains. It was only after having suffered all the trials that those possessed have to endure, that at length, after five months, he was freed not only from the demon, but of that which was even more beneficial and desirable, his vanity.

Chapter 14 (Sev.Sulp., Dial.1, chap.15)

The punishment of a hermit who went back to the world

There was a very rich young man belonging to a leading family, with a wife and small son of his own, who as a tribune in Egypt fought numerous campaigns against the Blembi, in the course of which he came into contact with various parts of the desert. Having seen many of the dwellings of the holy hermits, he embraced the word of salvation given him by the blessed John, turning his back on his profitless military service with its empty honour. Once into the desert he very soon developed every kind of virtue. He fasted severely, he was conspicuously humble, his faith was unshakeable. In his zeal

for virtue he was the equal of the monks of old time. But then the devil insinuated a thought into his head that it would be more honourable to go back to his native land and preach salvation to his wife and child and his whole household, rather than continue to renounce the world all by himself and neglect their salvation. Overcome after four years by the pressure of this false notion of what was right, he abandoned the work of the desert.

He arrived at a nearby monastery where there were many brothers, and in reply to their questions he told them why he had left the desert and where he was going. In spite of the urgings of them all and especially of the abbot of that place, his fixed determination could not be eradicated from his mind. His unfortunate obstinacy drove him forth, and he left, to the distress of all the brothers. Hardly was he out of sight when he was attacked by a demon. He began to froth at the mouth and spit blood and bite himself most cruelly.

The brothers carried him back to the monastery on their shoulders. Finding that they could not prevail against the demon, they restrained him of necessity with iron chains, hand and foot, a well deserved punishment for a fugitive. It took two years for him to be delivered by the prayers of the brothers from the evil spirit, after which he returned to the desert he had left, fully cured. He served as a warning to others in the future, that once anyone has begun something, he should not vainly and lightly abandon it in a fit of inconstancy, using a spurious righteousness as an excuse

Chapter 15 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.1, chap.4)

The habit, or clothing, worn by the monks of Egypt

The characteristic Egyptian habit is designed not so much for bodily protection as being a statement about their way of life. They constantly wear very small hoods by day and by night, to remind them that by wearing the clothing of little children they should constantly imitate their innocence and simplicity.

Their tunics are of linen, hardly reaching to the elbows, leaving their hands bare. By cutting off the sleeves they are reminded that they have cut themselves off from all the deeds and values of the world.

They cover their necks and shoulders with a little cape, which in our language as well as theirs is known as a *mafors*. It is quite inexpensive, and the wearing of it emphasises their lowly status.

The last item of all is the goatskin, or *melotes* in their language. The wearing

of a goatskin signifies that by the mortification of their members from all the impulses of the carnal passions they ought to clothe themselves with the highest degree of virtue.

Although the precepts of the Gospel forbid shoes (Matthew 10.10, Luke 10.4), the frailty of the body demands that they put something on their feet against the morning cold of winter and the fierce midday heat. So they quite rightly use sandals, as permitted by the Lord's command (Mark 6.9, Acts 12.8), except when celebrating or being present at the holy mysteries, for they think that what was said to Moses and Joshua the son of Nun should be taken literally: 'Undo the buckles on your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground' (Exodus 3.5 & Joshua 5.15)

Chapter 16 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.2, chap.3)

The canonical observance of prayer, and the complete renunciation of the world.

Throughout the whole of Egypt and the Thebaid, wherever there are monasteries, a uniform rule of prayer is adhered to when they come together for vespers or for the vigils of the night. No one is permitted to become part of this community of brothers unless he has put all his previous life and possessions behind him, and on entering he must know that, as the Lord said, he must become as a little child (Matthew 18.3), and be obedient to everyone else. He must not expect to be given any special consideration on account of his age or the number of years he has spent in the world. Rather he should consider them as having been unprofitable and lost. He must consider himself a beginner, a new apprentice, and learn how to conduct himself as a soldier of Christ.

As we have said, throughout Egypt the number of psalms at vespers and at the night vigils is fixed at twelve, and after the psalms there should be space for two lessons, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. It has been done like this from of old, and has survived unchanged for such a long time because it was not set up by human invention but handed down from heaven to the ancient fathers by the ministry of angels.

Chapter 17 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.2, chap.5)

How an Angel was seen to be singing the twelve psalms in the gathering of the seniors.

In the very earliest days of the faith, there were some men, few in number but

very highly respected, who are reckoned to be known as monks, and who learned their way of living from the successors of the apostles. They went apart into secluded places on the outskirts of the cities, practising a life of such rigorous abstinence that everyone was amazed at how they could voluntarily give themselves to an arduous life of this sort. These venerable fathers took considerable thought for the welfare of those who should come after them, and wanted to come to a decision about how the daily worship should be conducted among the whole body of the brotherhood. They gathered together, therefore, in a convenient place, with the intention of being able to hand on to their successors a heritage of peace and piety free from any suspicion of controversy. They feared lest any differences and disagreements which might arise among people in the daily conduct of their worship might later result in the growth of dangerous errors.

They discussed the way in which each of them had different customs in deciding the number of the psalms, some fifty, some sixty, and even some not content with that number who thought there should be even more. So they got into such a holy argument for the glory of their religion that the time for the solemnity of the most sacred vespers was upon them before they had come to a decision. Suddenly one of their number got up in the midst of them and began to sing psalms to the Lord. He sang eleven psalms, interspersed with prayer after each one, with equal emphasis given to each succeeding verse, but when he got to the twelfth psalm he finished it with a response of Alleluia and suddenly disappeared from sight, putting an end to both the worship and the arguments.

The seniors present understood from this that by the message of an angel it was the Lord who had decided upon the universal rule for the communities of brothers, and issued a decree that they should keep to this number both for vespers and night vigils.

The prayers that we mentioned above are begun and ended in this way: When the psalm is finished, followed by a Gloria, they are in no hurry to bend the knee but pray for a little standing up, in which position they spend the greater part of the time. There is then a brief pause before they prostrate themselves on the ground, to show they are begging for the divine mercy, then they rise again fairly quickly. With hands outstretched, they pray standing in the same way as before, concentrating upon the words of their prayer. For they maintain that a monk who prostrates himself for a long time, as if earnestly striving in his prayer, is liable to be attacked not only by wandering thoughts but also by

sleep. We have learnt this from experience, that many people drag out their prostrations not so much for the sake of prayer but for the sake of having a rest!

Chapter 18 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.2, chap.10)

Decency and due order to be observed in prayer.

When gathered together to celebrate these solemnities, which they call synaxes, silence is enjoined upon all, so that with such a large number of brothers gathered together, no voice is to be heard except that of the cantor. At the time of prayer, no one may spit, clear the throat, or yawn sleepily at great length; no voice except that of the presiding priest is heard. No one presumes to have prostrated themselves before he does, nor does anyone get up before he gets up from the ground to say the collect. The prayers are then brought to a swift conclusion, lest by lingering too long over them any residual sputum or phlegm disrupt the end of the service. And so the fervour of prayer is quickly snatched away from the jaws of the enemy - for although he is hostile towards us at all times, he is never so hostile as when he sees us offering prayers to the Lord against him.

For this reason they think it is better for the prayers to be short, and said in quick succession. They say that it is better for ten verses of a psalm to be sung with contrition of heart and careful attention than to pour out a complete psalm with the mind in a state of confusion.

Chapter 19 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.2, chap.11)

A psalm is not said with the response Alleluia unless it is so indicated in the title.

They also observe carefully the rule that no psalm is said with the response Alleluia unless it is so indicated in the title.

They do not allow any time to pass in idleness. During the hours of daylight they give themselves continuously to manual work, nor do they allow the densest hours of darkness to prevent them doing the kind of work which requires mental activity. They believe that by directing the mind aright they will be finding a greater depth of spiritual contemplation, the longer they are intent upon developing their work and labour.

We should also note that from vespers on Saturday to the lighting of the lamps

on Sunday they do not bend the knee, nor during the time from Easter Sunday to Pentecost.

Chapter 20 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.3, chap.2)

Manual work, and the offices of the third, sixth and ninth hours.

They keep to their manual work privately in their cells without ceasing, but not so as to neglect their study of the psalms or other parts of Scripture. They meditate on them constantly all day, spreading over the whole day what we are accustomed to observe at definite fixed times.

But they do mark the third, sixth and ninth hours with three psalms apiece. We know that the prophet Daniel poured forth prayers to God at these same three hours in his chamber with the windows open (Daniel 6.10). There are good reasons why these times of day have been specially set aside for religious observances. For at these hours the promises were fulfilled and the great matters of our salvation were accomplished. At the third hour the holy Spirit descended upon the apostles as the prophets had foretold, giving them the knowledge of tongues (Acts 2.4). At the sixth hour the spotless victim, Jesus Christ our Lord, was offered up to the Father, mounting the cross for the salvation of the world to wipe out the sins of the human race. At this same hour, Peter's vocation to the gentiles was revealed to him as he stood in ecstasy, for he witnessed the gospel vessel coming down from heaven, and the cleansing of all the living creatures in it, as he heard the divine voice saying to him, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat' (Acts 10.9). The fact that the vessel was let down by the four corners signifies nothing other than the four Gospels. At the ninth hour Christ went down to the lower regions and extinguished the impenetrable darkness of Tartarus by his own shining splendour, bursting open the gates of bronze and breaking the iron bars, taking back with him to heaven the captive band of saints, and by the removal of the fiery sword (Genesis 3.24) restoring to paradise its original inhabitant. At this same hour Cornelius the centurion stood in prayer and knew by the message of an Angel that his alms and prayers had been accepted by God (Acts 10.3). It is clear then from these examples that just as these holy men and apostles devoted these hours to religious observances so should we do likewise. If we had no rule binding us at the very least to some definite times for these devout duties, we would spend all day wrapped up in forgetfulness, idleness and useless pastimes.

Chapter 21 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.3)

The discretion and caution necessary in receiving into the monastery anyone renouncing the world.

Anyone who wants to renounce the business of the world and be admitted into the monastery must first spend ten days or even more outside the monastery gates, to give evidence of his perseverance no less than his humility and patience. He must lie prostrate at the feet of all the brothers who pass by; they all spurn and despise him as if it were not any religious sense which draws him but simple need; he gets many insults thrown at him, to find out whether by putting up with this verbal abuse he will be able to survive the tests of the future. When at last he is accepted he is carefully searched lest he has kept for himself even a single coin of his previous possessions. They know that under the daily discipline of the monastery he will not learn humility or obedience so long as he has hidden from sight even the smallest amount of money.

When he is received, therefore, he is stripped of everything which he used to own. He is not even allowed to keep any longer the clothing he is wearing, but is led into the middle of the assembled brothers, stripped of his own garments and clothed at the hands of the abbot in the garments of the monastery. This is to signify that he is despoiled not only of every thing that he used to own, but of all pride in worldly reputation. He must realise that he has to humble himself into the poverty and helplessness of Christ.

His discarded clothing is kept in the monastery until they are quite sure of how firmly he is progressing in this way of life and how bravely he is able to bear it. If they decide that he will persevere, his old clothing is given to the poor. But if they detect any grumbling or disobedience in him, they strip him of the monastic clothing which he is wearing and expel him from the community wearing his former clothes, which have been kept for him.

So then, when he has given proof of sufficient perseverance to be accepted, stripped of his own garments and clad in the monastic habit, he is not allowed to mix immediately with the brothers, but is given into the care of a senior who lodges apart near the gatehouse of the monastery and looks after the needs of strangers and newcomers. Here he assists in welcoming them kindly and diligently. When he has lived like a servant in this way for a year without any upset, he will have learned the first rudiments of humility and may be admitted to the congregation of the brothers.

Now at last he is taught to conquer first of all his own desires, and bends all his attention on controlling any conflicts which are discerned in him. For they maintain that no monk can possibly battle against anger, depression, or the spirit of fornication unless he first learns to mortify his own will through obedience; nor can he continue in true humility of heart, nor keep up good relations with his brothers, nor even remain long in the monastery, unless he learns how to overcome his own desires.

Chapter 22 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.10)

Nobody in the monastery may presume to do anything without the sanction of the seniors

Next, the rule of obedience is kept with such strictness that the juniors do not even see to their own natural needs without the knowledge and permission of the superior, and they hasten to obey such commands as the abbot might give them as if they came from God in heaven. If they are ordered to do anything which seems impossible they accept the order with faith and devotion, and do their best to carry it out with all their power.

So then, they sit in their cells giving equal attention to both work and meditation, but when they hear the signal calling them either to prayer or some kind of work, they leave their cells immediately. Even if anyone is in the midst of writing something, he would not dare to finish any letter which he had begun to form, but jumps up hastily the moment the sound of bell strikes his ears. He would not allow even so much of a delay as might allow him to finish it off.

We are aware of another great virtue among their other practices: they are not allowed to possess so much as a box or even a small woven basket or anything else at all. Nobody would dare to claim anything as his own personal property.

Chapter 23 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.20)

Three small lentil grains lost through carelessness

While one of the brothers was doing his week's duty in the kitchen, the prior noticed three grains of lentil on the floor, which had slipped out of the brother's hands while washing them ready for cooking. He immediately reported this to the abbot, who adjudged him to be a pilferer and careless of their common property. He was excluded from the common prayers, and was

not forgiven for his crime of negligence until he had done public penance.

Chapter 24 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.21)

Two monks who were short of firewood during their week's duty.

I heard of two monks who ran out of firewood during their week's duty and so were unable to cook food for the brothers as usual. The abbot ordered that until more wood could be gathered and fetched they should be content with dried food. Everyone accepted that they could not expect any cooked food, but the two cooks were upset that they would not in their turn be able to prepare food for the brothers as usual, fearing that they would be deprived of the reward due to them for their labour and service. So they took upon themselves the labour of scouring the dry and sterile places where there was no wood to be found unless it were to be cut from the fruit trees (for they have no wild shrubs in that area). They wandered off through the desert into the trackless ways near the Dead Sea, and collected thin twigs and thorn branches which the wind had scattered about, and so were able by their spontaneous service to prepare food for the brothers as usual. It was their faith which enabled them to provide this gift for their brothers, for even though the shortage of wood and the abbot's command provided them with a perfectly good excuse, they chose not to avail themselves of this freedom, for the sake of their due profit and reward.

Chapter 25 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.23)

Blessed John who lived near the town of Lycus.

I must make mention in this work of the blessed John who lived near Lycus, which is a town of the Thebaid. By virtue of his obedience the grace of prophecy was granted him. His fame spread everywhere, and deservedly came even to the ears of the rulers of the world. For even when John was living in the remotest parts of the Thebaid, as I have said, the Emperor Theodosius would not dream of going off on a war against the most powerful of tyrants without the support of his advice and opinions, which he accepted as if handed down to him from heaven, and gave him such confidence that he never failed to bring back the spoils of war from his enemies, even in the most desperate of battles.

Chapter 26 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.24)

The obedience of this same John

This blessed John subjected himself to a senior from his youth up until as an adult he approached perfection. For as long as this senior lived in this world John deferred to him with such humility that his obedience filled the senior with the greatest admiration. The old man wanted to explore more deeply whether John's virtue sprang from a true faith in the depths of his heart, so he would often give him unnecessary and even impossible tasks to perform, of which I will mention but a few.

He took a twig from his woodpile, previously prepared as fuel for the fire, and stuck it in the ground, telling John to fetch water and sprinkle it daily. Without taking any thought for the impossibility of this command, the young man accepted it with his usual respect, and daily brought water from about two miles away, never once omitting to water the twig. He kept this up for a year, never allowing anything to interfere with this task of obedience, neither sickness or anything else. The old man secretly observed his diligence day after day without saying anything. He could see that he was fulfilling this command in simplicity of heart as if it were a command from God and took pity on him for persevering so long in this laborious task. He went to look at the dried stick

"John, my son," he said, "is it putting forth roots or not?"

"I don't know," he said

The old man felt underneath it to see whether there were any roots, pulled the stick out of the ground and threw it away.

"You don't need to water it any more," he said.

Chapter 27 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.25)

The large stone

which John obediently tried to fetch

The fame of his obedience began to spread throughout all the monasteries, and some of the brothers came to test it and be edified by it. The old man summoned his disciple.

"John," he said, "run and fetch me that large stone as quickly as you can."

Straightaway he applied his shoulder to this immense stone, then his chest, striving with all his strength and undivided attention to make it move, with the

sweat pouring off him so that not only were all his clothes drenched in sweat, but the rock as well. In doing this he had taken no account of the impossibility of either the command or the deed, but out of respect for his senior, and in a spirit of sincere and simple compliance, he trusted with an untroubled faith that he would not be told to do anything useless unless there were some reason for it.

These few things out of the many deeds of abba John will suffice. We turn now to the memorable deed of abba Mutius.

Chapter 28 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.27)

The marvellous patience of abba Mutius.

Desiring to renounce the world, abba Mutius sought out a monastery, bringing with him his small son of about eight years of age. They lay out side the gates for a long time before they were granted permission to enter. And when they were received they were immediately separated from each other, so that the sight of his son would not constantly remind the father how much he had given up, and how rich he used to be, and even make him forget that he was a father at all.

In order to test still further whether he placed obedience higher than the bonds of family, his son was neglected, dressed in rags rather than proper clothes, subjected to slaps and blows from various people, often before the father's very eyes. The father could see that the innocent child did not deserve these blows, and he never saw the child's cheeks without them being stained with the dirty traces of his tears. Day by day he saw the child treated thus, but he endured it all for the love of Christ and in the virtue of obedience, with a stiff and unbending heart. He no longer thought of him as his son, for he had offered him to Christ along with himself, nor did he concern himself about his present injuries, but rather rejoiced that the child did not distract him from his own mental determination and fixed purpose.

Aware of this, the abbot decided to test his constancy still further. He saw the child weeping one day and pretending to be angry he ordered the father to pick him up and throw him in the river. As if commanded by the Lord he quickly picked the child up and straightaway carried him to the river to throw him in. In the fervour of his faith and obedience this would have been carried out completely, if it had not been for the abbot having ordered some of the brothers to patrol the riverbank carefully in order to rescue the boy. No sooner

had the boy been thrown in than they pulled him out of the streambed, thus saving the boy from the effect of the deed which the father had performed at the abbot's command.

His faith, obedience and devotion were instantly accepted by God, as was at once verified by a testimony from God. For it was revealed to the senior almost immediately that what he had done was to fulfil the obedience of Abraham (Genesis 28.) Some time later the abbot passed away from this world, praising Mutius before all the brothers because of his obedience, and leaving him as his successor and abbot of the monastery.

Chapter 28 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.29)

A monk, the son of an aristocrat, ordered to carry baskets through the streets.

We learned of a brother who came from a very high ranking family in the world, for his father was not only an aristocrat but very rich. He left his parents and joined a monastery, where, to test his humility, the superior ordered him to carry ten large baskets from his shoulders and hawk them through the streets, although at that time the sale of the baskets was not strictly necessary. He added a condition that if anyone offered to buy the lot he was not to agree, but had to sell them all to separate buyers. He carried out these conditions with complete faithfulness, overcoming all trace of embarrassment by his desire for Christ, and putting the baskets on his shoulders and carrying them through the streets, he sold them at the proper price and brought the money back to the monastery.

Chapter 30 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.30)

Abba Pinuphius in the search for humility flees from the monastery and settles a long way off

We saw abba Pinuphius who used to be presbyter of a very large coenobium not far from the city of Panephyus in Egypt. He was held in great respect for his age, his life and his priesthood, and was honoured by all. But he saw that because of all that he was unable to preserve his humility, so he fled, alone, from the coenobium into the furthest reaches of the Thebaid. There he took off his monastic clothes and put on secular garments, before seeking out the

monastery of Tabennisi, which he knew to be the strictest of all the monasteries, and which he thought would be far enough away for him not to be recognised. He stayed for a long time outside prostrating himself before the brothers, begging each one with many prayers that he might be admitted. When he was at last admitted, not without some scorn for being an old man who would not be suitable for many tasks, he was ordered to work diligently in the garden. A brother who was quite a junior was put over him who believed he should take charge of him completely. This brother not only instructed him in everything to do with the management of the garden but in all the tasks which were universally regarded as hard and humiliating. He carried them all out conscientiously every day, and many of them at night, for he got up quietly so that no one would see him, and no one would be able to guess who had been doing them.

Three years went by, and he was being sought throughout Egypt by the brothers, when at last he was seen by a brother who was visiting from Egypt. He could hardly recognise him because of the coarseness of his clothing and the menial work he was doing. He was bent forwards over a hoe, preparing the ground for vegetables, then carrying dung on his shoulders to be laid around their roots. The brother hesitated as he watched, and delayed making himself known to him for quite some time, but at last he moved closer, and recognising his voice as well as his face he at once cast himself at Pinuphius' feet.

The brothers were astounded.

"Why," they asked, "are you doing this to him? He has only recently joined us from the world, and is the lowest in rank of all of us."

The visitor justified what he had done by telling them Pinuphius' name and they were even more astounded by this marvel than before, for the name of Pinuphius was already well known among them. They all begged his pardon for their ignorance, and for keeping him all this time in the ranks of the juniors and children. But he wept and grieved greatly because by the envy of the devil he had been discovered and would not any longer be able to carry on in humility and lowliness. The brothers took him back weeping and reluctant to his own monastery, keeping a very careful eye on him lest he slip away and flee in the same way as before.

After a little while the desire for lowliness arose in him once more, and in the silence of the night he fled not just to a neighbouring province but to lands

completely unknown to him. He took ship intending to settle here in Palestine, believing that he would be more securely hidden if he went to places where even his name had never been heard of. When he got here he came to our monastery, quite near the cave in which our Lord was born of the Virgin. He was able to conceal himself here for a while, but like 'a city set on a hill', in the Lord's words (Matthew 5.14), he could not stay hidden for long, for there were always brothers coming from Egypt to pray at the holy places. He was recognised, and with many prayers they brought him back unwillingly to his own coenobium again.

Chapter 31 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.4, chap.32)

A valuable exhortation to a novice monk

Mindful of the friendly association we had had with this man in our own monastery we sought him out in Egypt later on. It so happened that while we were there he received a brother into the monastery, and we heard him give a marvellous exhortation, which I have a mind to include in this little work.

This is what he said:

You know, my son, how many days you lay outside before being received inside today. First of all you must understand why you have been put to all that difficulty. For it may teach you a great deal about this life that you wish to enter upon, if, knowing the reason for it, you give yourself to the service of Christ as you ought.

Now just as there is an inestimable glory in the future promised to the servants of God who follow together the requirements of this rule, so also there is terrible punishment prepared for those who observe it but tepidly or negligently. By failing to bring forth the fruits of holiness they have not lived up to what they have promised, or to what people believed them to be. 'Better never to have vowed at all than vow and not fulfil it' (Ecclesiastes 5.5), and 'Cursed be he who carries out the work of God carelessly' (Jeremiah 48.10).

This is why we refused you for such a long time. It is not that we do not desire your salvation, and that of all people, to be embraced with a whole heart. But we would not wish to receive you without due consideration, lest we should be found guilty of levity in God's eyes. And you would be liable to an even greater condemnation, if having been once accepted without being made aware of the great responsibility of your profession, you subsequently were to abandon it, or even just live it half-heartedly.

Know then as from today, you are dead to the world and all its deeds. As the

Apostle says, 'you are crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to you (Galatians 6.14). How can a living person be crucified? Take this brief explanation to heart.

Our cross is the fear of God. Anyone on the cross is unable by an act of will to move or turn his limbs; we also ought to govern our own wills and desires in such a way that they are bound by the precepts of the Lord, and not by what takes our fancy in the present moment. Someone fixed to the gibbet of the cross is no longer concerned with the present, nor does he worry about what he might like or not like. He is no longer agitated by worry about material possessions, for even though there is still breath in his body he knows himself to be dead to all earthly things. Likewise, in the fear of the Lord we should be crucified to all the vices of the flesh and keep the eyes of our mind firmly fixed on the destination whither we expect to travel at any moment.

We must always beware lest we take back for ourselves anything which we have formerly renounced. It is not in the beginning of anything that salvation lies, but in the persevering right to the end.

The wily devil is forever observing our footsteps, hoping to worm his way into our dying moments - another reason for a good beginning being of no value unless it is carried through to the end.

So then, in accordance with Scripture, once you have begun to serve the Lord, stand in the fear of the Lord, and prepare your soul not for rest, nor for delights, but for temptations and narrow ways (Ecclesiasticus 2.1). It is through great tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of heaven (Acts 14.22), for narrow is the way and strait the gate that leads to life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7.14)

The beginning of our salvation is the fear of the Lord, by means of which from the outset of our conversion we begin to cultivate the virtues. Once the fear of the Lord has penetrated the human mind it gives birth to contempt for all things, and generates revulsion from the world. By being deprived of all possessions and holding them as worthless, true humility is acquired. Humility is recognised as being present by the following signs:

Firstly, if a monk has put to death all his own self-will.

Secondly, if he does not conceal his deeds or thoughts from his senior.

Thirdly, if he puts his trust not in his own discretion, but in the judgment of his superior.

Fourthly, if he accepts every command with untroubled obedience and unwearying patience.

Fifthly, if he does no harm to anyone but patiently bears all injuries to himself.

Sixthly, if he never does anything contrary to the provisions of the rule.

Seventhly, if in all the tasks he is given he judges himself as a bad and unprofitable servant.

Eighthly, if he reckons himself to be inferior to all.

Ninthly, if he guards his tongue, and does not speak loudly.

Tenthly, if he is not easily moved to laughter.

By these signs, true humility may be discerned.

Another thing which must be observed in the congregation is that as the Psalmist said, you must 'be deaf and do not hear, be dumb and open not your mouth' (Psalms 38.13), and do not quibble or be judgmental about anything you are told to do.

Don't think you have acquired the virtue of patience because other people are virtuous, imagining that you have gained it simply because nobody irritates you.

The beginning of salvation is the fear of the Lord (as we have said). From the fear of the Lord is born a saving compunction, from compunction of heart proceeds nakedness and contempt for possessions, from nakedness proceeds humility, from humility comes mortification of the will, by mortification of the will all vices are eradicated, when vices are expelled virtues bear fruit and increase, in the growth of virtue purity of heart is acquired, in purity of heart the perfection of apostolic charity may be possessed.

Chapter 32 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.24)

The monk who offered refreshment to pilgrims
before the proper hour

When we came out of the land of Syria into the province of Egypt, there was a trustworthy old monk who welcomed us gladly and prepared food for us before the time of fasting was completed.

"Why are you offering us food before the canonical meal time?" we asked.

"I can always fast, brothers," he replied, "but I am about to see you on your way, and I can't keep you with me until the canonical mealtime. If I am welcoming Christ in you, then I must offer you refreshment. And when I have seen you on your way I can make up for it by a stricter fast. 'The children of the bridegroom cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them' (Luke 5.34). 'When he is gone, then you may fast' (Matthew 9.15).

Chapter 33 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.26)

A monk whose custom was never to eat alone

We saw another solitary who never ate when alone. Even if none of the brothers came to his cell for up to five days he put off eating, preferring to fast until the offering of the congregation in church on the Saturday and Sunday, when he would find some stranger and take him back to his cell, and together they would take food.

Chapter 34 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.29)

The monk Machetes

We saw another solitary, Machetes by name, who had been given this gift from the Lord: that he never dozed off during a spiritual conference, even if it went on all night and all day. But if anyone began to speak spitefully or frivolously, then he would go to sleep.

This same man once had a big bundle of letters delivered to him, some from his father and mother, others from his many friends in the province of Pontus. He pondered about them for some time.

"What thoughts," he said at last, "will go through my mind in reading these? They will either send me into transports of joy, or fruitless sadness. How much longer will these letter writers try to draw my heart away from the contemplation which I have set myself to achieve?"

And turning these thoughts over in his heart he decided not to break the seal of the letters, not even to open the bundle, lest he should be distracted from what he had set his heart on by bringing to mind the names of those who had written to him or imagining what they looked like. So with the packaging unbroken just as he had received it he threw it into the fire.

"Get you gone!" he cried. "Burn in the fire, all you thoughts of my native land, lest you try to call me back to what it is that I have fled from!"

Chapter 35 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.33)

Abba Theodore

We also saw abba Theodore, famous for his sanctity and his learning, not only in respect of his actual way of life but also for his knowledge of Scripture, which he had gained not so much by studious reading as simply from his purity of heart. For when he was seeking the answer to some obscure question he persisted seven days and nights in untiring prayer, until he was assured that

the Lord had revealed to him the solution to the problem he was addressing. This same Theodore once came unexpectedly and privately to my cell at the dead of night, seeking out with paternal curiosity how I might be getting on, new to the hermit life as I then was. I had just finished saying vespers, and was preparing to refresh my weary body by taking it to bed, when he fetched a sigh from the bottom of his heart and addressed me by name.

"John," he said, "How many people are conversing with God and enfolding him into themselves, and you are depriving yourself of this chance of illumination, wrapped in senseless sleep?"

Thus encouraged, I was inspired from that time on to give myself to vigils for the salvation of my soul.

Chapter 36 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.36)

The anchorites living in the empty spaces
of the desert

After leaving the monasteries of Palestine we visited a town in Egypt called Diolcos, where we saw a great number of men subject to the discipline of the coenobium, and also another group, the anchorites, who are held to be of a higher degree. Everybody spoke so highly of them that our hearts were burning in our haste to visit them. They had all been trained first of all under the discipline of a rule in the monasteries, before going out to the secret depths of the desert to join the most severe sort of battle with the demons. We found that those who were living this sort of life had the river Nile on one side, and the vast expanses of ocean on the other, making a sort of island. No other people except monks seeking hiddenness would want to go there, as the land is most unsuitable for cultivation because the soil is so salty and the sands are sterile. We eagerly hurried towards them, and were astonished above measure at the hard work they put up with in these solitudes. Their water supplies are so restricted that the effort they put into obtaining it could not be equalled even by someone making the most precious of wines. For they have to carry it from the river Nile three miles away for all their needs. And that is doubly difficult because of the mountains in between.

Chapter 37 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.37)

The monk Archebius

As we looked at them, filled with a burning desire to imitate them, one of the very experienced hermits, Archebius by name, hospitably invited us to his

cell. When he was given to understand that we wished to stay there, he pretended that he was wanting to leave that particular spot and offered us his cell as if he were on the point of going elsewhere anyway. He said that he had been going to do that even if we had not come. So we took possession of his cell and all its contents. He went away for a few days to gather materials for making a new cell. When he returned he laboriously built himself another cell. And not long afterwards with the greatest charity he handed this one over, with everything that was in it, to some other brothers who had arrived. His tireless devotion to the work of charity led to his building a third cell to live in.

Chapter 38 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.5, chap.40)

Two youths who die on a journey to take figs
to a sick man

There was a brother who sent some figs from Mareotis to abba John in the desert of Scete. He promptly asked two of the young men to take them on to a certain old man who was suffering from ill health in the inner desert. This solitary lived eighteen miles from the church. The young men took the fruit, and as they were on the way to the old man they were suddenly enveloped in a thick fog and lost sight of the right path. They wandered about all day and all night in the trackless desert but could not find the sick man's cell. Wearing out by the journey and overcome with hunger and thirst they fell to the ground on their knees, and as they were praying they gave up their spirit to God.

Footprints in these sandy places remain visible as if impressed in snow, until such time as even the lightest of breezes covers them over with a thin coating of sand. Nevertheless after a long search following their footprints, they were found kneeling as if in prayer still carrying, untouched, the figs which they had been given. They had chosen to lose their lives rather than betray the faith which had been placed in them, for they would not presume to touch any food without the sanction of the abbot. They preferred to leave this mortal life rather than disobey the superior's orders.

Chapter 39 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.10, chap.22)

The burden of work among the Egyptian monks

Throughout the whole of Egypt, the monks are not allowed to be idle, but they earn their bread by manual work. Their labour provides food not only for pilgrims and visiting brothers but also in several places in Libya suffering

from famine. They also take substantial supplies to those in prison or in chains in various cities, believing that by such an offering of the fruit of their hands they offer themselves as an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord.

There is a saying that a monk who works is plagued by one demon, but the lazy monk is destroyed by demons without number.

Chapter 40 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.10, chap.24)

Abba Paulus

Abba Paulus, one of the most respected fathers, lived in the vast Porphyrium desert, where he lived on dates and the produce of a small garden. There were no opportunities for him to earn a living from any other type of manual work, for he lived more than seven days' journey into the desert from any human habitation. But he did not want the movement of time to slip idly by, so he regularly collected each day the amount of palm leaves he would need if his livelihood depended on it. At the end of a year his cave would be full of the work he had done. But there was no one who would be able to take it away, nor did he wish to be idle, so he made a bonfire of it each year, demonstrating dramatically that without manual work a monk cannot survive anywhere, nor can he come anywhere near to the peak of perfection.

Chapter 41 (Cassian, Institutes, Bk.12, chap.20)

The blasphemous brother who burned with an unbearable fire of lust

I knew another brother who went to a most respected old man to confess that he was being gravely tempted to sins of the flesh and was burning with an unbearable fire of lust. The old man, like the spiritual doctor he was, immediately saw the origin and inner cause of this sickness.

"The Lord," he said, sighing deeply, "would by no means have delivered you into the hands of such a wicked spirit unless in some way you had blasphemed against him."

Hearing this, the brother was awe-struck, fell at the old man's feet and confessed that indeed he had wickedly blasphemed in thought against the Son of God. Whence it is clear that anyone who is an habitual blasphemer is insulting the Lord, and is therefore deprived of the possibility of becoming perfect, for he cannot deserve the sanctifying grace to become chaste.

Chapter 42 (Cassian, Conference 2, chap.2)

A number of seniors gather round the holy
Antony for mutual encouragement

On one occasion a number of the seniors went to the blessed Antony in the Thebaid to confer together in the search for perfection. They continued talking from vespers until daylight, the question of discretion taking up the greater part of the night. The question which they discussed at such length among themselves was: Which virtue or monastic observance could keep a monk unharmed from the attacks of the devil, and surely carry him by assured means on the right path to God? Each one gave his own opinion as to what he thought best. Some said the practice of fasting and vigils, others nakedness and contempt of worldly possessions, others a withdrawn life into the hidden parts of the desert, quite a few put the quest for charity first, which they defined as service to humanity consisting of the pious practice of giving hospitality to brothers and strangers. After spending the greater part of the night in devout discussion of this nature, the blessed Antony at last replied to them all.

"All the things you have mentioned are useful and necessary for anyone thirsting after God. But the countless circumstances and experiences of so many brothers do not allow of us giving precedence to any single one of these virtues. I have often seen brothers who observe certain practices becoming deceived in the end, because they did not observe discretion in the good thing which they had undertaken. The chief cause of their fall has been that far from being governed by their superiors, they failed to grasp the necessity for discretion, which is able to teach a monk a royal road that prevents them from overdoing ascetic practices on the one hand, while safeguarding them from falling into vice on the other. In everything that we do, discretion must come first. We must be quite clear about this: no virtue can be perfectly begun and continued without the grace of discretion."

After what Antony had said, they all agreed that discretion was the way to lead a monk fearlessly to God step by step, for it ensured that none of the virtues they had talked about could ever become harmful. Discretion is the mother and guardian and governor of every virtue.

Chapter 43 (Cassian, Conference 2, chap.5)

Heron

Some definite examples may help to reinforce this, so I remind you of a certain old man called Heron, who by paying no attention to discretion

brought to nothing all his earlier labours and, what is more, came to a miserable end. A few days ago by the tricks of the devil he was cast down from the heights to the very depths. For he had spent fifty years in the desert, maintaining an extremely strict way of life, preserving the hiddenness of solitude more than anyone else. He worked so very hard, and yet he has been deceived by the deceiver, coming to disaster by such a grievous fall that he has plunged all the desert-dwellers into the deepest grief. He would have run much less risk of falling if he had only practised the wisdom of discretion. Instead, he always practised fasting with such a rigorous spirit and kept so immutably to the hidden solitude of his cell that he would not even relax his strict abstinence on Easter Day. For such a great feast as Easter, all the hermits would come together in church, all except him alone, lest he should be seen to have relaxed his rule simply by taking a little extra food.

Such presumption led him into mistaking the angel of Satan for an Angel of light, whom he welcomed with the deepest veneration. He obeyed the angel's commands and cast himself headlong into a very deep well, thinking that he was about to demonstrate how greatly his virtues were going to be rewarded by coming out of the well unharmed. The brothers with great difficulty managed to get him out of the well half dead, but he died three days afterwards. And what was even worse, he persisted obstinately in his delusions, and no one could convince him that he had been led astray by the devil.

Chapter 44 (Cassian, Conference 2, chap.6)

Two monks travelling through the desert who decided that they would not partake of any food unless God himself brought it to them.

What can I say about those two brothers who lived in the distant desert where Antony used to live, and who, casting discretion to the winds, went for a long journey through the desert having decided that on no account would they take any food unless it were given them by God himself? As they were wandering through the desert, half dead with hunger they saw in the distance some Mazices, a race of people more savage and cruel than any other. They shed blood not only in pursuit of plunder, but simply because of their ferocious nature.

But contrary to their reputation for ferocity, they came forward offering the two brothers bread. One of the brothers, guided by discretion, accepted it thankfully as if from the hand of God. He reckoned that the food was divinely

provided, for it must have been by an act of God that these bloodthirsty people were now offering fainting people the means of sustaining life. But the other one refused the food because it had been offered to him by human beings.

Weakened by lack of food, he died.

However blameworthy their original decision may have been, one of them, guided by discretion, can be seen to have put right what he started foolishly. The other persisted in his stubborn presumption, and brought upon himself the death which the Lord had wanted to save him from.

Chapter 45 (Cassian, Conference 2, chap.7)

The monk who was deceived by the devil and wanted to sacrifice his own son

What also should I say about another monk, whose name I shall not mention, seeing that he is still alive? Over quite a long period he had been visited by a demon of angelic brightness, and was often led astray by his revelations, believing him to be a messenger of righteousness. For every night the devil caused a light to shine in his cell without the agency of any lantern. At last he ordered him to show his devotion to God by offering up in sacrifice his own son, who was with him in the monastery. This sacrifice would make him equal in merit to the patriarch Abraham. He was instantly led astray by these words, and would have carried out the deed without delay, had not the son slipped through his hands and fled from the cell at full speed.

Chapter 46 (Cassian, Conference 2, chap.8)

The monk to whom the devil showed the armies of the Christians and the armies of the Jews.

There was another monk who fasted very severely, shut up alone in his cell for many years. Hardly anybody was able to rival his abstinence. After many years of virtuous labour, in which he exceeded all other monks, he was in the end so deceived by the revelations of the devil that he regrettably converted to Judaism and the circumcision of the flesh. For the devil, posing as a messenger of truth in dreams and in other false displays, had often showed him an army of Christian monks, dark and loathsome, deformed and emaciated, and on the other hand the Jewish people dancing for joy, and shining with brilliant light. The devil warned him that if he wished to share in their blessedness he should get himself circumcised as quickly as possible. From the examples of these men that we have mentioned it can easily be seen that none of them would have been so easily deceived had they laboured to

acquire the virtue of discretion. The downfall of so many in what they tried to do shows how dangerous it is to be without the grace of discretion.

Chapter 47 (Cassian, Conference 2, chap.11)

Abba Serapion

Abba Serapion in giving instructions to the junior brothers, often used to draw on his own experience:

When I was young (he would say) and living with abba Theonas, after eating with the old man at the ninth hour, the devil got me into the habit of taking a bread roll and hiding it under my habit so that I could eat it later without the old man knowing. I committed this theft daily, but as soon as this greedy deception had been brought to a conclusion, the torture of knowing that I was a thief was much keener than the pleasure that the food had given me. But I had a compulsion every day to commit this dreadful deed, even though it made me feel bad, nor could I bring myself to tell the old man about these secret thefts.

But by the providence of God certain brothers came eagerly to the old man's cell for instruction one day, and after the meal was over they all began to take part in a spiritual conference. They were asking him about the vice of gluttony and hidden thoughts, and he replied to their questions, finishing up by saying: "Nothing is more harmful to the monk and more pleasing to the demons than to conceal his thoughts from his spiritual father."

Conscience-stricken, I thought that the old man must have already read the secrets of my heart. I sighed inwardly; then, as compunction grew in my heart, I burst forth openly into sobs and tears. I wept bitterly, and suddenly pulled out of my habit the bread roll which I had been secretly prepared to devour according to my depraved custom. I showed it to everyone, confessing that I had been involved in eating one in secret every day. I threw myself down on the floor to ask pardon, and pouring forth copious tears, I begged for their prayers that God might forgive me.

"You can be quite sure," the old man said, "that your confession has freed you from this thing which has had such a hold over you. Today you are victorious, you have triumphed over your adversary. You have come out stronger now by making your confession than you were when your silence had allowed him to cast you down to the depths. Your openness will result in this evil spirit no longer having dominion over you. The foul serpent from now on will no longer be able to take possession of you secretly, for he has been driven out of

the darkness of your heart."

He had hardly finished speaking when, like a lamp suddenly bursting into flame, the cell was filled with such a terrible smell coming from my clothing that we could hardly bear to stay there.

"See," the old man said, "the Lord has given his approval to what I have been saying. With the eye of faith you can see that the devil who made the Lord's passion necessary has been driven out of your heart by your life-saving confession. Now you can be quite sure that he has been obviously expelled. It is manifestly clear that the enemy will no longer find a resting place in you."

And, as the old man said, the mastery of the devil over me was crushed by the power of my confession, since when the enemy has never attempted to arouse in me a single thought of being greedy.

Chapter 48 (Cassian, Conference 6, chap.1)

Monks killed by Saracens

In the region of Palestine near Tekoa, which rejoices in being the birthplace of the prophet Amos (Amos 1.1), there is a vast desert stretching far and wide as far as Arabia and the Dead Sea, into which the river Jordan flows and is swallowed up. Here also are the ashes of Sodom. For a long time there were some monks of the greatest sanctity living here, until without warning they were murdered by invading Saracens. Their bodies were held in such reverence by the people of that region, as well as by the whole Arab race, that crowds of people gathered together from all sides, quarrelling violently over their remains, piously endeavouring to seize them, disputing as to who was more entitled to bury them and possess them as relics. Some claimed because they lived nearby, others because they were near the place of their birth.

Chapter 49 (Cassian, Conference 4, chap.1)

Abba Daniel

Among the other hermits we also knew Daniel, the equal of everybody in all the virtues, but especially famed for the grace of humility. Because of the purity and gentleness of his life he was chosen for the office of deacon by Paphnutius, a presbyter in the same desert. The blessed Paphnutius rejoiced in Daniel's virtues, and recognising him as his equal in the grace and merit of his life, sought for his ordination as presbyter, making him the same rank as himself. It was because he wanted to have a worthy successor already in existence that he had him ordained as presbyter. But, humble as ever, as long

as Paphnutius was present, Daniel never claimed for himself the privilege of belonging to the higher order, but always acted in his previous role of deacon whenever abba Paphnutius was making the spiritual offering. In the end, however, Paphnutius was frustrated in his hope of choosing a successor, even though he was a great man such that in many things he had the gift of seeing the future. For, not long afterwards, this man who he was hoping would be his successor went to the Lord before him.

Chapter 50 (Cassian, Conference 7, chap.1)

Abba Serenus

We had a greater admiration for abba Serenus than for anyone else. He was a mirror of his own name because of his great sanctity and continence. His virtues shone forth not only in his deeds and his whole way of life, but even, by the grace of God, in his face. More than anything else he had been blessed with a special gift of chastity, in that he was never troubled by natural urges, not even in sleep. That would seem to be beyond the powers of human nature, so I think I must try and explain how he arrived at such bodily purity.

This blessed Serenus, then, begged day and night, by means of prayers, fasts and vigils, for inward chastity of heart and body. He realised that his prayers had been answered when he felt that all the heats of concupiscence in his heart had been extinguished. He felt as if set on fire with this most sweet awareness of purity, and in the zeal of his chastity he burned with an even greater desire. By even more intense fasts and prayers he began to beg that the mortification of his passions which had been given to his inner spirit solely by the grace of God might also be extended as far as the outer man also. By this he desired that he would no longer be troubled by any of the simple and natural movements of the flesh which even children and small infants are subject to. He persevered untiringly in these prayers with copious tears, until an Angel came to him in a vision of the night. It seemed as if the Angel opened his belly, and drew out from his entrails a sort of fiery fleshly tumour and threw it away. He then put all his intestines back as they were before.

"See," said the Angel, "all your fleshly urges have been cut out. You know now that you have obtained this day perpetual purity of body, which is what you have been faithfully asking for."

Let this be a brief but sufficient indication of the special grace of God attributed to this memorable man.

But we also came to see him in Lent and asked him a number of questions.

Especially we wanted to know about the attacks of the demons. With his usual serene expression he replied:

"The demons have no power to harm anybody, as the example of Job manifestly shows, for he cannot tempt anyone more than is allowed him by the dispensation of God" (Job. 2, 1-6).

Chapter 51 (Cassian, Conference 7, chap.23)

The demons do not have the same power against monks nowadays as they did in former times.

It is quite obvious, not only from our own experience but from what the seniors tell us, that the demons nowadays do not have the same power over monks as they used to do in the time of the first anchorites, when there were very few monks dwelling in the desert. Their ferocity in those days was such that it was almost impossible to live in the desert at all. In coenobia of ten or twelve people, therefore, they approached so viciously with attacks that were almost visible, that the monks did not dare to go to sleep all together but took it in turns to stay awake while the others kept vigil with psalms and prayers and readings. When the demands of nature at last bade them sleep, they awoke the others and handed over to them the task of keeping vigil while they themselves retired to bed.

The present state of affairs is undoubtedly due to one of two things: either the power of the cross has permeated the desert and with its shining grace has blunted the devil's weapons, or our own negligence means that they do not have to fight so hard as they formerly did against those most valiant soldiers of Christ.

But we know that even the most saintly men have been handed over into the power of Satan and to great afflictions for even the slightest faults, so that the divine mercy may find no sin or stain in them on the day of judgment. Like gold purified in the fire they will be taken into the perpetual glory without any need for purifying punishment, in accordance with the saying, 'The just man is purified in the furnace of humiliation' (Ecclesiasticus 27.5) and 'Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every child who comes to him' (Proverbs 3.12 & Hebrews 12.6).

And in our own times abba Paul and abba Moyses have provided clear and indisputable proof of this when they lived in that part of the desert called Calamus. Now Paul had been living near the city of Panephysis, in the desert which we know had been created by being flooded with salt water. And

whenever the north wind blew the water was driven from the marshes and poured out over the land next to it, so that it covered the face of the whole region. All the ancient villages had long since been deserted for this very reason, making them look like little islands.

Chapter 52 (Cassian, Conference 7, chap.26)

Abba Paulus

This abba Paulus had arrived at such a degree of purity of heart in the silence of his desert that he could not bear the sight of a woman's clothing, let alone a woman's face. He was on his way to the cell of another senior one day when he happened to meet a woman coming towards him. When he saw her he cut short his journey and fled back to his own monastery faster than he would flee from any lion or dragon.

Now although he acted like this because of his ardent zeal for chastity and purity, it was because he was attached to a rigid discipline; it was not true spiritual knowledge that governed his actions. As a result, his excesses were given a buffeting lest he be overcome with self-conceit, for he was forthwith struck by an illness which left his whole body paralysed. He lost control over every part of his body, not just his arms and legs. He was unable to use his tongue, and his ears lost their ability to hear. Indeed there was no longer anything human about him; he was simply like an immoveable statue. He was reduced to such a state that the men were no longer able to cope with his infirmity, and only the tender care of women would be able to help. So they carried him to a monastery of holy virgins, who not only brought him his food and drink, but ministered to his every natural need. They did this for four years, right up until the end of his life.

And yet, although his members were so affected that there was no lively movement in any of his joints, the grace of God worked so powerfully in him that when other sick people were anointed with oil that had touched his body they were restored to health immediately. And thus it became clear that the debility of his body was all within the providence of the love of God, and the grace of healings had been prepared by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bear witness to his merits and make them manifest.

Chapter 53 (Cassian, Conference 7, chap.27)

Abba Moyses

Moyses was the other man we have mentioned as living in this desert. He was

an exceptional person second to none, and yet he was punished by a very wicked demon for having uttered a casual word of severe criticism against abba Macarius. The demon filled his mouth with human excrement. This purging chastisement was brought upon by divine dispensation, so that no stain of even the most momentary sin might remain in him, as is shown by the speed with which he was cured. For abba Macarius had immediately prostrated himself in prayer, and the evil spirit departed, put to flight by his command.

It must be clearly understood by all these happenings that we should not loathe or despise anyone who we can see are in the power of various temptations and evil spirits. There are two things which we must firmly hold fast to: firstly that nothing at all ever happens without the permission of God, secondly that everything God sends us comes from a loving and merciful doctor, and is intended for our benefit.

Chapter 54 (Cassian, Conference 8, chap.16)

The monk who in the solitude of the night saw
a great crowd of demons

A brother was once on a journey through the desert and at eventide found a cave to shelter in. By the time he had sung the usual psalms it was past midnight. His vigil finished, he was about to rest his weary body when he suddenly sat up again as he saw great crowds of demons flowing in from all sides, bunched up together, some in front of their leader, others behind him. Their leader was of a more imposing presence than them all, and more terrifying in appearance. When he had sat down on a lofty throne, he began to question each one of them in a searching cross-examination. Some confessed that they had not yet been able to prevail over their opponents, and then the leader castigated with fearful fury for the time and effort they had uselessly wasted. He condemned them as utterly worthless and drove them out of his sight. Others claimed that they had deceived the human beings assigned to them, and then he sent on their way as examples to them all, lavishing praise on them as the most brave of warriors, to the rejoicing and pleasure of them all.

One of the wickedest spirits of all came forward to announce exultantly a major triumph, for he mentioned by name a well-known monk whom he had been besieging constantly for the last five years, announcing that this very

night this monk had fallen into the sin of fornication. This report was greeted by an immense shout of joy from all. The leader could not have praised him more highly, so that he departed crowned with the highest of honours.

Dawn came, and the crowd of demons vanished from view. The brother had his doubts about what the unclean spirit had said, mindful of the gospel saying that he is not rooted in truth, that the truth is not in him, and that when he speaks lies he speaks according to his nature (John 8.44). So he went to Pelusium, where he knew that the monk lived whom the evil spirit said that he had deceived. There was another brother there whom he knew, who told him in answer to his queries that on the very night when the evil spirit had reported to his leader, the monk in question had indeed left the monastery early in the evening, gone down to the village and fallen disgracefully into fornication. Sighing and weeping, the brother returned to his own place.

Chapter 55 (Cassian, Conference 8, chap.18)

Two philosophers who visited Antony

Two philosophers who had heard of Antony's fame once came to visit him. After a discussion on several subjects they despised Antony as ignorant and illiterate and returned home. Not content with insulting him thus, they plotted to drive him from his cell by magic charms and demonic assistance. Driven by envy and spite, they set in motion an army of demons, such that every day many people began coming to Antony as to a servant of God. For some he traced the sign of the cross on their breast and forehead, for others he lay prostrate in prayer. Even the strongest demons were unable to come near, and they went back to those who had sent them, having achieved nothing. They sent some more powerful demons against him, who returned exhausted. They sent the most powerful and violent demons possible against the soldier of Christ, but they could not prevail against Antony's strong resistance. None of their wiles succeeded, their magic arts and necromancy were all in vain, and the evidence forced them to concede that there was great power in the Christian profession, since their shadowy demons had not been able to do Antony any harm, nor been able to drive him from his dwelling.

Overawed and astonished, the philosophers came back forthwith to the holy Antony and after confessing to him how their spite and malice had been behind the great battle they had brought against him, they asked to become Christians. Antony asked them the date when they had begun their battle, and

when they told him he said that he had been attacked by the most bitter and stinging thoughts on that day.

We know that this same blessed Antony frequently prayed at such length that he was often taken up into ecstasy. We have heard him saying at sunrise, "Why are you dragging me back, O rising sun, from the brilliance of the one true light!"

De Vitis Patrum Book V

translated into Latin by Pelagius the Deacon

Libellus 1: Rules of the Fathers

V.i.1. When abba Antony was asked, "What rule should I keep in order to please God?" the old man replied, "Follow this rule which I give you. Wherever you go, keep God continually before your eyes and apply the yardstick of Holy Scripture to everything you do. Wherever you happen to be don't try to move on too quickly. Do these three things and you will live."

V.i.2. "What should I do?" Abba Pambo asked abba Antony, The old man replied, "Don't put your trust in your own righteousness, don't go back on any promises, and be temperate in speech and appetite."

V.i.3. Holy Gregory said, "God asks these three things of everyone who tries to live up to his Baptism, an unwavering faith with all his soul and strength, temperate speech and bodily chastity.."

V.i.4. Abba Evagrius said, "Certain of the fathers used to say that a moderate and balanced diet together with charity will readily lead a monk into the way of passionlessness."

V.i.5. And again he said, "A certain monk when told of the death of his father replied to the one who brought him the news, 'Don't be blasphemous. My father has immortal life.'"

V.i.6. Abba Macarius said to abba Zacharias, "Tell me, what is the work of a monk?"

"Do you mean to say that you are asking me, father?" he replied.

"Yes, you, Zacharias, my son. Something compels me to ask you."

"For my part, father, I think that whoever trains himself to submit to necessity

is a true monk."

V.i.7. It was said of abba Theodore (that is, Theodore of Pherme) that he was ruled by three things above all else, poverty, abstinence, and seclusion.

V.i.8. Abba John The Dwarf said, "I would have everyone get a grip on all the virtues. Get up early in the morning every day, and make a start with them all. Patiently keep the commandments of God with fear and generosity and in the love of God, alert in body and mind and with great humility, in patience, in tribulation of heart, with circumspection, with many heartfelt prayers and intercessions, in purity and cleanliness of tongue with custody of the eyes, bearing injuries without anger, seeking peace without returning evil for evil, rejoicing not in other people's sins neither being conceited. Be self-effacing and humble before all other creatures, renouncing material gain, avoiding those who walk according to the flesh, striving always to follow the cross in humility of spirit with a strong will and spiritual discretion, with fasting, patience and tears in times of testing, with balanced judgment, chastity of soul, seeking the good in silence and manual labour, in nightly vigils, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in labour, reckoning yourself to be as one already dead in the sepulchre, so that death may be a present reality to you every day."

V.i.9. Abba Joseph Thebaeus said, "There are three courses of action pleasing in the sight of God. The first is when temptations assail you in your weakness and you overcome them with the help of grace. The second is when you do everything for God and not for any human consideration. The third is when you submit to the counsels of your spiritual father and renounce your own will."

V.i.10. Abba Cassian told a story about a certain abba John, head of his congregation, a great man in his manner of life. When he was on his death bed, ready to depart with joy, his mind fixed firmly on God, his brethren who were standing by asked him to leave them by way of a legacy some wholesome plan by which they might rise up to the perfection of Christ. "I have never followed my own inclinations," he replied with a groan, "nor have I ever enjoined on anyone else anything which I have not first done myself."

V.i.11. A brother asked an old man, "What manner of life is so beneficial that if I walk in it I shall live?"

"God alone knows what is good," the old man said, "but I have heard that when one of the fathers questioned abba Nistero the great, the companion of

abba Antony, he replied, 'Not all works people do are the same. Scripture tells us that Abraham was given to charity, and God was with him; Elijah sought silence and God was with him; David was humbled, and God was with him.' Whatever therefore you perceive in your heart to be a following of God, that do, and preserve your heart in peace."

V.i.12. Abba Pastor said, "There are three operations of the soul, to be watchful, to reflect maturely, and to exercise discretion."

V.i.13. A certain brother asked him, "In what way should a person live?" "Look at Daniel, who could be accused of nothing except the worship which he paid to God." The old man replied.

V.i.14. Again he said, "Poverty, tribulation and discretion, these are the works of the solitary life. These are described as if they were three men, Noah, Job and Daniel. Noah personifies poverty, Job tribulation, and Daniel discernment. If anyone practises these three activities, God takes up his dwelling with him."

V.i.15. Abba Pastor said, "If a man hates two things, he can become free from the world." "What are those two things?" a brother asked. "Vainglory and pandering to the body." was the reply

V.i.16 It is told of abba Pambo that as he was on his deathbed he said to the holy men standing around him, "Since the time that I came into this place of solitude, and built my cell and lived my life, I do not recollect ever having eaten bread that I have not worked for with my own hands, nor am I ashamed of any word which has come forth from my mouth right up to this moment. Yet now as I go to the Lord I have not even begun to serve God."

V.i.17. Abba Sisois said, "If you humble yourself and thrust your desires behind you will be securely free from worldly care and you will find rest."

V.i.18. Abba Chame said to his sons on his deathbed, "Have no dealings with heretics, neither fall foul of the law. Let not your hands be directed to piling up possessions but rather let them be stretched out to give."

V.i.19. A brother asked an old man, "How does the fear of God come to anyone?"

"If you have humility and poverty and don't judge others the fear of God will enter in." the old man said.

V.i.20. An old man said, "May fear, humility, abstemiousness and weeping make their dwelling in you."

V.i.21. Certain old men used to say, "Do not do to others what you yourself find repugnant. If you hate it when people insult you, don't insult anyone yourself. If you hate it when people say things falsely about you don't speak

falsely about others. If you hate being tempted to return calumny for calumny, or suffering injury, or having your possessions stolen, or anything of that sort, do not do such things to others. He who can keep this saying is on the way to salvation."

V.i.22. An old man said, "The life of a monk is labour, obedience, meditation, refraining from condemning and despising others and grumbling. For it is written, 'You who love the Lord flee from evil' (Psalms 96.10). This is the life of a monk, to bear with injustice, to keep his eyes from evil and vain imaginings, not to be forever seeking novelties and hearing strange tales, to keep his hands from stealing but rather open them to give, not to be proud of heart or evil in thought, neither to be gluttonous, but to manage all things with discernment. In these things a monk lives."

V.i.23. An old man said, "Beg God to shed light and humility into your heart, keep your sins always in mind and pass no judgment on others. Be subject to all, but have no familiarity with women, boys or heretics. Root out presumption, keep guard over your tongue and your stomach and abstain from wine. If someone picks a quarrel with you don't argue with him. If he speaks sensibly agree with him, but if maliciously, say, 'Well, I expect you know what you are talking about'. Don't argue with what he says and your mind will then remain in peace."

Libellus 2: Inner stillness

V.ii.1. Abba Antony said, "Just as fish die if kept on dry land so monks are drawn away from their original intentions if they linger outside their cells or spend too much time with worldly people. Therefore just as the fish must needs return to the sea so should we hasten to our cells, lest through lingering abroad we lose our inner watchfulness."

V.ii.2. Again he said, "He who remains quietly in solitude is saved from three areas of conflict, that is, hearing, speech and sight. He only has one area of conflict, the battle in the heart."

V.ii.3. Abba Arsenius while still at the imperial court prayed to God, saying, "Lord, how can I be saved?" And he heard a voice saying, "Arsenius, fly from human beings and you will be on the path of salvation." And after he had departed to follow the monastic life he prayed again in the same words. And he heard a voice saying, "Fuge, tace, quiete, (fly, say nothing, be at peace). From these three things sinlessness will grow."

V.ii.4. Archbishop Theophilus of blessed memory once visited Arsenius in the company of a certain magistrate, and begged the old man for his counsel. He remained silent for a moment.

"If I give you counsel, will you keep to it?" he asked.

And they promised to do so.

"Wherever you hear Arsenius is near at hand go in the opposite direction," the old man said,

On another occasion when the Archbishop wished to see him he sent a message beforehand asking whether he would see him. And he replied, "If you come I will see you, but once I have seen you I would have to go on and see everyone and then I would stay here no longer." When the Archbishop heard this he said, "If I am really serious about following his example I won't intrude upon this holy man."

V.ii.5. Arsenius once paid a visit to a certain place where there was a bed of reeds blown about by the wind.

"What is that rustling noise?" he said to the brothers.

"It is the reeds," they replied.

"Really, if someone sitting quietly heard so much as the song of a bird," the old man said, "he would no longer have quietness in his heart. How much more the sound of these reeds!"

V.ii.6. They say other people ministered to his needs, because his cell was thirty-two miles into the desert and he was never in a hurry to go out. But he did go out weeping when that part of the desert known as Scete was invaded.

"Just as the world has lost Rome, so the monks have lost Scete," he said

V.ii.7. Once when Arsenius was in Canopus a certain very rich but god-fearing matron came from Rome in search of him. She went first to Archbishop Theophilus and asked him if he would use his influence with the old man to allow her to visit him. So Theophilus went to visit Arsenius.

"There is a woman come from Rome who wants to see you," he said. But the old man would not agree that she should visit him. When she was told about this refusal, she ordered her horses to be saddled.

"I believe in God. I shall see him," she said. "There are men enough in Rome, but I have come in order to see a prophet."

And when she arrived near the old man's cell, by the providence of God he happened to be outside it. When she saw him she prostrated herself at his feet. He indignantly made her get up and glared at her.

"Well, if you must see my face, here it is. Stare at it," he said.

But she modestly would not meet his eye. "You've heard of my deeds, haven't you?" the old man said to her. "Well then, you really must look at me. What possessed you to undertake such a long journey? Don't you realise that you are a woman, and you ought not to go wandering about? And won't you go back to Rome and boast to the other women that you have seen Arsenius and thus make the sea into a high road for women to come and see me?"

"If only God will allow me to get back to Rome," she replied, "I won't let anyone else come here. But pray for me and remember me always."

"I pray to God that he will wipe out the memory of you from my heart," he replied.

Greatly upset she went away, and when she got back to the city she became quite ill in her distress. The Archbishop was told that she was ill and came to console her. He asked her what the matter was,

"How I wish that I had never come here!" she replied. "I asked the old man to remember me and he replied, 'I pray to God that he will wipe out the memory of you from my heart,' and now I am just dying from distress."

"Don't you realise that you are a woman," the Archbishop said to her, "and the devil uses women in his attack upon the holy men? That is why the old man said what he did, but he does pray always for your soul." Her mind was soothed, and she went home happy.

V.ii.8. Abba Evagrius said, "Stop hankering after a whole lot of things lest your mind gets into a turmoil and you lose your quiet way of life."

V.ii.9. A brother once went to abba Moses in Scete asking for a word, and the old man said to him, "Go and sit in your cell and your cell will teach you all things."

V.ii.10. Abba Moses said, "The man who avoids other people is like a ripe grape, but the person who mixes a lot with others is like a grape that is sour."

V.ii.11. Abba Nilus said, "Any one who loves quiet is safe from the arrows of the enemy, but the person who mixes with the multitude suffers many wounds."

V.ii.12. Abba Pastor said, "The beginning of evil is to let your mind be distracted." He also said "It is good to take no thought for bodily needs. For when a person is embroiled in a physical battle he is like a man standing next to a deep lake, and the moment an enemy sees him he is easily thrust in. If however he detaches himself from bodily things he is like a man a long way off from the well, so that while the enemy is trying to drag him in, God has time to send him help while he is being violently dragged towards it."

V.ii.13 Abraham the disciple of abba Sisoe once said, "Father, you are getting old. Let us return to the world for a while."

"Alright," Abba Sisoe replied, "if we can go somewhere where there aren't any women."

"And where is the place without any women, except in solitude?" his disciple asked

"So keep me in solitude," the old man said,

V.ii.14. Amma Matrona said, "Many in the desert who seek for popularity will perish. However it is better to mingle with the multitude while at the same time longing for the solitary life than it is to live in solitude and long to be with the multitude."

V.ii.15. An old man said, "A monk ought always to seek after inner stillness, regretting even the physical loss of it."

V.ii.16. The story is told of three students who became monks. One of them chose to bring reconciliation to those engaged in lawsuits, in obedience to the Scripture, 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5.9). The second took to nursing the sick, and the third sought inner stillness in solitude. The first one found that in his efforts to settle quarrels he couldn't always succeed. Totally discouraged he went to see the second one who was nursing the sick and found him similarly depressed and unable to fulfil what he had set out to do. So the two of them agreed to go and see the one in the desert. They told him their troubles and asked him if he had managed any differently from them. He didn't answer for a while, then poured some water into a bowl and told them to look into it while the water was still disturbed. And after a while when the water had become still he asked them to look again. And when they looked they saw their own faces as in a mirror. Then he said to them, "Thus it is with anyone living in the midst of people; there is so much agitation that you can't see your own shortcomings. But when you find inner stillness, especially in solitude then you can see your own sins."

Libellus 3: Compunction

V.iii.1. It was said of abba Arsenius that throughout his life when he sat down to do his weaving he would hold a basin in his lap to catch the tears which flowed freely from his eyes.

V.iii.2. A brother asked abba Ammo for a word.

"Go and model your thinking on those in prison," the old man said, "for they

are wondering where is the judge and when will he come and they weep in expectation of punishment. Likewise the monk should hold himself in distrust and chide himself inwardly saying; 'Woe is me that I must stand before the judgment seat of Christ - for how shall I give an account of my deeds?' If you therefore always think along these lines you will be safe."

V.iii.3. Abba Evagrius said, "When you sit in your cell, retire into yourself and think of the day of your death. You will then realise how the body will decay. Think of its dissolution and mourn. Conceive a repulsion for the vanities of the world. Be self-effacing and take thought as to how you might always remain in this state of quiet, and you will be all right. Think of all those who are in hell. Picture to yourself the state of their souls, their bitter silence, their heart rending groans, their fearful struggles, their grief and longing, their unending tears without relief. Consider also what confusion engulfs the sinners, suffering as they do in the sight of Christ and in the presence of Angels and Archangels, and Powers and all mankind. Think of all their punishments, the eternal fire, the deathless worm, the darkness of Tartarus, and above all, the gnashing of teeth, the fears and the torments.

"Contrast that with the good things laid up for the righteous, confidence before God the Father and Christ his Son, in the presence of the Angels and Archangels and Powers, in the presence of the whole company of the kingdom of heaven, with its gifts of joy and peace.

"Keep the memory of both these alternatives with you, and groan over the judgment pronounced upon sinners. Weep, imagine how they grieve, and fear lest you fall into the same condemnation. But over the good things laid up for you, rejoice, exult, and be glad. Hasten to enjoy them, but keep the other place far from you. Never forget these things whether you are in your cell or elsewhere. Let the image of these things remain ever in your mind, for by this means you will at least rid your mind of evil and harmful thoughts."

V.iii.4. Abba Elias said, "I fear three things, first, the hour of my death, secondly having to stand before God, thirdly the sentence which will be pronounced upon me."

V.iii.5. When holy Theophilus the Archbishop was on his deathbed he cried, "Blessed art thou, Arsenius, for you always kept this hour in your mind."

V.iii.6. Some brothers related how one of them had broken into laughter at the table when they were all eating peaceably together. When abba John noticed this he wept and said, "What do you think this brother has in his mind that he should laugh, when rather he ought to weep because he has disturbed their

brotherly peace?"

V.iii.7. Abba Jacob said, "Just as a lantern brings light into a dark room so does the fear of God as it comes into the heart illuminate it and teach it all virtue and the commandments of God."

V.iii.8. Certain of the fathers asked abba Macarius of Egypt why his body remained so lean whether he ate or whether he fasted.

"If you use a piece of wood over and over again to poke the fire with," the old man replied, "the piece of wood itself gets burnt up in the end. So it is that if anyone keeps on immersing his mind in the fear of God, then the fear of God will burn up his bones."

V.iii.9. Once the old men of Mount Nitria sent to abba Macarius in Scete asking him to visit them and telling him that a large crowd was about to visit him if he did not come to them, for they longed to see him before he departed to the Lord. So he came to the mountain and met a large gathering of all the brothers who asked him to give them a word. He however shed tears and said, "Let us weep, my brothers, let our eyes shed tears before we depart hence, that tears may waste away our flesh." And they all wept and fell on their faces saying, "Father, pray for us."

V.iii.10. As abba Pastor was travelling in Egypt he saw a woman sitting by a gravestone weeping so bitterly that he said, "All the pleasures in the whole world would not be able to outweigh this poor soul's grief. So ought the monk always to let compunction dwell in his heart."

V.iii.11. On another occasion he was travelling with abba Anub in the land of Diolcus and passing by a cemetery they saw a woman beating her breast and weeping. They stood and looked at her before going on a little way where they met someone whom they asked what the woman's trouble was, that she wept so bitterly.

"Her husband, son and brother are all dead," was the reply.

And abba Anub records that abba Pastor said, "I tell you, unless you put to death all the desires of the flesh and learn how to grieve like this woman you will never be a monk. For the whole heart and soul of this woman are in her weeping."

V.iii.12. Abba Pastor said, "There are two tasks in grieving, getting it and keeping it."

V.iii.13. A brother asked him, "What should I do?"

"When Abraham got to the promised land," he said, "he arranged for a burial place for himself, and thus by means of a sepulchre secured the land to his

seed for ever."

Compunction Book V (Self Control begins further down page)

"What does 'sepulchre' mean?" the brother asked.

"A place of weeping and mourning." he said.

V.iii.14. Athanasius of pious memory asked abba Pambo to come down to Alexandria from the desert. And when he arrived he saw a woman of the theatre and wept. Asked by his companions why he wept he said, "Two things move me. First that this woman is lost, and secondly that I myself have not tried to please God half as much as this woman has tried to satisfy the desires of men."

V.iii.15. As abba Silvanus was sitting once with his companions he fell flat on his face into a trance. When he recovered after quite a long time he was weeping. And when his brothers asked him what was the matter he said nothing but continued to weep. After repeated urging he said, "I was caught up to the Judgment Seat and saw a crowd of people wearing the habit going into torment, and many seculars entering the kingdom." And he continued to lament, from then on reluctant to leave his cell. But if necessity forced him to, he covered his face with his hood, saying, "What need to gaze upon this earthly scene in which there is no profit?"

V.iii.16. Syncletica of holy memory said, "There is immense labour and strife for the sinner who turns to God, but afterwards unspeakable joy. If you are trying to light a fire, before you succeed you get smothered in smoke, which irritates and brings tears to the eyes. Just so, it is written that our God is a consuming fire, and it is fitting that the divine fire should be lit in ourselves with tears and hard work."

V.iii.17 Abba Hyperichus said, "The monk labours night and day in watchfulness, praying unceasingly and as he is stirred in his inmost self he brings forth tears which draw down more readily the mercy of God."

V.iii.18. Some brothers who had some secular visitors came to abba Felix to ask him if he would give them a word. The old man however said nothing. But after they had pressed him for some time he said to them, "Do you really want a word?"

"Yes, indeed, father," they replied.

"A word is worth almost nothing." the old man then said. "At one time when the seniors were questioned the brothers acted on the advice given to them,

and thus God acted through what was said. Now, however, since people ask and don't act on what they hear, God withdraws his grace from the seniors. They don't know what to say since their words bring no results."

V.iii.19. It is told of abbas Hor and Theodore that they took a goatskin into their cell and then said to each other, "If God should suddenly visit us what should we do?" And they wept, left the place to itself and returned to their separate cells.

V.iii.20 An old man told how a certain brother wanted to become a monk but was put off by his mother. He persisted in his desire, however, saying, "I want to save my soul." She continued to do all she could to prevent him, but when she realised that she couldn't prevail she agreed. He went away and became a monk but then wasted his time in idleness. It happened that his mother died and shortly afterwards he fell ill with a very serious disease. In his delirium he was snatched up to the Judgment Seat and found that his mother was among those condemned. When she saw him she was astonished.

"What's this, my son?" she said. "Have you also been condemned and sent here? What's happened to what you said about wanting to save your soul?" Put to shame by these words and struck dumb by sorrow he stood there unable to reply to his mother. After this vision, by the merciful dispensation of God he began to get better and recovered from his illness. Realising that this vision could only have been sent by divine intervention he took it to heart and sat down to think about his own salvation, lamenting and repenting of those things in which he had failed because of his former negligence. He concentrated on this so intensely that many begged him to spare himself a little lest he harm himself because of all the tears which beyond measure he was shedding. But he refused to be comforted, saying, "If I didn't take to heart the reproaches of my mother how would I stand up against the accusation to be made against me by Christ and the holy Angels in the Day of Judgement?"

V.iii.21. An old man said, "If it were at all possible for human souls to die of fright at the coming of the Lord after the Resurrection, then the whole world would perish from dread and terror. For what must it be like to see the heavens opened and God appearing in anger and wrath with innumerable hosts of Angels before the whole race of humankind? For this reason we ought to live as those who must give an account of all our deeds before God."

V.iii.22. A brother asked an old man, "Why is it, father that my heart remains hardened and I have no fear of God?"

"I think if you keep on goading your heart you will possess the fear of God,"

the old man said to him.

"What do you mean by 'goadings'?" the brother asked.

"In everything you do," the old man replied, "goad on your heart, saying, 'Remember you must appear before God'. Also say this, 'What need I fear from human judgment?' And I reckon that if you persevere in this, the fear of God will grow."

V.iii.23. An old man saw a certain person acting the fool and said to him, "We have to give an account of our whole life before God, and you play the fool?"

V.iii.24 An old man said, "Just as we carry our shadows with us wherever we go so we ought always to know tears and compunction wherever we are."

V.iii.25. A brother asked an old man, "Father, give me a word."

"When God struck the Egyptians there was not a household escaped mourning," the old man said.

V.iii.26. A brother asked another old man, "What should I do?"

"We ought always to weep," the old man said. "It so happened that a certain old man gave up the ghost but after a while returned to life again. We asked him what he had seen and with tears he replied, 'I heard a voice there lamenting and repeating incessantly, "Woe is me."' We likewise should always weep."

V.iii.27. A brother asked a certain old man why it was that he longed in his heart to be able to weep, for he heard the seniors weeping but tears would not come and that troubled his soul. And the old man said, "It was forty years before the children of Israel entered the promised land. The gift of tears is like the promised land; if you get there you no longer fear the battle. God wills that the soul be troubled so that it might constantly desire to enter into that land."

Libellus 4: Self Control

V.iv.1. Certain brothers from Scete, wishing to visit abba Antony, took ship in order to make that journey. They met on board a certain old man who also was going to visit Antony, although they did not realise this. As they sat in the ship they talked about the sayings of the fathers, the Scriptures, and the way in which they themselves worked, but the old man remained silent through it all. It wasn't until they got to the harbour that they realised that he too was on his way to Antony. When they had arrived abba Antony said, "You've had good company on your journey in this old man." And to the old man, "You've

brought some good brothers with you."

"Good, indeed," said the old man, "except that their dwelling place has no gateway. Anyone who wants to can go into the stable and let loose the ass." He said this because each one of them had been saying whatever first came into his head.

V.iv.2. Abba Daniel said that abba Arsenius used to keep vigil all through the night, and when towards morning he decided as a concession to nature to have some sleep he would say, "Come on then, sleep, you wicked servant", and he would snatch some sleep sitting down before getting up again soon after.

V.iv.3. Abba Arsenius used to say, "If a monk is any sort of a warrior at all one hour's sleep should be sufficient."

V.iv.4. Abba Daniel said of him, "During all the years that he was with us we gave him a small share of the harvest for him to live on during the year, and whenever we went to see him he fed us as well out of that."

V.iv.5. He also said that he kept on topping up the water in which he soaked his palm leaves and changed it only once a year. He used to make mats out of these palms and worked at them up to the sixth hour. Some of the seniors asked him why he didn't change the water, as it stank.

"In the world I used to make use of sweet smelling lotions and herbs," he replied, "so it is fitting that now I endure this stink."

V.iv.6. Again he told how when Arsenius heard that all the different kinds of apple had ripened he asked for some. And he took one tiny taste only of each sort, giving thanks to God.

V.iv.7. It was said of abba Agathon that for three years he kept a stone in his mouth to help him learn how to keep silent.

V.iv.8. Abba Agathon was once going on a journey with some of his disciples when one of them found a small packet of green bracelets on the way and said to the old man, "Father, should I pick these up?"

The old man looked at them and admired them greatly.

"Did you put them there?" he asked.

"No, father," the brother replied.

And the old man said, "What is it makes you want to pick up what you haven't put down?"

V.iv.9. One of the old men once came to abba Achilles and found him spitting blood out of his mouth.

"What's this, father?" he said.

And the old man said, "A certain brother has said something to me which

plunged me into gloom, and I tried very hard not to let it affect me. So I prayed to the Lord that it might be taken away and he has made those words as blood in my mouth which I have spat out, since when I have found peace and forgotten all my grief."

V.iv.10 Abba Achilles once went to visit abba Isaiah in his cell in Scete and when he went in he found Isaiah partaking of some refreshment. (He had put some salt and water into a bowl). When he saw that Isaiah hid the bowl under some palm mats he asked what it was that he had been eating.

"Forgive me, father," he replied. "I was splitting palm leaves and got very hot so I dipped a little bit of (bucella) in salt and put it in my mouth for my throat was all dried up. But I could not swallow it, so I was driven to pour a little water on to the salt to try and help me swallow - but forgive me."

And abba Achilles said, "Come and see the sort of broth Isaiah eats in Scete. If you want real broth, go to Egypt."

V.iv.11 It was said of abba Ammoy that he fell ill and was confined to bed for several years, but never expressed any curiosity about getting up to see what he possessed inside his cell; for because of his illness he had been receiving many gifts. When his disciple John came in and went out he shut his eyes lest he should see what he was doing. What he did know was that he was being faithful to his monastic calling.

V.iv.12. Abba Benjamin, the presbyter in the Cells, said that when he went to a certain old man in Scete, with the intention of giving him a little bottle of oil, the old man said to him, "Look at this little bottle of oil which you brought me three years ago. There it still is in the place where you put it down."

Hearing this we marvelled at his attitude.

V.iv.13. It was said of abba Dioscurus of Namisia that he ate only barley bread and crushed lentils, and that for a year at a time he kept one or other of the following rules, either to visit no one, or to keep absolute silence, or to eat nothing cooked, or to refrain from fruit or olives. And he kept to this whatever he did. Having done one of these things for a year he then switched to another, and kept to that, year after year.

V.iv.14. Abba Evagrius told of an old man who said that he avoided anything that pandered to his senses in order to cut off all occasions of discontent, for he was aware that his discontent increased always in proportion to sensual satisfaction, and stirred him up emotionally and made him unreasonable.

V.iv.15. Epiphanius, the bishop of Cyprus once sent to abba Hilarion saying, "Come, let's meet before we die." And when they met and sat down to eat

there was brought to them a portion of poultry which the bishop picked up and offered to Hilarion.

"Forgive me, father", he said, "but since taking the habit I have never eaten anything killed."

"And since I have taken the habit," Epiphanius replied, "I have never let anyone go to bed still bearing a grudge against me, nor have I slept still holding a grudge against anyone else."

"Forgive me, father," the old man said. "Your deeds are better than mine."

V.iv.16. It was said of abba Elladius that for twenty years in his cell he never lifted up his eyes to look at the ceiling.

V.iv.17. Once when abba Zeno was travelling in Palestine he sat down after work by a cucumber patch to eat his meal. A thought arose in his mind, "Pick a cucumber and eat it. It wouldn't matter much, would it."

To this thought he replied, "Thieves are condemned to torment. Find out first whether you would be able to bear such torment."

So he got up and stood in the sun for five days, becoming thoroughly dehydrated, until he said to himself, "I can't bear this torment." His better judgment then said to him, "If you can't bear torment then you had better not steal in order to eat."

V.iv.18. Abba Theodore said, "Fasting keeps the body under control." But another senior said, "Vigils are more effective."

V.iv.19. Abba John the Dwarf said, "If a king wishes to annex an enemy state he first of all cuts off their water and food supply, until perishing with hunger they submit to him. It's the same with the demands of our stomach. If you accustom yourself to fasting and hunger, the enemy seeking to overcome your soul is weakened."

V.iv.20. He also said, "Once when I was going up on the road to Scete with my palm mats I fell in with a camel driver whose conversation aroused me to furious anger. So I dropped what I was carrying and fled."

V.iv.21. Abba Isaac the presbyter of the Cells once said, "I know of a brother who when reaping in the fields felt like having an ear of wheat. So he asked the owner, 'Would you mind if I had an ear of wheat?' The owner was astonished at hearing this and said, 'You are in charge of the field, father, and you are asking me?' Such was the scrupulous honesty of this noteworthy monk."

V.iv.22. One of the brothers asked abba Isidore, one of the old men of Scete, "How is it that the demons are so afraid of you?"

"Ever since I became a monk," the old man said, "I have never allowed anger to rise as far as my throat."

V.iv.23. He also said, "For the last forty years I have felt the temptations of sin in my heart, but I have never consented either to concupiscence or to anger."

V.iv.24 Abba Cassian had this to say about abba John who lived near abba Esaius for forty years in the farthest depths of the desert: "He had a great atmosphere of charity about him, and I questioned him about his fidelity to charity, saying, 'You've been on your own for so long that you haven't been likely to have suffered injury from anyone, so tell me, how have you managed this?' And he said, 'Since becoming a solitary I have broken my fast only after sunset. Nor have I ever let the sun go down upon my wrath.'"

V.iv.25. He also narrated how abba Serapion had told abba Moses, "When I was young, I lived and ate with Theonas, my abbot, and when leaving the refectory I succumbed to the wiles of the devil and picked up a slice of bread to eat in secrecy without my abbot knowing. After having done this several times I began to be thoroughly addicted to this vice and couldn't give it up, but consulted no one about it except my own conscience, being too embarrassed to discuss it with the old man. However in a dispensation of God's mercy some of the brethren met together with him for spiritual direction and questioned him about private thoughts. The old man said in reply that there was nothing which harmed monks and pleased the devil so much as concealing private thoughts from your spiritual father. He spoke also about self-control. As he was saying all this I suddenly found myself crying, thinking that God must have told him about me, and plucking from out of my sleeve the bread which my bad habits had led me to steal I fell down before him, begging forgiveness for my past sins and prayer for future amendment. And then the old man said, 'Your confession, my son, has of itself freed you from captivity, without any need for me to say anything. By your self-accusation you have put to flight the demon who was able to darken your soul because of your silence, and who up to now had been allowed to dominate you without contradiction or rebuke. Now that you have driven him out into the open there is no longer any room for him in your heart.' He had hardly finished speaking when something happened which bore out what he had said, for a flash of fire came out of my sleeves and the whole house was filled with such a horrible smell that those who were there thought that there must have been a quantity of sulphur being burned. And the old man said, 'See, my son, the Lord has shown by this token that he has confirmed both my words and

your deliverance."

V.iv.26. It was said of abba Macarius that when relaxing in the company of the brothers he made a rule for himself that if wine were offered him he would drink it, but that for every cup of wine he would afterwards go for a whole day without water. But as all the brothers wanted was for him to have some relaxation they did offer him wine, and the old man gladly drank it but afterwards punished himself for it. But a disciple who had found out about this said to the brothers, "For Heaven's sake don't give it to him, for afterwards he compensates for it by punishing himself." When the brothers realised this they stopped offering it to him.

V.iv.27. Abba Macarius the great in Scete said to the brothers, "After Mass in the church, brothers, flee."

"Where can we flee to in this solitude, father?" one of the brothers asked. And he put his finger on his lips, saying, "This is what you must flee from", and going in to his cell he shut the door and stayed by himself.

V.iv.28. Again abba Macarius said, "If you are moved to anger when you decide to rebuke someone, keep your passion within bounds. Don't jeopardise your own salvation in order to save your brother."

V.iv.29. Abba Pastor said, "If Nabuzaradan the captain of the guard had not invaded, the temple of the Lord would not have burnt by fire (2 Kings. 25). In the same way, if bodily indulgence had not invaded your heart, the mind would not have broken down in its fight against the enemy."

V.iv.30. It was said of abba Pastor that when he was bidden to the common meal he wept, but would still go there lest he offended his brothers by disobedience.

V.iv.31. When abba Pastor was told of a certain monk who wouldn't drink wine he replied, "A monk should have nothing to do with wine."

V.iv.32. Again, abba Pastor said, "Just as bees are driven out by smoke so that the sweetness of honey can be removed, so bodily indulgence drives the fear of God out of your heart so that all your good works are brought to naught."

V.iv.33. One of the old men told how the mother of abba Pastor and his brothers wanted to visit them in Egypt and was not allowed. So one day she watched closely and when they went to church she came to meet them. But when they saw her they turned back into their cell and shut the door in her face. She stood at the door shouting and weeping in great grief. Abba Anub heard her and going over to abba Pastor asked, "What shall we do about this old woman, weeping in front of your door?"

Abba Pastor then got up, went to the door and still standing inside listened to her weeping very sadly and said, "Why are you crying, old woman?"

Hearing his voice she cried and shouted all the more, saying, "You are my children. I just want to see you. Why shouldn't I see you? Am I not your mother? Have I not suckled you? Are we not totally of one flesh? It is very moving to hear your voice."

"Do you really want to see us now, in this world?" the old man said to her.

"Well, if I don't see you here, my children," she replied, "shall I see you in the world to come?"

"If you can bear it not to see us here," he replied, "you shall certainly see us in the world to come."

And the mother departed rejoicing, saying, "If I am really going to see you in the world to come, I don't need to see you here."

V.iv.34. It was said of abba Pior that he used to eat while walking about. And when someone asked him why he ate in this way he replied that he wanted to show that food was not as it were something he really needed but rather something superfluous. And to another who questioned him he said that it was so that he shouldn't dwell on the pleasant taste of the food.

V.iv.35. Abba Peter, surnamed Pyonius, who lived in the Cells was said never to drink wine. When he got old, however, they begged him to take just a little. When he wouldn't agree they warmed a little water and offered it to him, and he said, "Believe me, my sons, I will accept this as if it were medicine." And he professed himself to be quite content with warm water.

Self Control (continued) Book V (Sexual Temptation begins further down page)

V.iv.36. Once when there had been a celebration of Mass in abba Antony's mountain, there was a little wine left over which one of the seniors poured into a small cup and took to abba Sisoe, who when he was offered it drank it. A second time he accepted and drank, but on being offered it a third time he refused, saying, "Easy, brother, don't you know where Satan is?"

V.iv.37 A certain brother asked abba Sisoe what he should do because certain of the brothers out of kindness frequently asked him to stay for a meal after church.

"That's burdensome", the old man said.

And his disciple, Abraham, said, "If a brother goes to church on the Saturday

and Sunday and drinks three cups of wine afterwards, would that be too much?"

"That wouldn't be too much, if it weren't for Satan," the old man said.

V.iv.38 Often when abba Sisoe's disciple said to him, "Come on, father, it's time to eat", he would reply, "Are you sure we haven't eaten already, my son?" And when the disciple assured him they hadn't the old man would say, "Well, if we haven't eaten, bring the food and let's eat."

V.iv.39. Abba Sisoe once confidently asserted that for thirty years he had not prayed to God about his sins without saying, 'Lord, Jesus, protect me from my own tongue.'

"And even now," he said, "day after day I fail and transgress because of it."

V.iv.40. Abba Silvanus and his disciple Zacharias once came to a certain monastery where they gave them some refreshment before they went on. And as they travelled on the disciple came upon a pool and desired to drink. But abba Silvanus said to him, "Zacharias, today is a fast day,"

"Haven't we just been eating to day, father?" he replied.

And the old man said, "The food which we have just taken was out of charity. As for us, my son, let us keep to our fast."

V.iv.41 Holy Syncletica said, "The precept which above all we ought to hold fast is to maintain our chastity. Even among worldly people chastity may be kept, but it can be totally unprofitable if they sin in all their other senses, by inordinately leering and laughing indecently."

V.iv.42 Again she said, "Just as strong medicine can drive out bodily poisons, so fasting and prayer can drive out squalid thoughts from the soul."

V.iv.43 Again she said, "Don't be led astray by the delicacies of this world which rich people use, however beneficial they might be in themselves. For they tickle their palates by seasoning their food with all manner of clever spices. But as for you, avoid a superfluity of such delights by means of fasting and disinterest in food. Neither be stuffed full of bread or hanker after wine."

V.iv.44. Abba Sisoe said, "The main point of our pilgrimage is that we should learn to guard our tongue."

V.iv.45. Abba Hyperichius said, "Just as a terrible lion can be put to the test by wild asses, so can a monk by thoughts of self-satisfaction."

V.iv.46. Again he said, "Fasting serves the monk as a bridle against sin. If you put off fasting, you become like a stallion, overcome by sexual desire."

V.iv.47. Again he said, "The monk's body is dried up by fasting, but his soul is drawn upwards from the depths. The fasting of the monk dries up the springs

of desire."

V.iv.48. Again he said, "A chaste monk is honoured on earth, and in heaven is honoured by the Most High with a crown."

V.iv.49 The same man said, "The monk who can't hold his tongue when angry won't be able to restrain his bodily desires either."

V.iv.50 Again he said, "Let not your mouth bring forth evil words any more than a vine might bring forth thorns."

V.iv.51 Again he said, "Eating flesh and drinking wine is no better than devouring the life of your brother by slandering him."

V.iv.52. Again he said, "The serpent whispering to Eve drove her from Paradise. Similarly, if you speak evil of your neighbour you imperil your own soul no less than the soul of anyone who listens to you."

V.iv.53 Once on a feast day in Scete an old man was offered a cup of wine which he thrust away from him, saying, "Take this death-dealing stuff away." When the other people at table saw this they refrained from drinking also.

V.iv.54. On another occasion a small vessel of newly made wine was brought in to be poured into the brothers' cups. And a certain brother coming in saw that they had accepted the wine and ran off into the cellar just as it collapsed on him. Hearing the noise the brothers ran in and found him lying there half dead and began to revile him, saying, "Serves you right for trying to make out you are somebody."

But the Abbot stood up for him, saying, "Leave the brother alone. He's done a good work. And as the Lord lives, this cellar will not be rebuilt during my time so that the world may know that all because of a cup of wine a cellar collapsed in Scete."

V.iv.55 The presbyter of Scete once went to Alexandria to see the bishop. And on his return to Scete the brethren asked him, "How was it in the city?"

"Believe me, brothers," he replied, "I looked on the face of no one but the bishop."

Hearing this they were puzzled and asked, "What about all those crowds of people?"

As a reminder and encouragement to the forgetful, the presbyter replied, "I disciplined my curiosity and refrained from looking at them."

The brothers took the point of this story and renewed the custody of their eyes.

V.iv.56 One old man was once visiting another, who then said to his disciple, "Prepare a little lentil soup."

And he did so.

"And soak a little bread in it for us."

And he soaked it.

And while they went on talking of spiritual matters the food stayed there until the sixth hour of the next day, when the old man once more said to his disciple, "Prepare a little lentil soup, my son."

"I've already done that yesterday," he replied.

Only then did they rise and take some food.

V.iv.57. Another old man visited a certain father who cooked a little lentil soup and then said, "Let us do the work of God first and then eat."

So one of them recited the complete psalter, and the other recited two of the major prophets off by heart. When morning was come the visitor departed, both of them having forgotten completely about the food.

V.iv.58. A certain brother felt hungry one morning but refused to allow himself to eat until the third hour. And when the third hour was come he forced himself to fast until the sixth hour, when he soaked some bread and sat down ready to eat. But then he got up again, saying, "No, I'll wait till the ninth hour."

At the ninth hour as he said the prayers he saw the power of the devil rising up from him like a puff of smoke, and the pangs of his hunger immediately ceased.

V.iv.59. A certain old man fell ill and could eat nothing for quite some time, so that his disciple begged him to be allowed to make something for him to eat.

And he went away to make some rolls out of a little flour (*de farinula lenticulam et zippulas*). There was a vessel hanging there with some honey in it, and also another one containing rancid oil (*raphanaleum*), which was the only one, he could see in the dim light. In mistake the brother put the rancid oil in his mixture instead of the honey. When the old man had tasted it he ate in silence and the disciple urged him to eat some more. He forced himself to do so and the disciple urged him a third time. Unable to manage any more he said, "Truly, I can't, my son."

The disciple kept on urging him, saying, "It's good for you, father. Look I'll eat some with you."

But when he had tasted it and realised what he had done he fell on his face and said, "Woe is me, father. I might have killed you. And because you didn't say anything I might have had a terrible sin on my shoulders."

But the old man said, "Don't worry, my son. If God had wanted me to eat

honey it would have been honey that you put in those little rolls."

V.iv.60 It was told of a certain old man that he once had a hankering after cucumbers. And when he had got one he first of all hung it up where he could see it, to show that he was not the slave of his appetite. So he conquered himself, and did penance for having been overcome by desire in the first place.

V.iv.61. A brother once went to visit his sick sister in her monastery. She was one who was utterly steadfast, and had no desire to see any man, or give occasion to her brother to find himself in the midst of a lot of women for her sake, so she sent him a message, "Go, brother, and pray for me, for by the grace of Christ I shall see you in the kingdom of heaven."

V.iv.62. A monk once met some nuns as he went on a journey, and when he saw them he made a detour out of way. And the Abbess said to him, "If you had been a perfect monk you wouldn't have looked at us so closely as even to notice whether we were women or not."

V.iv.63. Some brothers once went into Alexandria at the invitation of Archbishop Theophilus, who made a speech to his guests about destroying pagan temples. And when they dined with the Archbishop they were served with a dish containing pieces of veal, which they were unwittingly eating until the Archbishop picked up a morsel of the meat and offered it to the old man sitting next to him saying, "Here's a really choice piece of meat for you to eat, father."

But they all replied, "Up to now we thought we were eating olives. But if it really is meat we can't eat it."

And all refused to eat any more.

V.iv.64. A certain brother had some fresh loaves of bread in his cell and invited some of the seniors to eat with him. And when they had each eaten a slice they stopped. The brother, aware of how severe their fasting usually was, began very humbly to urge them for the love of God to eat that day till they were satisfied. And they ate another ten slices. See, then, how true monks, single-minded ascetics, could for the love of God eat more than was their custom.

V.iv.65. An old man was sick of a very serious disease such that he was coughing up blood. And a certain brother brought him some dried fruit and made it into a dish which he offered him, saying, "Try it. It will do you good." The old man looked at him for a long time and said, "To be quite honest I would rather that the Lord would let me remain in this illness for another

thirty years."

And there was no way that the old man in his illness would agree to eat even a little of such food, so that the brother had to take back what he had brought and return to his own cell.

V.iv.66. A brother happened to visit another old man who had been a hermit for a very long time, and found him ill. So he bathed his face and made a tasty dish out of some food which he had brought with him. When the old man saw this he said, "Truly, brother, I had forgotten that human beings could turn to food for consolation." And when offered a cup of wine he wept saying, "I had thought to live out my days without drinking wine."

V.iv.67. An old man decided to go without water for forty days. And when it got to be very hot he rinsed out a water jar, filled it with water and hung it up where he could see it. When his brothers asked why, he replied, "Looking at what I desire and not taking it, I am able to put up with the greatest heat and thus earn a greater reward from the Lord."

V.iv.68. A certain brother going on a journey with his already aged mother came to a river which the old woman couldn't face wading through. So her son wrapped his hands up in his cloak lest he should make any contact with his mother's body and carried her across the river. His mother asked him why he had done that to his hands

"Because a woman's body is like a fire," he replied. "In the very act of touching you I would have found phantasies of other women coming into my mind."

V.iv.69. One of the fathers told how there was a certain brother who having fasted all Holy Week came to the liturgy on the Saturday, but left after receiving communion so that he wouldn't have to eat with his brethren in the church. And afterwards when alone, he ate only a few vegetables sprinkled with salt and no bread.

V.iv.70 Some brothers gathered once in Scete eating dates and one of them who was ill with much fasting coughed up some phlegm which accidentally landed on another brother who was tempted to complain about having been spat upon. But in order to overcome his thoughts he picked up the spittle, put it in his mouth and swallowed it, saying to himself, "Lest you say something to your brother which might upset him, consume this unappetising thing."

Libellus 5: Sexual Temptation

V.v.1. Abbot Antony said, "I reckon that the body is permeated by a natural power of movement, which does not operate except as the mind directs it, and whose significance in the body is only that of a movement which is not governed by outside influences. But there is another power of movement which comes from the body being nourished and aroused by food and drink which heat the blood and excite the body in its actions. Wherefore the Apostle says, 'Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess' (Eph.5.18). And again in the Gospel the Lord commands his disciples, 'But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness' (Luke 21.34). There is yet a third power of movement for those who are struggling to order their lives which comes from the wiles and treachery of the demons. So you need to know that there are three kinds of bodily movement, one natural, one from eating too much, and one from the demons."

V.v.2. Abba Gerontius Petrensis said, "There are many who, being tempted by the thoughts of bodily pleasure, do not allow the body to be affected but who nevertheless sin in their minds. They maintain virginity in their bodies but think thoughts of sex (*secundum animum fornicantur*). It is a good thing, therefore, beloved brethren, to do as it is written, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence'"(Proverbs 4.23).

V.v.3. Abba Cassian told of how abba Moses said, "It is a good thing not to conceal your thoughts but to reveal them to an old man of spirituality and discretion, not merely to someone who is old in years. There are many who trusted and confided simply in someone who was old but who had no experience. Instead of getting consolation they were driven to final despair."

V.v.4. There was a certain brother who was most zealous in ordering his life. And when he was grievously troubled by the demon of sex he went to a certain old man and told him his thoughts. When this expert heard, he was indignant and called the brother a miserable wretch unworthy of the monk's habit to entertain such thoughts. The brother, hearing this, despaired of himself, left his cell and began to go back to the world. But by the mercy of God, abba Apollo met him, and seeing that he was upset and unhappy he asked him, "Brother, why so sad?"

In great confusion of mind he was at first unwilling to answer, but in the face of much questioning by the old man as to what the matter was he at last confessed, saying, "I am bothered by thoughts of sex, and I confessed to that old man and according to him there is no hope of salvation for me, so in despair I'm going back to the world."

When father Apollo heard this he talked and reasoned with him like a wise physician, saying, "Don't be too dumbfounded, or despairing of yourself. Even at my age and state of life I can be greatly troubled by thoughts such as these. Don't collapse in this time of testing; it can be cured not so much by human advice as by the mercy of God. But just for today grant me one request: go back to your cell."

This the brother did. Abba Apollo however hastened to the cell of that old man who had sown despair and standing outside prayed the Lord, "Lord, who allows us to be tempted for our good, turn the battle which this brother has suffered against this old man, that in his old age he may learn from experience what he didn't learn long since, that you must have compassion on those who are troubled by this sort of temptation."

Having completed his prayer he saw an Ethiopian standing by the cell casting arrows against this old man, who, severely wounded, began to stagger about here and there as if drunk with wine. Unable to bear it any longer he rushed out of the cell and began to return to the world by the same road as the young brother had taken. But abba Apollo, knowing what was happening, met him, and running up to him asked, "Where are you going? And what is the reason for the agitated state you are in?"

But he, sensing that the holy man knew all about what was happening, could say nothing for very shame.

"Go back to your cell," said abba Apollo, "and acknowledge your own weakness, recognise it as part of yourself. For either you have been overlooked by the devil up till now, or else despised as being so lacking in virtue as to be unworthy of striving against him. Did I say 'strife'? You weren't even able to put up with his attacks for a single day! But all this happened to you because when that young man was attacked by our common adversary, instead of giving him helpful advice against the devil as you ought, you drove him into despair, forgetful of that wise precept by which we are bidden to save those on a pathway towards death and neglect not to redeem the condemned (Proverbs 14). Nor have you heeded the sayings of our Saviour, 'A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoking flax he shall not quench' (Matthew 12.20). No one can withstand the attacks of the enemy, or quench and contain the fire of rebellious nature, unless the grace of God comes to the aid of our natural infirmity, which in all our prayer we beg God in his mercy to heal in us, and that he may turn away from us the attacks launched against us, for it is of him that we are cast down and again restored

to the way of salvation, it is he who strikes and then heals us with his hands, he humbles and exalts, he kills and makes alive, he leads us down to the depths and raises us up again" (1 Kings 2).

Having said this he prayed, and at once the old man was freed from that battle. And abba Apollo urged him to seek from the Lord a tongue of discretion, so that he might know when the time was right for giving a sermon.

V.v.5. Syrus Alexandrinus, when asked about sexual thoughts replied thus, "If you didn't have thoughts you would be a hopeless case, since those who are freed from thoughts are those who have moved into deeds, that is, those who have sinned in the body are the ones who have not fought against thoughts of sin, or turned them down. The one who sins in the body has gone beyond being troubled by thoughts."

V.v.6. An old man questioned a brother, saying, "Are you in the habit of talking with a woman?"

"No," the brother replied. "In my thoughts are phantasies both old and new, and some memories, which disturb me with images of women."

The old man replied, "Fear not the dead past, but fly from the living present, that is, consenting to and committing sin - and cast your prayer net wider."

V.v.7. Abba Matthois told of a certain brother who came to him and said that a scandalmonger was worse than a fornicator, to which he replied, "That's a difficult one."

The brother asked, "How would you see it, then?"

The old man said, "Scandal-mongering is indeed an evil, but can be quickly cured if the offender does penance and repents, confessing that he has spoken evil. Sexual sin however brings instant death."

V.v.8. Abba Pastor said, "Just as a prince's armour bearer (spatharius) stands before him always in full armour, so ought the soul always to stand ready against the demon of sexual sin."

V.v.9. A brother once came to abba Pastor and said, "What shall I do, father? For I am troubled by sexual temptation. And I went to abba Hybistio who said, 'You ought not to let such things dwell with you any longer.'"

Abba Pastor said, "The deeds of abba Hybistio are lifted up to the Angels in heaven and have taken him out of sight. You and I however are still struggling. But if a monk guards his stomach and his tongue and stays in solitude he will be saved from death."

V.v.10. It was told of Amma Sara that for thirteen years she was severely attacked by the demon of sexual temptation but she never prayed to be

released from this battle; she only kept on saying, "Lord give me strength."

V.v.11. It was also told about her that she was attacked by an even more hostile and threatening demon of sexual temptation filling her head with worldly deceptions. But abating nothing of her fear of God and her profession of chastity she went to pray in her inner chamber and saw the demon of fornication in bodily form, who said to her, "You have conquered me, Sara." But she replied, "Not I but Christ my Lord."

V.v.12. A certain brother goaded by sexual temptation felt that it was like having a burning fire in his heart night and day, but he went on battling, giving no assent or concession to his thoughts, until after many days the thoughts subsided, unable to prevail over the brother's perseverance. And at once it was as if a great light was lit in his heart.

V.v.13. Another brother goaded by sexual thoughts got up in the middle of the night and ran to an old man to confess and receive counsel. Helped and strengthened he returned to his cell. And behold the devil tempted him again, so that again he ran to the old man. This happened several times. The old man by no means discouraged him, but gave him appropriate advice, "Don't give in to the devil, don't relax your mind, but as often as the devil is troublesome, come to me so that he may be rebuked and put to flight, for nothing wearies the devil so much as having his attacks brought out into the open, and nothing rejoices him so much as thoughts being concealed."

Eleven times the brother came to him to reveal his thoughts, and at last he cried, "Mercy on me, father. Give me a word."

And the old man said, "Believe, my son, that God has allowed thoughts which have goaded my own mind to be transferred to you, but don't carry them away with you, cast them down in front of you straight away."

As the old man said this, because of his great humility, the murmur of temptation was stilled in the brother's heart.

V.v.14. Another one, goaded by sexual temptation kept on battling and underwent ever more severe fasts for forty years, guarding his thoughts and refusing consent to them. At last he came in to the church and made known to everybody what he had been going through. And everyone was enjoined to do penance for him for a week, joining together in prayer to the Lord, and behold his temptation ceased.

V.v.15. On the subject of sexual temptation an old man said, "You lazy hermits, do you really want to walk on the path of salvation? Get going, work hard, take pains, seek and you will find, wake up, knock and it will be opened

unto you. Think of the gladiators of this world, who when seen to have stood up bravely against all manner of attacks, receive the crown. See how much strength can be built up by physical exercise. So do you stand, and be strong, and the Lord will fight against the enemy for you."

V.v.16. Another old man spoke thus about these same sexual thoughts, "Be like somebody going along the street or into a shop who can smell cooking or some other such pleasant smell. If he wants to he can stop and eat, but if not, all he gets is the smell before he passes by. So you may leave the smell behind you, rise up and pray, 'Lord. Son of God, help me'. And do this to counteract all sorts of other thoughts. For we don't aim at eradicating thoughts but at fighting against them."

V.v.17. Another old man said, "We suffer these things because of our negligence. If we really trusted that God dwelt within us, we would not allow any other superfluous baggage inside. For the Lord Christ dwelling in us and with us, sees every aspect of our lives. Bearing him with us as we do, and gazing upon him, we ought not to be negligent but become holy as he is holy. Let us stand on this rock and let the enemy dash himself against it in vain. Fear not, and he cannot do you harm. Sing with vigour the psalm, 'They that put their trust in the Lord shall be even as the Mount Sion. He who lives in Jerusalem shall stand fast for ever'" (Psalms.125.1)

V.v.18. A brother questioned an old man, saying, "If a monk falls into sin he is grieved that in his search for perfection he has fallen dangerously short, and has to work hard at the task of renewal. But someone making a beginning after renouncing the world seems to prosper with ease."

And the old man replied, "A monk succumbing to temptation is like someone with a building which has collapsed. If he plans prudently he will rebuild the ruins, gathering together all the useful building materials, possessing already the foundations which have been laid, and stones and sand and other things necessary for building. And so he can quickly begin to get on with the restoration. But someone who has not excavated or laid down footings, and has none of the requisite materials simply launches forth in hope that somehow, some time, all will come to fruition. Similarly, a monk who has succumbed to temptation and turned back to the Lord has a lot of resources to fall back on - meditation on the divine law, psalmody, manual work, prayer, etc. - all these are fundamental. But someone newly converted remains in the lowest rank until he has learnt these things."

V.v.19. A certain brother in the grip of sexual temptation went to a certain

respected old man and said, "Of your charity please pray for me, as I am very troubled by sexual thoughts."

So the old man prayed to the Lord. Later he came again to the old man with the same request, and the old man again prayed to the Lord, saying, "Lord, show me how the devil is working in this brother. And why is it that even though I have already prayed to you he has not found any relief?"

And the Lord showed him what was happening with this brother. For he saw him sitting down, a devil with him, and as it were sporting with him, and an angel sent to help him from the Lord standing nearby, very angry with this brother for not turning to the Lord but really enjoying his own thoughts and giving his whole attention to them. So the old man realised that the cause lay rather at the brother's own door, and told him that it was because he was consenting inwardly to these thoughts. He showed him how to deny entrance to such thoughts, and as the brother began to come to life again through the old man's prayer and teaching, so he began to gain respite from his temptations.

V.v.20. When a certain respected old man saw that his disciple was grievously troubled with sexual thoughts he asked him, "Do you wish that I should ask the Lord to take this burden from you?"

But he replied, "I can see, father, that if I work at it, even though the burden of such work is very heavy, there will be fruition in due course. But pray for me to the Lord to give me strength to bear it."

And the old man said, "Now I know that you are far advanced along the way and have outstripped me."

V.v.21. It was told of a certain old man who had gone into Scete that his disciple had been with him since the time when milk was his only food, and having been brought up in a monastery he had no idea of what women were. But when he grew up, to the old man's astonishment, he described how the devil showed him women's clothing in dreams. For when he went up to Egypt with him for the first time and saw women he said to him, "Father those people are like what I saw in my dreams in Scete."

And the old man said, "These are the monks of the world, my son. They wear a habit rather different from ours, and live in different hermitages."

And as they went back to their cell, the old man marvelled that the demons had showed him images of women in Scete.

V.v.22. A certain brother in Scete was being severely tried by the devil, who kept on putting into his mind memories of a certain beautiful woman, and this

grievously disturbed him. And in the mercy of God it so happened that another brother came down from Egypt and joined him in Scete. In the course of conversation he mentioned that the wife of a certain person was dead, who happened to be that same woman who had been throwing him off balance. Hearing this he put on his cloak that night and went up to the place where he had been told she was buried. He dug down till he was able to take out some of the decaying remains and wrap them in his cloak, which he then kept in his cell after his return. And when it had got really putrid, he would put it in front of him and scold his own thoughts thus, "See the object of your desires - posses it, enjoy it!"

And so by the use of this putrescence he rebuked himself until his craving died.

V.v.23. A certain man once came to Scete to be a monk and brought his newly weaned son with him, who when grown to adolescence began to be attacked and provoked by demons. He said to his father, "I am going back to the world. I can't resist these bodily desires."

His father however tried to calm him down, but the young man said, "I really can't bear it, father. Let me go back to the world."

His father said, "Hear me just this once, my son. Take forty loaves and enough palm leaves for forty days work and go into the inner desert, and stay there for forty days, and let God's will be done." Obedient to his father, he went into the inner desert, staying there at his work of making mats out of the dried palm leaves and eating dry bread. After twenty days without incident there appeared to him a devilish apparition in the shape of an Ethiopian woman sitting in front of him, stinking and foul of face, such that unable to endure it he turned violently away from her. And she said to him, "In the hearts of men I am able to appear beautiful, but because of your obedience and the labour you have persevered in, God has not allowed me to lead you astray, but made me show you how foul I am."

He immediately got up and giving thanks to God ran to his father, and said to him, "I no longer want to go back to the world, father, for I have seen the work of the devil and his foulness."

His father had realised this would happen, and said to him, "If only you had stayed the full forty days as I had said, you would have seen even greater things than these."

V.v.24. A certain old man who lived in a very distant part of the desert had a mother who after many years wanted to see him again and having enquired

where he lived, set out to take the road to the desert. Meeting up with a camel train she joined them and travelled into the desert with them. But she was led astray by the devil, for when she had arrived at the old man's door, she established her identity by certain signs and stayed with him saying, "I am your mother."

Now another monk living in a lower part of the desert who was in the habit of filling a bowl with water at the time for his meal, suddenly found that the bowl was tipped over and the water poured out on the ground. Inspired by God he said to himself, "I will go into the inner desert to tell the seniors about the incident of the spilt water."

So he got up and went on his journey and when it got to be late at night he went to sleep in a temple of idols by the side of the road. In the middle of the night he heard the demons saying, "This night we have led that monk into sexual sin."

He was sad when he heard this and coming to the old man whom he found to be in a similar sad state he said, "What shall I do, father? For I filled my bowl with water but at the hour for my meal it was all poured out."

And the old man said to him, "You are coming to consult me because your bowl of water has tipped over? But what shall I do, for this night I have fallen into sexual sin."

"I know", was the reply.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"I was sleeping in the temple", he said, "and I heard the demons talking about you."

"I think I'd better go back to the world," he said, but the other begged him, saying, "Don't, father. Stay here in your place and send this woman away. This has all happened because of the attacks of the enemy."

At these words the old man took heart, intensifying and developing his way of life until he had returned to his former state.

V.v.25 An old man said, "Silence, hidden meditation, and an untroubled mind give rise to chastity."

V.v.26. A certain brother asked an old man, "If someone succumbs to temptation, what should be done for those who are scandalised by him?"

The old man told him a story: A certain man was appointed to be the deacon in a monastery in Egypt, and to this monastery there came with all his family a certain civil servant suffering judicial banishment. In a very evil deed the deacon lay with this man's wife, and all the brothers were very upset. He

however went to a certain old man and confessed all. This old man had a secret inner chamber and when the deacon saw it he said, "Bury me alive in here and don't tell anyone."

And he went into hiding in this cell and truly did penance. It happened quite some time after that the waters of the Nile did not flood. And when everyone had offered many prayers it was revealed to one of the holy men that the waters would not flood until the deacon hidden with such and such a monk should come forth. They were astonished to hear this and went to drag him out of the place where he was. He offered up prayers, and the waters flooded. So those who had been scandalised by him were in due course edified by his penitence, and they glorified God.

V.v.27. Two brothers went into the town to sell what they had made, and when they had parted from each other in the city, one of them succumbed to sexual temptation. Meeting him later, the other brother said, "Come, let's go back to our cell."

But the other said he wasn't coming.

"Why not, brother?" he asked.

"Because after you left me I was tempted and fell into sexual sin."

But he, wanting to win his brother back, said, "The same thing happened to me. After I left you, I too fell into sexual sin. But let's go and do penance together however difficult that may be, and God will forgive us our sins."

When they got back to their cell they told the old men what had happened and they told them what they must do by way of doing penance, one of them not for himself but for the other brother as if it had been he himself who had sinned. Seeing his labour and his charity, God revealed after a while to one of the old men what this brother who had not sinned had taken upon himself out of the depth of his charity on behalf of the one who had.

"Truly, this is what it means to lay down your life for your brother," he said

V.v.28. A brother once came to one of the old men and said, "My brother has cast me off and dashes off hither and thither so that I am very upset by it."

And the old man advised him thus, "Bear with him calmly, brother, and God seeing your labour and patience will call him back to you. It is not possible for anyone to be easily turned aside by harshness or severity once he has made his mind up, for devils aren't driven out by devils; rather win him back to you by kindness, for God himself calls people by persuasion."

And he told him this story: There were two brothers in the Thebaid and one of them fell into sexual sin, and said to his brother, "I'm going back to the

world."

The other wept and said, "I can't let you go, brother. If you go you lose your purity and the fruits of your labour."

But he wouldn't listen, saying, "I'm not staying, I'm going. Either come with me and I'll go back in your company, or else let me go and I shall stay in the world for good."

The brother went and told all this to a senior of some repute who said to him, "Go with him, and God, because of your labour, will not let him be destroyed."

So he rose up and went with him back to the world. When they had arrived at a town, God looked on the labour of love which he felt compelled to exercise by following his brother, and took away the brother's cravings, so that he said, "Let's go back to the desert, brother. I've already sinned with a woman in my thoughts and what has that benefited me?"

And they returned joyfully to their cell.

V.v.29. A brother tempted by a demon went to a senior and said, "Those two brothers there are both of them evil livers."

The old man knew that he was being deceived by the devil, but sent and called the two brothers to him. After vespers he put out a carpet for those two brothers and enveloped them in a single cloak, saying, "Great and holy are the sons of God."

But to his disciple he said, "Shut that other brother up in his cell by himself. For he himself is a victim of the passions of which he accused the others."

V.v.30 A brother said to one of the old men, "What shall I do, for these unclean thoughts are killing me?"

And the old man said, "A woman when she wants to wean her child puts something bitter-tasting on her breast, so that when the child comes to suck as usual, he tastes the bitterness and rejects it. Therefore put some bitterness in your thoughts."

"What is this bitterness which I have to put there?" the brother asked.

The old man replied, "Think of death and the torments laid up thereafter for sinners."

V.v.31 A certain brother questioned an old man about this kind of thought.

And the old man said, "I'm never bothered by such things."

The brother was shocked by this and ran to another old man telling him what the other had said and how he had been shocked by that because it was abnormal. And the old man said, "That man of God didn't mean to say that

there was nothing to it. Go back to him and apologise in the hope that he will show you the mastery lying beneath his words."

So the brother went back to the old man and apologised, saying, "Forgive me, father. It was stupid of me to rush off without so much as a farewell word, but I pray you, explain to me how it is that you are never worried by sexual temptation."

And the old man said, "Since the time I became a monk I have never fully appeased my desire for bread, water, sleep or any of those things which give pleasure. I have crucified myself, never allowing myself to feel sexual urgings."

And the brother departed, greatly edified by what the old man had said.

V.v.32 A certain brother asked one of the old men, "What shall I do? For my thoughts constantly turn towards sex and don't leave me alone for one hour at a time, and my mind is in a turmoil because of it."

And he replied, "When the demons scatter these thoughts into your mind and you become aware of it, don't hold a conversation with them. The natural task of the demon is to suggest them, and however much he keeps on sending them in, the demons themselves will not be driven out. It rests with you as to whether you accept or reject them."

"But how shall I do this?" the brother asked. "For in my weakness my passions overcome me."

"Listen to this example", he said. "You know what the Midianites did? They dressed up their daughters and made them attractive in the eyes of the Israelites, and did not prevent anyone from coming to them and lying with them. Whoever wanted to went in to them but others angrily condemned them, and killed those who had rashly gone in to them (Numbers 25). Do likewise against sexual thoughts. At the first sign of any suggestion from them in your thoughts, don't answer, but get up, pray, and do penance with the words, 'Son of God have mercy on me'."

"But I do try to direct my mind like that, father," said the brother, "though there is no compunction in my heart, and there seems to be no power in my words."

"Keep up with those mental exercises," the old man said, "for I have heard that abba Pastor used to say, and several other fathers too, that even though the snake-charmer may not fully understand the force of the words he uses, the snake who hears them recognises their power and is subdued and humiliated thereby. Similarly for us, though we may not fully understand the force of the

words we use, the demons hear them and depart in terror."

V.v.33. An old man said, "Thoughts of sexual temptation are really as fragile as a sheet of paper. If it is pushed towards us and we don't want it, it is easily crumpled up and thrown away. Therefore we do need discernment in our minds, recognising that there is no hope of safety for those who consent to such thoughts, but that a crown of glory is laid up for those who resist."

V.v.34 Two brothers attacked by sexual temptation left and took wives. After a while they said to each other, "How much good has it done us, leaving the sort of life the angels live for this tarnished existence - and then the fire of everlasting torment? Let's go back to the desert and do penance for what we have done."

When they got to the desert they asked the fathers to receive them as penitents, confessing their sins. And the fathers shut them up for a whole year, allotting each the same weight of bread and quantity of water, as they appeared to be of similar constitution. When they had completed their time of penance they came out. The fathers saw that one of them was pallid and sad, the other robust and cheerful, and they wondered why, seeing that their rations had been exactly the same. And they asked the sad and sorry one what sort of mental discipline he had used in the cell. He replied, "I turned over in my mind the evil I had done and the punishment of the world to come, and for very fear my bones stuck to my flesh" (Psalms 102.5)

Then they asked the other one about his thoughts in the cell and he replied, "I gave thanks to God who had saved me from the iniquity of this world and the punishment of the world to come, and I rejoiced in a continuous remembrance of God."

And the old men said, "Both kinds of penitence are equal in the sight of God."

V.v.35. An old man living in Scete fell ill and his brothers looked after him. And when the old man saw how much hard work it entailed he said, "I'll go down into Egypt lest my brothers are worn out."

But abba Moses said to him, "Don't go, lest you fall into sexual sin."

"You can say that to me," he replied, "and my body more than half dead?" And he got up and went into Egypt. When people living nearby heard of his arrival they gave him a great deal of help, among whom was a certain faithful virgin (virgo fidelis) offering her services to the sick old man. After a little while when he was getting better from the illness he had, he lay with her and she conceived. When questioned by her neighbours about who had got her pregnant, she told them it was the old man, but they wouldn't believe her. But

the old man confessed that it was he, and begged them that they would care for the baby she was carrying.

Sexual Temptation (continued) Book V

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In due course she gave birth to a boy and when it was weaned the old man put it on his shoulders and travelled to Scete on a day when there was a feast, entering into the church where there was a great gathering of the brothers.

When they saw him they wept, and he said to them, "You see this child? He is the son of my disobedience. Take heed to yourselves, then brothers, for even at an advanced age I was capable of this - and pray for me." And going back to his cell he began again as if at the very beginning of his ascetical life.

V.v.36. A certain brother was grievously tempted by demons in the shape of beautiful women enticing him to intercourse. For forty days he persevered vigorously in battle against them, with hardly any defeat and that much against his will. When God saw the strength of his struggle he granted him the gift of being able to suffer these temptations without any sexual arousal whatsoever.

V.v.37. There was a certain solitary living in lower Egypt, very well known because he was the only one in the church in that desert place. Inspired by the devil a certain woman of loose morals said to some of her young friends, "What will you give me if I can seduce that solitary of yours?"

And they agreed on a price. That evening she wandered up to his cell as if she were lost and knocked on his door. When he came out he saw that she appeared to be very distressed and asked her how she had got there. Putting on a few tears she said she had got lost. Moved by compassion he let her come into the porch of his cell while he himself went inside and shut the door. But she went on crying miserably, saying, "Abba, the wild beasts will get me here."

He again was distressed by this, but yet feared the judgment of God. However, muttering "Why should this happen to me?" he opened the door and let her in. But then the devil began to stir up desire for her in his heart as if with sharp arrows, and realising that this was of the devil he lit a lamp, saying, "'The way of the ungodly is in darkness, but the child of God walks in the light'" (Psalm 35.6).

Inflamed with desire he said, "'They who do such things are destined for

torment' (Gal.5.21). Test yourself, then, whether you are capable of bearing the fire which is eternal."

And he thrust a finger into the flame, burning it, though he felt no pain such was the heat of his sexual fire. And he kept on doing this till morning, burning all his fingers. When the unhappy woman saw what he was doing she was overcome with fear and fell in a dead faint. In the morning her friends arrived and asked whether a woman hadn't visited him the night before.

"She did", he said. "Look at her asleep there."

And going in they found her to be dead. "She's dead, abba", they cried.

He shook back the cloak which he wore and stretched out his hands to them saying, "See what this devil's daughter has done to me. She's made me lose all my fingers."

And after telling them what had happened he went on to say, "It is written that you shouldn't return evil for evil" (1 Thess 5.15), so he prayed and raised her up. Completely converted, she lived the rest of her life in chastity.

V.v.38. There was a certain brother troubled with sexual thoughts who happened to see the daughter of a pagan priest as he was going into an Egyptian village. He fell in love with her and asked her father to give her to him for a wife. "I can't do that," he replied, "without asking my god." So he went to the demon whose cult he served and said, "Look, this monk has come to me, wanting to have my daughter. Shall I give her to him?"

The demon answered, "Ask him if he will renounce God and his Baptism and his monastic way of life." Going back to the monk he said, "Deny your God and your Baptism, and your monastic way of life, and I will give you my daughter," to which he agreed.

And immediately the priest saw a dove come out of his mouth and fly up to heaven. He went back to the demon and said, "See now, he's promised those three things"

But the devil replied, "You still can't give him your daughter because God has not abandoned him. He helps him still."

The priest went back to the monk and said, "I still can't give her to you for your God still helps you and has not departed from you."

When the brother heard this he said to himself, "If God has shown me such grace, when I have ungratefully denied him and my Baptism and my monastic way of life, if he in his goodness has even now come to my help in my wickedness, why am I departing from him?"

And he turned himself around and came to his senses, and went back to the

desert to a certain respected old man to whom he confessed all. And the old man said, "Sit with me in the cave and fast with me for three weeks and I will pray to God for you."

And the old man agonised for his brother and prayed God, saying, "O Lord, I pray you, grant me this soul, and accept his penance."

And God heard his prayer. At the end of the first week the old man went to the brother and asked him whether he had seen anything, and the brother replied that he had seen a dove hovering high up in the heavens above his head. And the old man said, "Don't relax, keep on praying earnestly to God."

At the end of the second week, the old man came to him again and asked him if he had seen anything, and the brother replied that he had seen the dove coming down towards his head.

The old man replied, "Keep your mind alert and pray."

At the end of the third week the old man came to him again and asked whether he had seen anything more. He replied, "I saw the dove come and stand right over my head, and as I reached out my hand to take it, it flew right into my mouth."

And the old man gave thanks to God, saying, "See, the Lord has accepted your penitence. Now you must watch over yourself and be vigilant."

The brother replied, "I shall stay with you till I die."

V.v.39. One of the old men of the Thebaid told of the son of a pagan priest, who as a little boy often sat in the temple watching his father go in to sacrifice to the idols. Once he went in by himself and saw Satan seated there, with all his army standing around, when in came one of his officers who fell down and worshipped him. "From whence have you come?" Satan asked. "I have been in such a province," he replied, "and have come to report that I have stirred up wars and disturbances with much shedding of blood." "How long did this take you?" the devil asked. "Thirty days" was the reply. And the devil ordered him to be flogged, saying, "All that time, just to do that." Then another one came and worshipped him. "From whence have you come?" he asked. "I have been at sea," he replied, "and have come to report that I have caused storms and shipwrecks with much loss of life." "How long did this take you?" the devil asked. "Twenty days" was the reply. And the devil ordered him to be likewise flogged, saying, "So many days - and this is all you have done?" A third came and worshipped him. "From whence have you come?" the devil asked. "I was in such a city," he replied, "and I have come to report that I stirred up strife at a wedding, occasioning much bloodshed and even the death

of the bridegroom himself." "How many days did this take you?" he asked. "Ten", was the reply. He too was ordered to be flogged because it had taken him such a long time. Another came and worshipped him. "From whence have you come?" the devil asked. "I have been in the desert," was the reply, "and for forty years I have been battling with a certain monk until this very night, when I persuaded him to fall into sexual sin." When the devil heard this he got up and embraced him, took his own crown from off his head and put it on the other's head, and made him sit down with him on the throne, saying, "You have valiantly accomplished a great work." When I heard and saw all this I said to myself; "Great indeed is the order of monks."

V.v. 40. It was told of a certain father that he had been converted after living for some time in the world, and was frequently assailed by desire for his wife, which he confessed to the seniors. They saw that he was a willing workman who would perform even more than he was asked, and gave him a certain regime to keep to whereby his body would be weakened to prevent its rebellion. By the mercy of God, however, a certain father came down to live in Scete, and approached this monk's cell, noticing that the door was open, and passed by wondering why no one had come out to meet him. He turned back, thinking that perhaps the brother inside was ill, knocked on the door, went in and found the brother very weak indeed. "What's the matter, father?" he asked. So he told him the story, "I have lived a life in the world, and the enemy troubles me greatly with memories of my wife. When I told the seniors about this they prescribed various ascetic regimes for me to carry out. But when I obediently tried to fulfil them I fell ill, but even so my desires increased." When the old man heard this he was sad, and said, "I'm sure these important fathers who gave you these penances from which you fell ill had the best of intentions, but just listen to me for a bit, and abandon those practices. Take a little food in due season and regain your strength, do a little of the work of God, and cast all your thoughts on the Lord, for you won't be able to win simply by means of your own labours. Our bodies are like clothing. If you treat them properly they will wear well, if you neglect them, they go rotten." He listened and followed his advice, and within a few days the sexual urge grew less.

V.v.41. Some well-known monks told us about a certain solitary monk of old time, well advanced in his way of life, living in the mountains near Antinoe. Many people profited from his words and his deeds, so that the devil became envious of him, as he does of all men of virtue, and he began to put certain

thoughts into his mind:

"Living in the way you do, you ought not to be served by others, still less to expect to be served. Rather, you should be serving others. Or if you don't serve others, at least you should be your own servant. So take your own baskets to market that you have made, and buy what you need, and come back home again, and don't be a burden to anybody."

The devil suggested all this to him in envy of his silence, and his fruitful waiting on the Lord, which was of benefit to so many people. He hoped by this to hunt him down and capture him. But the monk saw only that there was something good about these thoughts, and he went out from his monastery. At the time of his departure he was the admiration of all, never known to have any temptations of an insidious nature, well known and easily recognised by all who saw him. But he met up with a woman and it was such a long time since he had seen one that he fell victim to his own recklessness and had intercourse with her.

And he went back to the desert with the devil dogging his footsteps and sat down beside the river. He thought of how the devil must be rejoicing over his fall, and he fell into despair because of the grief he had caused to the Spirit of God, and the holy Angels, and the venerable fathers, many of whom had conquered the devil even though they lived in cities. He could not think of any of them who were like him, and so the thought never occurred to him that God attributes virtue to those who devoutly turn to him. In his state of blindness he could not see the cure for his sin and felt like throwing himself into the river, which would, of course, have completed the devil's joy. This spiritual grief left him feeling physically ill, and if the mercy of God had not come to his aid he certainly would have remained in that state without doing penance, to the enemy's great joy.

In the end, however, he came to his senses and thought of how he might burden himself with severe penances, and seek pardon from God with weeping and mourning. He returned to his monastery, and blocked up the door of his cell in the way that is usually done for the dead. There he wept in prayer to God. He fasted and kept vigil, so that his body wasted away with worry, but he could find no relief to his soul no matter how much penance he did.

Whenever the brothers who ministered to him came and knocked on his door, he replied that he could not open up because he had bound himself with an oath to spend a whole year in penance, and he begged them to pray for him. He was unable to give them the reason for this, lest they be scandalised at

hearing such things from someone who was honoured among them as an outstanding monk. And so he spent the whole year fasting severely, and devoutly doing penance.

On the night of the Resurrection of our Lord he took a new piece of candlewick and put it in a new holder. He shielded it from view by putting a dark cover round it, and late at night rose up to pray:

"O most merciful and compassionate Lord," he said, "who wish to save even the barbarians and bring them to a knowledge of the truth, I fly to you as the Saviour of the faithful. Have mercy on me who have grievously offended you and given joy to the enemy. By obeying him I am dead. But you, O Lord, who have mercy on the ungodly and the merciless, and who forgive in advance those who come to you, have pity on me your humble servant. For nothing is impossible with you, otherwise my soul would have been scattered into hell like dust. Have mercy on your servant, in accordance as you will raise the bodies of the dead on the day of resurrection. Hear me, O Lord, for my spirit faints and my soul is in misery. My body which I have defiled is wasting away. I am no longer worthy of living, because of my lack of faith. By my penitence forgive my sin, a twofold sin because I despaired. Bring life to me in my contrition, and as a sign, set fire to this lamp. I accept your faithful mercy and forgiveness, and I shall keep your commandments for the rest of the life left to me, and I shall not cease from fearing you, but devote myself to you ever more deeply than before."

And having said all that with many tears in this night of the resurrection, he went to see whether the lamp had been lit. He removed the cover and found that it had not been lit. He fell on his face once more, beseeching the Lord: "I know, O Lord, that I have not stayed upright in the contest for the crown, choosing rather the delights of the flesh and selling myself to the torments of the ungodly. Spare me, O Lord. See, I acknowledge once more my betrayal of your goodness in the presence of your Angels and the company of the righteous, and I would confess it before the whole human race if it were not that they would be scandalised. Lord have mercy on me that others may be edified; Lord bring me life."

And having prayed thus three times, he was heard, for as he got up he found the lamp was burning brightly. He rejoiced in the hope which now filled his heart with joy, wondering at God's grace, who had thus forgiven his sins, answered his prayers and given peace to his soul.

"Thanks be to you, O Lord, " he prayed, "who have had mercy even on my

unworthy existence in this world. You have given me this great new sign of your faithfulness. You are merciful and spare the souls that you have created." As he prayed thus, the day dawned. And he carried on praising God, quite forgetful of earthly nourishment. And he tended that light for the rest of his life, pouring in more oil than was strictly necessary, to ensure that the light would not go out. And the divine Spirit dwelt in him once more, and he was famed among all for the humility he had shown in his confession and joyful thanksgiving to God. And a few days before his death, the Lord revealed to him the time when he would pass away.

Libellus 6: A monk should not possess anything

V.vi.1. A certain brother renounced the world and gave his possessions to the poor, but kept a few things for himself before going to abba Antony. When the old man realised this he said to him, "If you want to be a monk go down to the village, buy some pieces of meat, fasten them to your bare body and then come here." As soon as he had done this the dogs and birds tore at his flesh. He came back to the old man who asked him if he had done what he said. When he showed him his lacerated body, St Antony said, "Anyone renouncing the world and yet wanting to hang on to his money will be thus tormented and lacerated by demons."

V.vi.2. Abba Daniel told how a certain legal official once came to abba Arsenius with his father's will. He had been a senator and left him a large sum of money. Arsenius took the document and made as if to tear it up, but the officer fell at his feet and implored him, "Please don't. It would be more than my life is worth." And abba Arsenius said to him, "I died to the world long before him. How then at his death can he make me his heir?" And he gave the will back to him, accepting nothing,

V.vi.3. This same memorable abba Arsenius once fell ill in Scete and lacked the money for a herbal remedy which he needed. But when he found someone who had some he accepted it as a gift and said, "I thank you, Lord, that you have found me worthy to have arrived at such a pass that I need to beg for alms."

V.vi.4. The story is told of abba Agathon that he spent a long time making a cell for himself and his disciples. Once they had built it and begun to live in it he found within a week that it was ill-suited for their purposes. So as the Lord said to the apostles he said to his disciples, "Arise, let us go hence." This

greatly upset his disciples, who complained, "If your mind is completely made up to leave this place what was the point of spending all that time and labour building this cell? People will begin to talk about us, saying, 'Look, they're off again. They can't settle anywhere.'" When he saw how small-minded they had become, he said, "Even though some might be scandalised yet there are others who might find it edifying and say, 'Blessed are those who for the Lord's sake move on, despising their all that they leave behind'. I tell you, if you want to come, come. Meanwhile, I'm going." They fell down on the ground before him, begging to be allowed to go with him.

V.vi.5. Abba Evagrius told the story of a certain brother who possessed nothing except a copy of the Gospels, and he even sold that to provide food for the poor. "I have sold", he said, "that very word which bade us sell everything and give to the poor."

V.vi.6. Abba Theodore of Pherme possessed three very fine manuscripts (codices), and in the course of a visit to abba Macarius he mentioned these three manuscripts and how much he profited from reading them. Not only that but other brothers asked to read them and they profited also. "Tell me", he said, "what should I do about it?" And the old man replied, "What you are doing is good, but it is better still to possess nothing, "Hearing this he went away and sold these notable manuscripts and gave the proceeds to the poor.

V.vi.7. One of the fathers told the story of John Persa, who among his many virtues had arrived at a state of deep simplicity and innocence. He lived in the part of Arabia near Egypt. Once he borrowed a shilling (solidus) from a brother in order to buy linen and make it up. And another brother came to him and asked, "Give me some linen, father, so that I can make some clothing for my own use." And he cheerfully gave it. Likewise another brother came and asked him to give him some linen to make a cloak, and he gave it. And to a number of others asking the same he also gave with simplicity and joy. Some time later the person from whom he had borrowed the shilling came asking to be reimbursed. And the old man said, "Yes, I'll bring it to you." And seeing that he didn't have the wherewithal to pay he decided to go to abba Jacob the treasurer and ask him to provide the shilling.

On the way there he found a shilling lying on the ground, but didn't touch it; instead he said some prayers and returned to his own cell. And the brother came again and began to press him for the shilling. Again he said, "Yes, I will pay you." He went off again and found the shilling still in the same place on the ground, but he just said his prayers and returned home. And when the

brother began once more to press him he said, "Bear with me once more and I will bring you your shilling." He got up and went back to the same place where he found the shilling and having made his prayer he picked it up and took it to abba Jacob and said, "Father, as I was coming to see you I found this shilling in the way. Pray be so kind as to announce it lest someone here has lost it." So he announced it but there was no one found who had lost it. Then indeed he said to abba Jacob, "Well if no one has lost it I will give it to the brother to whom I owe a shilling. I was coming to you to ask you for a shilling to pay my debts when I found this shilling in the way." And abba Jacob marvelled that even when in debt he had not taken for himself what he had found. And so the brother had his shilling back. This was another marvellous thing about him, that if anyone came to borrow anything from him he wouldn't get it ready for them himself, but would simply say to the borrower, "Just help yourself to what you need." When they brought back what they had borrowed he would say to them, "Just put it back where you got it from." If however they never brought back what they had borrowed the old man said nothing at all.

V.vi.8. Some of the fathers described how a brother had once entered the circle of cells around abba Isaac wearing ordinary dress. The old man looked at him and said, "This is a dwelling place for monks. You are a secular and can't come in here."

V.vi.9. Moreover, abba Isaac said to the brothers, "Abba Pambo and other fathers used to wear old garments with many patches, but nowadays you wear costly garments. You might as well go, for you have already departed from the spirit of this place." And once when they had got ready for harvesting he said to them, "I won't give you any instructions for if I do, you won't observe them."

V.vi.10. Abba Cassian said, "There was a certain Syncleticus who renounced the world and divided his possessions among the poor but kept back a certain amount for his own use, being unwilling to accept the humiliation of giving up everything and submitting to the rule of the common life among monks. Basil of holy memory said this to him, 'You may have given up being a senator, you haven't yet become a monk'."

V.vi. 11. A certain brother said to abba Pisteramon, "What shall I do, for I hate having to sell the things that I have made?" And he replied, "Abba Sisoe and others all sold the fruits of their labours and it didn't worry them. But when you are selling, first of all state your price for what you are displaying, but if

you want to relax the price a little, do so, and don't worry about it." Again the brother asked him, "If my needs are provided for in other ways do you think that I needn't bother with manual work?" The old man replied, "However much you possess, never neglect your work, do whatever you can, but without any mental agitation."

V.vi.12. A brother asked abba Serapion for a word, and the old man said, "What I have to say to you is that you have stolen what belongs to the widows and orphans and put it in your window." For he had noticed that the window was full of books.

A monk should not possess anything (continued)Book V

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V.vi.13. Syncletica of blessed memory was asked whether owning nothing was the highest perfection. She replied, "It is indeed a very good thing for those who can. For if you are able to put up with it, you may experience bodily discomfort but you will have peace of mind. Just as clothing of good quality is laundered and restored to whiteness by being trampled on and turned over and over again underfoot, so is a strong person made stronger by voluntary poverty."

V.vi.14 Abba Hyperichus said, "Voluntary poverty is the treasure of the monk. Lay up treasure for yourself in heaven then, brother, for therein is peace, world without end."

V.vi.15. There was a holy man named Philagrius who lived in Jerusalem and worked busily to provide himself with bread. While he was standing in the market place selling his wares it so happened that someone dropped a bag containing a thousand shillings. The old man found it but stayed where he was, saying to himself that the person who lost it must soon come back, which indeed he did in great distress. He stopped him and gave him back his bag, whereupon the owner begged him to accept a reward, which the old man would in no wise do. This made the owner cry out, saying, "Come and see what this man of God has done." But the old man fled from view and left the town, lest he should be recognised and honoured for what he had done.

V.vi.16. When an old man was asked by a brother what he should do to be on the path of salvation, he took off his habit, ungirded his loins and stretched out his hands, saying, "In like manner a monk should strip himself of all worldly

property and nail all temptation and worldly cares to the cross."

V.vi.17. Someone once asked a certain old man to accept some money for his future needs, but he refused since the work of his hands supplied all his needs. On being pressed repeatedly that at least he might accept something in order to give to the poor, he replied, "There are two reasons why I can't agree. Firstly I would be taking something I did not need, and secondly if I were to give it away it would only make me conceited."

V.vi.18. Some Greeks once came to the city of Ostracines wanting to give alms. So they approached the church treasurers to find out who was most in need. They were taken first to a certain leper to whom they offered an alms. But he refused, saying, "I have a few palms with which I weave mats which suffice to provide me with bread." They were taken then to the dwelling of a widow where she lived with her little daughters. When they knocked on the door it was answered by one of the daughters completely naked. Her mother had gone off to her work as a laundrymaid. They offered the daughter some clothing and money but she would not accept it, saying that her mother had come to her and said that, "Have faith. God willing I will find some work today to keep us going." And when the mother arrived they asked her whether she would accept something, and she refused, saying, "I have the Lord for my helper, and would you take him away from me today?" And they, seeing her faith, glorified God.

V.vi.19. An affluent stranger once came to the presbyter in the Scythian desert bringing some money which he asked to be distributed among the brothers. The presbyter said, "They don't have any need of it." He vigorously insisted, but the presbyter still refused, so he put the gold into a wicker basket by the church door, saying, "Anyone who needs some can take it." But nobody touched it, some didn't even notice it. And the old man said, "The Lord accepts your offering. Go and give it to the poor." And he departed, greatly edified.

V.vi.20. A certain man brought some money to an old man, saying, "Take this to defray the expenses of your old age and your illness", for he was a leper. But he replied, "You come here after sixty years to deprive me of my mainstay? Look, during the whole time that I have been ill I have lacked nothing, for the Lord has cared for me and fed me." And he would not accept the gift.

V.vi.21. The old men told of a certain gardener who gave away all the profit from his labours in alms, keeping back for himself only sufficient for his own

needs. Then the devil whispered in his heart saying, "Set some money by for your needs when you get old or when you fall ill." So he began to save, and filled up a large jar with coins. Now it so happened that he fell ill, and his foot became badly infected, so he spent the money he had collected on doctors, but nothing did him any good. Finally there came a specialist doctor who said to him, "Unless I lance your foot it will go completely rotten." And they agreed on a time for his foot to be lanced. Returning home that night, however, he was sorry for what he had done, exclaiming with tears and groaning, "Be mindful, O Lord, of what I used to do when I laboured in my garden and ministered to the poor." As he said this, an angel of the Lord appeared and said to him, "Where is the money you saved? And where is the hope in which you used to live?" Coming to his senses, he cried, "I have sinned, O Lord, forgive me. I will no longer carry on in this way." The angel then touched his foot and he was instantaneously healed, and getting up in the morning he went out in the fields to work. Presently the doctor arrived with his instruments, as agreed, and he was told that his patient had been working in the field all morning. In astonishment the doctor ran out to the field where he was working and when he saw him digging he glorified God who had given him back his health.

V.vi.22. A brother asked a certain old man whether he could be allowed to put by a few shillings in case of illness. The old man could see that his heart was set on it and said, "Alright." The brother went back to his cell and began to commune with himself, saying, "Do you think the old man was telling me the truth or not?" He got up and went back to the old man in penitence and said, "For the Lord's sake tell me the truth, for my thoughts give me no peace over these few shillings." And the old man said, "When I saw that you really wanted to keep them, I told you to keep them, although really it is not a good thing to keep more than is sufficient for your immediate bodily needs. If you had kept those few shillings that would be where your hope rested. And once they had gone why should you expect God to care for you? Therefore let us cast all our care upon the Lord for he cares for us" (1 Peter 5.7).

Libellus 7: Patience and Fortitude

V.vii.1 Once when holy abba Antony was sitting in his cell, afflicted with weariness and confusion of thought, he complained to the Lord, "Lord I crave for peace and my thoughts won't allow it. What can I do in this confusion in order to gain peace?" And getting up he began to go outside, when he saw

someone who looked like himself sitting and working, then getting up from his work to pray, then sitting again weaving mats from palm leaves, and once again rising to pray. This was really an angel of the Lord sent to rebuke and chasten Antony. And he heard the voice of the angel saying to him, "This do and you will find peace." He took great comfort and steadfastness from this, and as he persevered, he found the peace which he sought.

V.vii.2. A certain brother consulted abba Agathon, saying, "A certain commandment has been laid on me, and I am undergoing very severe strife in the battle area. I dearly wish to move beyond that commandment to the point where I can put paid to the strife." The old man said, "Agathon used to be like this. What I did was to fulfil the commandment and thus win the battle."

V.vii.3. Abba Ammon said that he had spent forty years in Scythia praying God day and night that he might have the grace to overcome anger.

V.vii.4. Abba Besarion said that he had remained standing forty nights among thorn bushes without sleep.

V.vii.5. A certain brother living alone was restless and upset, so he went to abba Theodore of Therme and told him about his restlessness. The old man said, "Go, humble your pride, and force yourself to live in community." So he went away into the desert and lived with others. Later he came back to the old man and said, "I can't find any peace living with others, either." And the old man said, "If you can't find peace either living with others or living alone, what made you want to be a monk? Wasn't it simply in order to endure tribulation? Tell me, how many years have you been wearing the habit?"

"Eight", he said. And the old man said, "Believe me, I've been wearing the habit for seventy years and never for one day have I found respite from the battle. And you think you should find peace in eight?"

V.vii.6. On another occasion a certain brother asked him, "If there were some sudden ear-splitting disaster, father, wouldn't you be afraid?" And the old man said, "Even though the heavens should fall to earth Theodore would have no fear." For in his prayers to God, he had begged to be delivered from all fear, which is why the brother had questioned him.

V.vii.7. It was said of abba Theodore and abba Lucius of Alexandria that for fifty years they had encouraged each other by saying, "Once the winter is over let us depart hence." But when the summer came they would say, "Let us go once this hot spell is finished." And this is how they always carried on, as the fathers remember.

V.vii.8. Abba Pastor told of how abba John the Dwarf (Lit. 'of short stature')

had prayed the Lord to take away all passions from him, and having become self-confident he came to a certain old man and said, "Behold a man at peace, with no internal battles." And the old man said, "Go and pray the Lord that strife may be stirred up in you, for strife nourishes the soul." And when the battlefield began again in his heart he no longer prayed to be delivered from it, but that the Lord might give him the strength to bear it.

V.vii.9. Abba Macarius the great visited Antony in the mountain, and after knocking at the door Antony came out and asked, "Who are you?"

"Macarius," he replied. Antony sent him away, shut the door and went inside, but later, when he saw him patiently waiting, he opened up and welcomed him with the words, "I have heard of you and have wanted to meet you for a long time." And he offered him hospitality and refreshment, tired as he was from the exertion of his journey. When Vespers had been said Antony took a few palms and put them to soak. Macarius said, "Give me some too that I may soak them and work." "This is all I have", said Antony, and made a larger bundle to soak. So sitting together late into the night, discoursing of the things of the spirit, they wove away at their mats, till they stretched right out through the window into the cellar. And when Antony went out in the morning and saw the mats of abba Macarius he marvelled, kissed his hands and said, "These hands are hands of great power."

V.vii.10. This same Macarius once went on a journey to a place called Terenuthin, where he found an ancient tomb to sleep in where many pagans had been buried, and he laid one of the bodies under his head for a pillow. But the demons seeing his fearlessness were furious, and wishing to frighten him, they began to call out as if beguiling a woman, "What about coming to the bathhouse with us, lady." And another demon replied as if from those very dead bodies underneath him, "I can't, because of this traveller lying on top of me." But the old man was not afraid. With perfect composure he gave the corpse a hard punch saying, "Get up and go, if you can." When the demons heard this, they cried with a loud voice, "You've beaten us", and they fled in confusion.

V.vii.11 Abba Mathois said, "I would rather have reasonably easy work all the time than a difficult task soon ended.

V.vii.12. The story is told of abba Milido that once when he was living in the Persian borders with his two disciples two sons of the Emperor went hunting as was their custom, and set nets over a distance of forty miles, in order to kill whatever it was they might find trapped in them. What they found in the nets,

however, was the old man and his two disciples. Gazing on his shaggy and unprepossessing appearance, they were astonished and asked him whether he was a man or a devil. "I am a sinner", he replied, "and I have come out here to do penance for my sins, and I worship the Son of the living God." The hunters replied, "The only gods are the Sun, and Fire and Water. Worship and sacrifice to them." "You are wrong - they are only creatures," he answered. "I beg you, be converted, and accept the true God who has created them and everything else. "But they laughed at him and said, "You call a condemned and crucified man the true God?" "Yes, indeed," he said. "What I am saying is that the true God is he who destroyed death by nailing it to the cross." But they put him to the torturers, together with his two disciples, demanding that they sacrifice. After a great deal of torture they beheaded the two brothers, but the old man they kept on tormenting for a long time. Finally they set him up in a certain place and used him as a target for archery practice, one from in front and one from behind. The old man said, "Because you have agreed together to shed innocent blood, tomorrow at this very moment of the day your mother will be left without sons, and will no longer enjoy your devotion. Your blood will be shed by each other's arrows." They greeted his words with mocking laughter, but the next day it happened that when they went out hunting, a stag escaped from their net, so that they mounted their horses and pursued it. Shooting arrows at it, they transfixed each other in the heart, so that they died as the old man had prophesied.

V.vii.13. Abba Pastor said, "It is in temptations that the character of the monk is made manifest."

V.vii.14. He also told how Isidore, the presbyter of Scythia, once spoke to a gathering of the brothers, saying, "Brothers, was it not to engage in manual work that we came here? And now I observe that there is no work left. I shall therefore gather my mantle about me and depart to where work can be found. There I shall find peace."

V.vii.15. Holy Syncletica said, "If you fall out with someone in the monastery, don't go and live elsewhere. If you do that you only harm yourself. If a hen fails to keep her eggs warm they will go bad without producing chickens. Just so will monks or nuns grow cold and die if they persist in gadding about from place to place."

V.vii.16. Syncletica said, "When the devil fails to subvert us through the rigours of poverty, he uses riches in his endeavours to seduce us. And if he can't prevail through insults and indignities he makes use of honour and glory."

But if he can't seduce us by means of pleasures and bodily satisfactions he tries to gain possession of the soul by unlooked for vexations. He can devise all kinds of burdens to be cast on to one whom he wishes to tempt, by means of which he reduces monks to a state of fear and upsets the charity which they ought to have towards God. But even though the body be chastened and afflicted with severe fevers or even intolerable thirst, remember that you are a sinner who suffers these things, and compare them with the punishments and everlasting flames of eternity, the torments which justice demands, and then you will not be overwhelmed by your present troubles but will rather rejoice that God has visited you. Let this pre-eminent saying be upon your lips, 'The Lord has chastened and corrected me, but he has not given my soul over to death' (Psalm 118.18). If you are like iron, by being put through the fire you will lose the rust. If you undergo all these things with integrity you will go from strength to strength. You will be like gold which is purified by fire. A messenger of Satan has been given to you to buffet your flesh. Rejoice therefore at the thought of who it is to whom you are being likened, for St Paul himself was found worthy of a similar visitation (2 Cor.12.7). If you are afflicted by illnesses or by excessive cold remember that when Scripture says, 'We went through fire and water', what follows is that 'we were brought out into a wealthy place' (Psalm 66.11). While you are in the middle of the one, hope confidently for the other, using what strength is given you. Shout aloud the words of the prophet, 'I am poor and in heaviness' (Psalm 89.30). It is through tribulations of this sort that you will be made perfect, as it is written, 'Thou hast set me at liberty when I was in trouble' (Psalm 4.1). It is in these practices above all that he tries our spirits, for then we have our adversary always before us.

V.vii.17. She also said, "If you should become seriously ill, don't worry because you are no longer able to stand for prayers or chant the psalms aloud because of weakness and bodily infirmity. For all these things are necessary to dispel the lusts of the flesh in the same way as fasting and labour act against unlawful desires. So when sickness is working towards that end all those other observances are no longer necessary. For just as illness can be cured by strong and efficacious medicine, so vice is cut off by that very illness. It is a great virtue to be patient in the face of illness and give thanks to God. Don't be overly depressed if you lose your sight - you may have lost one means of praising God, but you can still contemplate with your interior eye. Have you gone deaf? Be thankful that you can no longer hear things that are unseemly.

Is your sword-arm weakened by some sort of wasting sickness? You can still carry on the inner fight against the temptations of the enemy. Is your whole body diseased? Your inner man can nevertheless grow in holiness."

Libellus 8: Do nothing for show

V.viii.1. Abbot Antony once heard of a young monk who performed a spectacular miracle on the public highway in that when he saw certain old men struggling to walk along on their journey he ordered some wild asses to come and carry them to him. When these old men told abba Antony of this he said, "This young monk seems to me to be like a merchant ship laden with precious gifts, but who knows whether it will ever reach port?" And shortly after, he suddenly began to weep and tear his hair out in great distress. "What is the matter, father?" asked his disciples when they saw this. "A great pillar of the church has just fallen" the old man said. He was of course referring to that young monk, and added that they should go to him and see what had happened. So they went and found the young monk sitting on his mat weeping for his sins. When he saw the old man's disciples he said to them, "Ask the old man to pray to God to give me just ten days of grace in which I hope I may make satisfaction." And within five days he was dead.

V.viii.2. When Antony heard the monks talking favourably of a certain brother, he took the opportunity of a visit from this same brother to find out whether he was able to put up with being insulted. When he found out that he couldn't, he said, "He is like a house which outwardly is beautifully decorated but inwardly has been despoiled by robbers."

V.viii.3. It was said of both abba Arsenius and abba Theodore of Pherme that they despised having a good reputation more than anything else. Abba Arsenius would hardly ever meet anybody. Abba Theodore would meet people but as if carrying a sword.

V.viii.4. There was a certain presbyter-disciple of Archbishop John called Eulogius, whom people held in high esteem because of his abstinence and fasting, going for two days at a time, or even sometimes for a whole week, eating nothing but bread and salt. Once he went to visit abba Joseph in Panephus, expecting to find in him someone given to an even stricter regime. The old man gave him a friendly welcome and gladly prepared for him what food he had. Eulogius' companions said that Eulogius ate nothing but bread and salt, but abba Joseph went on eating without comment. At the end of three

days they had heard no psalmody or prayer for this was a work which abba Joseph kept hidden, and they went away with no feeling of uplift whatsoever. In the mercy of God, however, they were enveloped by a dust cloud and losing their way found themselves back with the old man. As they were about to knock on his door they heard the sound of psalmody, and waited to listen to it for quite some time before they knocked. The old man again gave them a friendly welcome. Because of the heat those with Eulogius picked up a waterpot and gave it to him to drink, but he could not because it turned out to be a mixture of sea and river water.

Turning this over in his mind he began to question the old man about the way he lived, saying, "How is it father that at first you were doing no psalmody but began to do so after we had left, and why was the water I wanted to drink salty?" "It was one of the brothers", the old man said. "He must have mixed sea water in by mistake." But Eulogius kept on asking what was the real truth of the matter. And the old man said, "I keep a little cup of wine for hospitality's sake, but this large water pot is what the brothers are happy to drink from."

In these words he showed him how to maintain discipline over his thoughts and to prevent his mind being motivated by what others might think. As a result he stopped trying to be different from others and began to eat whatever it was that was set before him. So he learned to keep his good deeds hidden, and said to the old man, "The way you work is true charity indeed."

V.viii.5. Abba Zenon, the disciple of abba Silvanus, said, "Don't stay in fashionable places, or with famous people. And don't put down foundations when you build your cell."

V.viii.6. A brother once came to abba Theodore of Pherme and spent three days pestering him for advice. But he got no reply and went away disappointed. Theodore's disciple then asked him, "Father why didn't you speak to him, for look, he's gone away disappointed?" "Believe me," the old man said, "The reason I said nothing was that this man is like a wholesale dealer. He makes himself out to be somebody by peddling other people's words around."

V.viii.7. Another brother asked this same abba Theodore whether he should go without bread on some days, to which the old man replied, "Fine. I do the same myself." And the brother said, "I would nevertheless like to take some chickpeas to the mill to be ground into flour." "If you are going to the mill," replied abba Theodore, "you might just as well make some bread as well. It's

not much of an extra, is it."

V.viii.8. Another brother in conversation with this same abba Theodore, began to speak and speculate about matters of which he had not yet had any experience, and the old man said, "You haven't even found a ship yet in which to stow your baggage, let alone begin to navigate it, and would you then think you have already arrived in the regions you are disposing of so freely? When you have experienced those things you were talking about, then you can talk from experience.

Do nothing for show (continued) Book V

(Judge no one & Discretion begin further down page)

V.viii.9. Abba Cassian told how a certain brother came to abba Serapion, who asked him to say the prayers according to custom, but he wouldn't, saying that he was a sinner and unworthy to be called a monk. When abba Serapion offered to wash his feet he likewise demurred using the same words. But the old man gave him something to eat and began to admonish him quite kindly, saying, "My son, if you wish to progress, go and stay in your cell, and look to yourself and your manual work. It will be more profitable for you to stay put rather than go out." Abba Serapion could see from the young man's face that he was very displeased at these words, so he went on to say, "You've just been saying that you were a sinner and almost unfit to live, so should you really get so upset because I give you some charitable advice? If you would be really humble, learn to carry out cheerfully the tasks laid upon you by others without squandering yourself in shabby verbiage." At this the brother begged the old man's pardon and departed greatly edified.

V.viii.10. The provincial governor once heard of abba Moses and journeyed into Scete in order to visit him. When someone warned the old man he was coming he got up and fled to the marshes, but the governor and his entourage met him and asked where the cell of the abba Moses was. "What do you want to see him for?" he said. "He is a daft old man, heretical even." The governor went to the church and told the clergy there that he had heard of abba Moses and wanted to see him but that when they had asked an old man from Egypt where his cell was he had replied, "What do you want to see him for? He is a daft old man, heretical even." Hearing this the clerics were rather shocked, and asked who this old man was who had spoken like this about a very holy man. "A tall, dark man, wearing a very ancient habit," he replied. "That was

abba Moses himself," they said. "He said this about himself because he didn't want to be a spectacle for you." And the governor departed, greatly edified.

V.viii.11. A brother asked abba Mathoës, "If I should go away and live somewhere else how should I order my life?" And the old man said, "Wherever you live don't try and make a name for yourself in any way by saying; 'I don't mix with the other brethren' or 'I don't eat this that or the other'. These things may give you a sort of futile reputation, but will prove a burden in the long run, for when people get to hear about you they will all flock round to see you."

V.viii.12. Abba Nistoron the Greater was walking in the desert with a brother when they saw a large snake and fled. The brother said to him, "And you were afraid, too, father?" "I wasn't afraid, my son," he replied. "But it was a good thing to flee from the sight of the snake since I now have no need to flee from a spirit of vainglory."

V.viii.13. The governor of the province once wanted to see abba Pastor but he wouldn't agree. The governor then had abba Pastor's nephew arrested as a criminal and cast into prison, saying, "If the old man will come and plead for him I will let him go." So the boy's mother came to her brother, abba Pastor, and began to weep at his doorway, but he would not give her any reply.

Overcome with grief she implored him, saying, "You may have a heart of iron unable to be moved by compassion, but at least you should have pity on your own flesh and blood." But he was adamant, saying, "Pastor has not fathered anybody." And she departed. When the governor heard of this he sent a message to the effect that he only needed to say a word and the boy would be freed. But the old man urged in reply, "Examine his case according to the law. If he is worthy of death, let him die. But if not, you know what you should do."

V.viii.14. Again, abba Pastor said, "Teach your heart to observe what your tongue teaches others." And again, "People often want to appear to be perfect because of what they say, but their deeds don't always match their words."

V.viii.15. Abba Adelphius, the bishop of Nilopolis, once came to abba Sisoe in the mountain, and when they were about to depart again he gave them something to eat early in the morning even though it was a fast day. As he was putting the food on the table some brothers knocked on the door, and the old man said to his disciple, "Give them a few beans which are due to them because of their work." And abba Adelphius added, "Send them away in the meantime lest they should spread it around that abba Sisoe is eating food so

early in the morning." But the old man heard him and said to the brother, "Go on, give it to them." When they were given the food they asked; "You've got guests with you, haven't you? And I suppose the old man is eating with you all?" "Yes", the brother replied. At this they looked very troubled and said, "God forgive you for letting the old man eat at this hour, for don't you know that he will now fast for several days instead?" When the bishop heard this, he began to apologise to the old man, saying, "Forgive me, father, for I was thinking the thoughts of sinful humanity, but what you were doing was of God." And Abbot Sisoe said to him, "Unless God gives the glory, the glory of any human being is of no account."

V.viii.16. Abba Ammonas of Raythum once said to abba Sisoe, "When I read the Scriptures I am forever making a sermon out of them in my mind, so that I shall be ready to explain them to whoever asks me about them." And the old man said, "There's no need of that. Rather look to simplicity of mind in order to be sure of being able to give an answer."

V.viii.17. The governor of the province once came to see abba Simon, who took off the belt he was wearing and climbed up a palm tree as if to trim it. When the travellers arrived they asked where the old man was who lived in this solitude. He replied, "There is no solitary here." And the governor departed.

V.viii.18. On another occasion a different governor came looking for him and some clerics came before him and warned him, saying, "Father, get yourself ready, for a governor who has heard of you is coming to see you to receive your blessing." "Right. I'll get ready then," he replied, and going to his larder he got out some bread and cheese and sat down to eat it in the doorway of his cell. The judge arrived with his staff, and when he saw the old man he was disillusioned, saying, "So this is the solitary monk of whom so many tales are told!" And he turned round and went home.

V.viii.19. Holy Syncletica said, "Just as treasure is soon spent when brought out into the open, so does virtue quickly perish when publicly taken notice of. Just as wax soon melts when brought to the fire, so the soul is weakened by overmuch praise and loses its former strength.!

V.viii.20. She also said, "Just as it is impossible to be both seed and full-grown plant all at the same time, so it is impossible for anyone basking in worldly glory to gather heavenly fruit."

V.viii.21. On a feast day once in the Cells the brothers were eating together in the church. One of the brothers said to the steward, "I don't eat anything

cooked, only salted." And the steward called to another brother through the crowd, "This brother doesn't eat cooked food. Bring him some salted." And one of the old men got to his feet and said, "It would have been better for you to have sat in your cell eating flesh today rather than have this shouted out among so many brothers."

V.viii.22. Somebody very abstemious in food who ate no bread visited a certain old man who happened to be entertaining some pilgrims and had prepared a little lentil dish for them. When they all sat down to eat, this abstemious brother soaked a little dried chickpea and ate that. After they had got up from the table, the old man took him aside and said, "Brother, if you are going to visit anyone, don't make a show of your way of life. If you must keep to your rigorous rule stay in your cell and don't go out." He accepted what the old man said, and from then on shared in whatever he found among the brothers.

V.viii.23. Taking care for the morrow in a human manner impoverishes people and dries them up.

V.viii.24. An old man said, "Whether you avoid other human beings, or whether you scorn the world and the people in it, become as a fool yourself in the eyes of many."

Libellus 9: Judge no one

V.ix.1. It happened once that a brother of the congregation of abba Elias, having fallen into temptation, was expelled and went to abba Antony in the mountain. After spending some time with him, he was sent back to his congregation. But when they saw him they drove him out again, and again he went to abba Antony, saying, "They won't have me back, father." So the old man sent a message to them, "A ship has suffered shipwreck in the open sea, lost all the goods it was carrying and although empty has with great difficulty arrived in port. Would you then sink a ship which has escaped into port?"

They realised that abba Antony was talking about the man he had sent back to them, and reinstated him at once.

V.ix.2. A certain brother who had sinned was ordered by the presbyter to leave the church. Besarion got up and left with him, saying, "I too am a sinner."

V.ix.3 Abba Isaac of the Thebaid visited the congregation of brethren and finding one of them guilty of crimes passed judgment upon him, and went

back to the desert. But an angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell, forbidding him to enter. "Why not?" he asked. "God has sent me," the angel replied, "to ask you where do you wish he should send the guilty brother whom you have sentenced?" Abba Isaac immediately apologised, saying, "Forgive me, I've done wrong." And the angel said, "Don't worry, God has forgiven you, but take care in future not to judge anybody before God has judged him."

V.ix.4. When a brother in Scete was found guilty, the seniors called a meeting and sent a message to abba Moses, asking him to attend, but he would not. The presbyter also sent a message to him begging him to come for the whole body of the brothers wanted him to. So he came. He arrived dragging behind him a battered old wicker basket filled with sand, and those who went out to meet him asked, "What is this all about, father?" And the old man said, "My own sins follow me about, although I can't always see them, and should I come today to judge the sins of somebody else?" Hearing this they said nothing to the brother but pardoned him.

V.ix.5. Abba Joseph asked abba Pastor how to become a true monk and the old man replied, "If you would find peace now and in the world to come say to yourself in every crisis, "What am I?" and pass judgment on nobody.

V.ix.6. A certain brother also asked him, "If I see my brother committing a fault is it a good thing to conceal it?" And the old man said, "Whenever we overlook a brother's fault God overlooks our own. And whenever we proclaim our brother's faults God likewise proclaims ours."

V.ix.7. When a certain brother had transgressed the Abbot went to a certain nearby solitary who had long since stopped going out and told him about the offending brother. And the solitary said, "Expel him." So the brother was expelled from the congregation and went to hide in the marshlands, where he wept copiously. It happened however that some of the brothers who were on the way to visit abba Pastor heard him weeping in the marshlands and turning aside to him found him overwhelmed with grief. They suggested to him that he should go to that same old solitary, but he would not, saying, "Let me die here where I am." When the brothers got to abba Pastor they told him about it. And he asked them to go and tell the brother that abba Pastor would like to see him. When they told him this, he came, and when the old man saw how downcast he was he embraced him and comforted him and begged him to take some food. Abba Pastor then sent one of the brothers to that solitary with this message, "For many years I have been hearing about you and wanted to see

you but have never managed it, because of our mutual neglect. Now, however, by God's will, there does seem to be a pressing reason for it. So I hope it won't be too much trouble for you that we should meet." He did not, however, leave his own cell. But when the solitary got the message he said to himself, "Unless God had inspired the old man he would not have sent to me." So he went. And they greeted each other with joy, and sat down to talk. And abba Pastor said, "There were two people living near each other and both of them had suffered bereavement. And one of the two left his own dead body and went over to weep for the dead body of the other." The old man's conscience was pricked by these words, and realising what he had done he said, "Pastor has already risen up to heaven, while I am still earthbound."

V.ix.8 A brother asked abba Pastor, "What shall I do, for I become faint-hearted when I sit still by myself?" And the old man said, "Despise no one, condemn no one, disparage no one, and the Lord will give you peace, and your time of meditation will pass smoothly."

V.ix.9. A meeting was held in Scete where the fathers discussed the guilt of a certain brother. Abba Prior, however, said nothing and afterwards went out and filled a large bag with sand and lifted it up on his shoulders, while putting a small amount of sand in a little wicker basket which he carried in front of him. When the fathers asked him what he meant by that he replied, "This bag with a lot of sand represents my sins, and since there are so many of them I have put them behind me where I can't see them and grieve or weep for them. This little lot in front of me represents the sins of this brother, upon whom I am busy trying to pronounce judgement. This is quite wrong. I should rather keep my own sins before me and be thinking of them and asking God to pardon me." Hearing this the fathers said, "This is the true path of salvation."

V.ix.10. An old man said, "Although you may be chaste don't condemn the unchaste, for that is to make a mockery of the law. Didn't he who said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' also say, 'Judge not'?"

V.ix.11 A presbyter from the basilica was in the habit of going to a certain solitary to consecrate the oblation (i.e. bread and wine) for his Communion. But somebody came to this solitary and blackened the name of this same presbyter, so that when he came the next time as usual to consecrate the oblation the scandalised solitary would not open the door to him, and the presbyter went away. And behold, a voice came to the solitary saying, "Human beings are taking my judgements upon themselves." And he was rapt up in a trance and saw as it were a golden well with a golden bucket and a

golden rope and beautiful pure water. There was a leper, however, drawing water and pouring it out into a container, and although he was thirsty he couldn't bring himself to drink because of the leper drawing the water. And a voice came to him a second time, saying, "Why aren't you drinking this water? Does it matter who draws it? All he is doing is drawing it and pouring it into a container." The solitary came to himself and thought hard about the meaning of the vision, then called the presbyter and asked him to come and consecrate the oblation as usual.

V.ix.12. There were two brothers greatly respected by the congregation who had each been given the gift of being able to see the grace of God in the other. It happened that one of them once went out among the congregation one Saturday morning and saw someone eating and said to him, "What? Eating, at this time, on a Saturday?" The next day Mass was celebrated as usual and the other brother noticed to his sorrow that the grace of God had departed from his brother. When they got back to their cell, he said, "What have you done, brother, for I can't see the grace of God in you as I used to?" And the other said, "I'm not aware of having done anything wrong in thought or deed." "You haven't scolded anyone, by any chance?" he asked. Suddenly remembering, "Oh yes," he said. "Yesterday morning I saw someone eating and said to him, 'What? Eating at this time on a Saturday?' That was wrong of me. But do penance with me for a fortnight and let us ask God's forgiveness." They did so and at the end of a fortnight he saw the grace of God once more returning upon his brother, and they were greatly comforted, giving thanks to God who alone is good.

Libellus 10: Discretion

V.x.1. Abba Antony said, "There are many who chastise their bodies by their abstinence, but because they lack discretion in it they are far from God."

V.x.2. Some brothers came to abba Antony to tell him of certain showings they had had and to ask whether they were true or whether they were deceptions of the devil. They had started out on an ass which had died on the way and when they got to the old man he forestalled them by asking them how it was that their ass had died on the way.

"How did you know that?" they asked. "The demons showed it me," he said.

"Well, we were coming to ask you about that," they said, "for we have had some showings and they are generally true, unless we are much mistaken."

And so by the example of the ass, the old man was able to satisfy them that these things came from the devil. It happened that a hunter chanced upon them as he was seeking wild game in those remote parts, and seeing abba Antony laughing with his brothers he held them in contempt. But the old man wished to show him how necessary it was to relax sometimes with the brothers, and said to him, "Put an arrow in your bow and draw it", which he did.

"Draw it again", he said, and he did.

"Further" and he did, at which point the hunter said, "If you keep on drawing it too far the bow will break."

And abba Antony said, "It's the same in the work of God. If you stretch the brothers too far they will fall apart. You need to relax the rules from time to time."

At this the hunter was contrite and departed greatly edified by what the old man had said, and the brothers, refreshed, went home.

V.x.3. A brother asked abba Antony to pray for him and he replied, "Neither God nor I can do anything for you unless you yourself take care to cast yourself on his mercy."

V.x.4. Again, abba Antony said, "God doesn't allow this generation to get involved in many battles for he knows that they are not able to endure them."

V.x.5. Abba Evagrius once asked abba Arsenius why it was that although they worked hard at gaining knowledge and learning they did not seem to possess the virtues that the Egyptian peasants had. Abba Arsenius replied, "Being intent upon the discipline of worldly learning we gain nothing. But these Egyptian peasants gain virtue from the way they work."

V.x.6. Abba Arsenius of blessed memory said, "A monk following a life of pilgrimage in other places should not make himself out to be of central importance in anything. In this way he will be free from strife."

V.x.7. Abba Marcus, in talking with abba Arsenius, said, "It is a good thing not to have any sort of luxury in the cell. I knew a brother who had a few kitchen greens in his cell and he threw them out."

"Yes, that's fine," said Arsenius. "Nevertheless each person must act in accordance with the way in which he is being led. Even if at first he is not capable of that kind of valiant act, at a later date he might well be able to encourage it to grow."

V.x.8. Abba Peter, a disciple of abba Lot, told how once he was in the cell of abba Agathon when a brother came in and said, "I would like to go and live in community, but tell me how I should order my life among them."

And the old man said, "From the first day that you go in among them, keep quiet about the details of your pilgrimage all the days of your life, and don't be full of your own importance."

"What are the effects of self-importance?" asked abba Macarius.

"It's like a heat-wave which when in full flow causes everyone to flee. It will even destroy the fruit on the tree."

"And self- importance is like that?" asked Macarius.

"There is no other passion worse," said abba Agathon. "It is the generator of all other passions, and a monk had better not take self-importance upon himself, or let him sit alone in his cell."

V.x.9. Abba Daniel said, "When abba Arsenius was about to die, he charged us not to have a funeral service (agape) for him, "for", he said, "I think it would seem that I had ordered it to be done for my own benefit."

V.x. 10. It was said of abba Agathon that some people visited him having heard that he was a man of great discretion. In an attempt to find out whether he could lose his temper they said to him, "So you are Agathon. We have heard that you are a very self-opinionated person, given to sexual sins."

And he said, "Yes, that's true." "You are also that Agathon who spreads scandal and has a lot to say for himself?" they said.

"I am indeed," he said.

"You are also Agathon the heretic?" they continued.

"Not a heretic," he said.

And they asked him how it was that he had borne all the insults patiently, but denied it when accused of being a heretic. "All those insults at the beginning I put up with", he said, "for they were good for my soul. But I wouldn't agree when you called me a heretic, for that would mean separation from God, and I have no desire to be separated from God." His hearers were greatly impressed by his discretion, and departed greatly edified

V.x.11. This same abba Agathon was asked, "Which is the more important, manual labour or interior watchfulness?" The abba said, "A human being is like a tree. Manual labour is like the leaves, interior watchfulness is like the fruit. Therefore, as Scripture says, 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire.' (Matt 3.10) So we ought to take every possible care of the good fruit in ourselves, that is, watchfulness of the mind. But we do need our outward leafy covering, that is, our manual work"

Abba Agathon was a wise and thoughtful person, a diligent workman, thorough in all he did, keen and reliable in his manual work, sparing in food and clothing.

V.x.12. This same abba Agathon, when there had been a meeting in Scete to judge a certain case, came to them after judgement had been delivered and said, "You haven't judged this case very well."

"Who are you to say?" they asked.

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"I am merely one of the sons of men," he said. "As it is written, 'Are your minds set upon righteousness, O ye congregation? And do ye judge the thing that is right, O ye sons of men?'" (Psalm 58.1)

V.x.13. Abba Agathon said, "Even if in your anger you could raise the dead, it would not be pleasing to God, simply because of your anger."

V.x.14. Three old men once came to abba Achilles, and one of them had rather a bad reputation. One of these old men said, "Father, would you make me a fish-hook?"

"Oh no" he said.

And the next one said; "Please do, so that we shall have something in our monastery to remember you by."

But he replied that he really didn't have time.

And the third, he of the bad reputation, also said, "Make me a hook, father, so that I may have a kind of blessing from your hands."

And to him he said, "Yes, I will."

The first two whom he had refused asked him in private why it was that he had refused their request but agreed to the other's. The old man replied, "In giving you the answer that I didn't have time I knew that you wouldn't be upset, but if I hadn't answered him the way I did, he would have said that it was because I had heard of his bad reputation and for that reason wouldn't make him a fish hook. So I threw him out a lifeline to save him from mental distress and depression."

V.x.15. The story is told of an old man who had spent fifty years without eating bread and drinking very little water, and who said, "I am no longer tempted by sex, avarice or vanity." When abba Abraham heard about this boast he came to him and asked whether this was what he really had said.

"Yes", he replied.

"If you went into your cell," abba Abraham said, "and found a woman lying on your blanket, would you be able to think of her as not being a woman at all?"

"No", he said, "but I would control my thoughts and not attempt to molest her."

"It's not that you have destroyed all thoughts of sex," said abba Abraham, "but rather that you have controlled them. Again, if you were walking along and among the stones and broken bricks you saw some gold, would you reckon that to be merely a sort of stone?"

"No," he said, "but I would resist the temptation to pick it up."

"The desire is still there, you see," said abba Abraham, "even though you have controlled it. Again if you heard of two brothers, one of whom liked you and spoke well of you while the other disliked you and slandered you, would you feel the same towards both of them if they came to you?"

"No," he said, "but I would try to help the one who disliked me in exactly the same way as I would the one who liked me."

And abba Abraham said, "The passions never die. It is just that in holy people they are kept under control."

V.x.16. One of the fathers told a story of an old man who worked diligently in his cell wearing only a blanket. He went on a visit to abba Ammonas, who when he saw him wearing only a blanket said, "This sort of practice isn't really a very useful one." But the old man said to him, "I've got three thoughts that bother me, one, that I should go and live somewhere else in the desert, two, that I should go on pilgrimage where no one would know me, and three, that I should shut myself up in my cell and see nobody and eat only every second day."

"There's no need to do any of these three things," said abba Ammonas.

"Simply sit in your cell and eat a little every day, and bear in mind the words of the publican in the Gospel (Luke 18.13. 'God be merciful to me a sinner'). This will keep you in the way of salvation."

V.x.17. Abba Daniel said, "The more you build up the body the less fruitful your mind becomes, but the more the body shrivels the fresher the mind. The more heated the body, the more tenuous the mind, and the thinner the body the more lively the mind."

V.x.18. Abba Daniel told how when abba Arsenius was in Scete there was a monk stealing the old men's belongings. Abba Arsenius wanted both to win him over and also to satisfy the old men, so he invited the monk into his cell

and said to him, "I'll give you anything you want, as long as you don't steal", and he gave him some gold and some coins, and some other little things - whatever he had that was useful. But the monk kept on stealing. When the old men saw that he had not reformed his ways they expelled him, saying, "If this brother had had some kind of bodily infirmity we would have looked after him, but he is a thief, he's been warned, and has not mended his ways, so expel him, since he is not doing his own soul any good and he is causing a great deal of upset to everyone living here."

V.x.19. At the beginning of his monastic life (conversatio), abba Evagrius went to an old man and asked, "Father, give me a word whereby I may live." And the old man said, "If you would be on the way of salvation, wherever you go don't go on talking about anything unless you've been asked."

Evagrius was made to feel very guilty by this word, and apologised, admitting his own faults in this respect, saying, "Believe me, I've read many books but I've never come across wisdom like that." And he went away having profited greatly.

V.x.20. Abba Evagrius said, "A twisted or wandering mind can be straightened out by reading, vigils and prayer, disordered desires by fasting, labour and mental effort, disruptive anger by psalmody, longsuffering and mercifulness, but make use of all these things seasonably and in due measure, for anything else may serve in the short term, but in the long term may do more harm than good."

V.x.21. Once when abba Ephrem was on a journey, a prostitute was sent by someone to lead him astray and try to get him to have sex with her, or at the very least to get him to commit the sin of anger (for no one had ever seen him angry or quarrelsome).

"Follow me," he said to her. When they got to the middle of a crowd of people he said, "Come here and have sex with me now, if you like"

"You can't do that, with all these people around," she said, quite taken aback.

"If human beings can make you feel ashamed," he said, "how much more should God, who brings to light the hidden things of darkness!" (1 Cor.4.5).

Confused and rebuked she departed, her desires unfulfilled.

V.x.22. Some brothers once came to abba Zeno and asked him the meaning of what is written in Job.15.15, 'Yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.'

And the old man replied, "Human beings have abandoned their sins and are searching the heavens. But this is the interpretation of the text you asked about; 'Since God alone is without stain, therefore the heavens are said to be

not clean in his sight"

V.x.23. Abba Theodore of Pherme said, "If it should so happen that a friend of yours falls into sexual temptation, hold out your hand to him and draw him back again if you can. But if he falls into heresy and won't listen to you draw back and break off your friendship lest by staying with him you also get dragged down to the depths."

V.x.24. The well-known abba Theodore once came to abba John the Eunuch and in the course of conversation he remarked, "When I was in Scete, discipline of the mind was our chief work, and we regarded manual labour as something which was transitory. But now that we have worked at discipline of the mind we realise that that too is a transitory thing."

V.x.25. One of the fathers once came to abba Theodore and said, "One of our brothers has gone back to the world."

And abba Theodore said, "Don't be excited by that. But if you should hear that someone has succeeded in escaping from the attacks of the enemy, that would be something to get excited about."

V.x.26. That famous abba Theodore said, "There are many who live at peace with the world who nevertheless have not been shown the peace of God."

V.x.27. The story is told of John the Dwarf that he once said to his senior brother, "I want to be as free from care as the angels who do nothing but serve God without ceasing," and taking off his habit he went into the desert. He lasted there a week and then came back and knocked at his brother's door. Without opening the door his brother called, "Who is there?"

"It's John", he replied.

"No," he said. "John's gone off to be an angel and no longer lives among men."

But he kept on knocking and crying, "It is me."

The brother wouldn't open up to him however, leaving John crestfallen. When at last he did open the door he said, "If you are a human being there is work to be done in order to live. But if you are an angel why are you trying to get back into the cell?"

Seeing the error of his ways he apologised, saying, "Forgive me, brother. I was wrong."

V.x.28. Some old men once came to Scete, among them abba John the Dwarf, and as they were eating, a certain eminent presbyter got up and offered each one water to drink from a small jug, but no one accepted any except John the Dwarf. The others were surprised and asked him why he, the least important

of all, had presumed to accept the ministrations of such a pre-eminent man. He replied, "Well, when I get up to offer water I am delighted when every one has some, and I find it very rewarding, so I accepted in order that he too might have that rewarding experience and not be disappointed because no one drank."

Hearing this they were all very impressed by his discretion.

V.x.29. Abba Pastor once asked abba Joseph, "What do you advise I should do when assailed by temptation? Should I reject them, or let them in?"

And the old man said, "Let them in but fight against them."

When he had settled back again in Scete it so happened that a visitor to Scete from the Thebaid told how he had asked abba Joseph the same question, and he had said, "'Don't allow entrance to any temptation, but cut it off immediately.'" When abba Pastor heard that abba Joseph had given this advice to the visitor from the Thebaid he visited abba Joseph in Panephus again and said, "Father, when I shared my thoughts with you, you gave me a completely different answer from the answer you gave to that visitor from the Thebaid."

And the old man said, "You don't question my respect for you?"

"No, of course not," he replied.

"Wouldn't you have told me," abba Joseph said, "to give you the same sort of advice as I would give myself? Therefore, if you are open and accepting towards temptations when they come, you test yourself to the limit. I say this to you as I would to myself, but there are others who cannot safely withstand the onset of the passions, and ought to cut them off immediately."

V.x.30. Again, abba Pastor said, "Once I came to abba Joseph in Lower Heracleus, and in his monastery there was a very nice fruit tree, and one morning he told me to go and pick some fruit and eat it. This was on a Saturday. I wouldn't eat because it was a fast day, and said to him, 'Tell me, for the Lord's sake, why you told me to go and eat, for I haven't done so because of the fast, and yet I feel guilty for not having done what you said. For I suppose you wouldn't have asked me to do this unless you had some reason.'

"And he replied, 'The seniors at the beginning don't always give instructions according to the book, but sometimes a bit off-centre. Once they know that they will be obeyed in dubious matters, they will be sure of being always obeyed when giving them instructions about the things that matter.'"

V.x.31. A brother asked abba Joseph what to do, since he wasn't being persecuted, he had no work to do and therefore couldn't give alms.

And the old man said, "If you are prevented from doing any of these things

keep your conscience free from any harm towards your neighbour and you will be on the way of salvation. God seeks a soul free from sin."

V.x.32. Abba Isaac of the Thebaid said, "Don't allow any young boys in, for because of young boys four churches in Scete were ruined."

V.x.33. Abba Longinus said to abba Lucius, "There are three thoughts which bother me. The first is that I should go on pilgrimage."

And the old man replied, "If you can't keep guard over your tongue wherever you go, don't go on pilgrimage. But if you can guard your tongue, go."

"The next thought," said abba Longinus, "is that I should only eat every other day."

Abba Lucius replied, "The prophet Isaiah says, 'Even though you bind a yoke about your neck, yet is your fasting not acceptable to me. Rather keep your mind from evil thinking.' (Isaiah 58. 5-6)

"The third thought," said abba Longinus, "is that I should shut myself away from human contact."

And abba Lucius replied, "Unless you have first amended your way of life by living with others you won't be able to amend by living alone."

V.x.34. Abba Macarius said, "If we harbour resentment for the evils done to us by other people, we destroy the ability to maintain the remembrance of God in our minds. But if we are ever mindful of the evils which can come upon us from the demons, we are protected from attack."

V.x.35. Abba Mathoes said, "Satan is never really sure which passion is capable of leading anyone astray, so he sows a whole lot of seeds at random not knowing which will provide a harvest, now a seed of sexual temptation, now a seed of slander and many other similar passions. Then concentrates on whatever one it is that finds a response. And once he knows what it is that the soul finds attractive, he doesn't scatter any other kinds of seed about."

V.x.36. It is told of abba Nathyra, who was a disciple of abba Silvanus, that when he lived in his cell in Mount Sinai he was quite moderate as regards bodily necessities in the way in which he governed his life. But when he was made bishop of Pharan he disciplined himself with quite severe ascetic practices. His disciple said to him, "Father, when we were in the desert you didn't crucify yourself like this."

And the old man said, "My son, there we had solitude and silence and poverty, and I looked after my body in such a way that I ran no risk of falling ill and finding I was in need of things which were unobtainable. Now, however, we are in the midst of the world, where it is very easy to be over-indulgent, and if

I fall ill here there are plenty of people who will be able to come and help me - as long as I don't betray my monastic vocation."

V.x.37. A brother consulted abba Pastor saying, "I am very unsettled and would like to leave this place."

And the old man asked him why.

"Because I have heard some very unedifying things about one of the brothers," he replied.

The old man asked, "Are the things you have heard true?"

"Yes, they're true, father," he said. "The brother who told me about them is very trustworthy."

"He can't be very trustworthy if he told you these things," said the old man, "for if he were really trustworthy he would not have mentioned such things at all. God himself when he heard tales of the Sodomites would not believe it before he had gone down and seen with his own eyes" (Genesis 18.20)

"I have seen with my own eyes," he said.

Hearing this the old man looked down at the ground and saw a small splinter which he picked up and said, "What is this?"

"A splinter," he replied.

He then looked up towards the roof and said "What is that?"

"A beam supporting the roof," he replied.

And the old man said, "Engrave it upon your heart that your own sins are like this beam, but that those of the brother you are talking about are like this small splinter."

When abba Sisois heard about this advice he exclaimed, "How best shall I extol you, abba Pastor? Truly you are like a precious jewel and your words are full of grace and glory."

V.x.38. Some presbyters of that district were visiting in the nearby monasteries where abba Pastor dwelt, and abba Anub came to abba Pastor and said, "Let us ask these presbyters if in their kindness they will today offer up here the gifts of God (i.e. bread and wine)."

But abba Pastor just stood there and would give no answer, so that abba Anub went away disappointed.

"Why didn't you answer him?" asked some who were nearby.

And abba Pastor said, "I don't apologise. I am as it were dead to the world, and the dead don't speak. So don't think of me as if I am really with you."

V.x.39. A certain brother from the monastery of abba Pastor went on pilgrimage and stayed with a certain solitary who was held in high esteem by

all and received many visitors. The brother told him a few things about abba Pastor's nobility of soul, which made him want to go and visit him. This brother went back to Egypt and a short time afterwards, the solitary made a pilgrimage to Egypt to visit this same brother who had previously visited him, for he had told him where he lived. He was surprised to see him and highly delighted. The solitary then said to him, "Do you think you could possibly be so kind as to take me to abba Pastor?"

So he took him to abba Pastor and introduced him, saying, "This is a lovely person of great warmth, held in high esteem in his own district, who would very much like to see you."

The old man received him very graciously, and after their greetings sat down to talk. The pilgrim brother began to talk about the Holy Scriptures, and about all sorts of other spiritual and heavenly things, but abba Pastor turned his face away and said nothing. The brother left, disappointed that abba Pastor had nothing to say, and said to his guide, "My journey to this old man has been a complete waste of time, as he hasn't condescended to say a single word to me."

So the brother went to abba Pastor and asked him why he had not conversed with this splendid person, held in high esteem in his own district, who had come especially to see him. And the old man replied, "He lives in the heavenly realm and talks of heavenly things. I am down-to earth and can only speak of earthly things. If he had spoken about human passions I would have known how to reply to him, but I'm no use in talking about spiritualities."

The brother went back to his visitor and said, "The old man does not talk readily about the Scriptures, but he will reply to anyone who talks about the human passions."

Stung by this, he went back to the old man and said, "What should I do, father, about the passions which rule in my soul?"

Giving him a happy look the old man said, "I'm glad you have come back, for now I can speak about these things and perhaps say something useful."

Greatly edified, he realised that here was a path of true charity, and he went back home giving thanks to God that he had been found worthy to see such a holy old man.

V.x.40. A brother consulted abba Pastor, saying, "I have committed a grievous sin, and think I ought to do penance for three years."

"Too much," said abba Pastor.

"One year, would you think?" asked the brother.

"Too much," was the reply.

Those standing nearby said, "How about forty days?"

"Still too much," said the old man, adding, "I reckon that for anyone who truly repents from the bottom of his heart and is determined not to repeat his offence, the Lord will even accept a mere three days."

V.x.41. Abba Ammon consulted him about the unclean thoughts and vain desires which the human heart brings forth. And abba Pastor replied, "'Does the axe claim more credit than the man who wields it?' (Isaiah 10.15) If you weren't striving against them, you wouldn't have any work to do."

V.x.42. Abba Isaiah consulted him on the same question and abba Pastor said, "If you have a cupboard full of clothes and you leave them shut up for a long period, eventually they will rot. In the same way, if you prevent your thoughts breaking out into bodily actions eventually they will rot and disappear."

V.x.43. When abba Joseph also consulted him about this, abba Pastor said, "If a snake or a scorpion is put into a bottle and tightly shut up, in the course of time it will certainly die. So with evil thoughts which fester by the devices of the demons - they gradually decrease according to the measure of patience shown by the one to whom they are sent."

V.x.44. Abba Joseph asked abba Pastor, "What is the best way of fasting?" And abba Pastor replied, "I think you should eat every day but regularly take a little less than you feel like eating."

"But when you were young," said abba Joseph, "didn't you go without food for two days at a time?"

"Quite right," the old man said. "And sometimes three days, or even a week. This was a practice approved by the influential seniors. But they found that it was better to eat daily, and on alternate days a little less, thus showing us a royal road which was not so arduous and easier to practice."

Discretion continued)Book V

V.x.45. Abba Pastor said, "Don't live where there are others urging extravagant practices on you which you don't find profitable."

V.x.46. A brother visiting abba Pastor told him that he cultivated a field and gave the crops away. The old man told him that he was doing a good work and the brother went away encouraged in what he was doing. Abba Anub overheard this and said to abba Pastor, "Where's your fear of God that you should have spoken to the brother like that?"

But the old man said nothing. After two days abba Pastor asked the brother to

come and see him and said, "What was it you were asking me about the other day? I think my mind must have been wandering at the time."

And the brother said, "I told you that I cultivated my field and reaped it and gave it away." And abba Pastor said, "Oh, I thought you must have been speaking of your brother who is not a monk, for this is not really monk's work."

He was downhearted to hear this and said, "I don't know how to do any other sort of work except this so why shouldn't I cultivate my field!"

After he had gone, abba Anub apologised to abba Pastor, and abba Pastor said, "I always knew of course that this was not monastic work, but I spoke to his condition (lit, "according to his mind") and encouraged him in his charitable aims. Now of course he's gone away sad, but he will still do the same work."

V.x.47. A brother asked abba Pastor, "What is the meaning of that Scripture where it talks about being angry with your brother without a cause?" (Matt 5.22.)

"No matter what your brother may have done to offend you, if you get angry with him even to the extent that you would need to pluck out your right eye and cast it from you, then you are angry without a cause. But if anyone tries to separate you from God, then you can get angry."

V.x.48. Abba Pastor said, "If someone has done wrong and says, 'I've done wrong' without prevarication, don't scold him lest you destroy his good intentions. If however you say to him, 'Never mind, brother, but don't do it again' you will help him to be sorry."

V.x.49. Again he said, "It is a good thing to experiment. People become stronger through experiment."

V.x.50. Again he said, "A teacher who does not do what he teaches is like someone who is quite happy to clean up the mess of all who come to him but can't clean up his own mess and is full of all kinds of uncleanness and filth."

V.x.51. Again he said, "It is human not to know yourself."

And he added, "One person may seem to live in silence but in his heart he is constantly condemning others. In reality he never stops talking. But another who may talk from morning to night in reality has the gift of silence, because he never speaks except to profit his hearers."

V.x.52. Again he said, "Suppose there were three people together, and one of them sought to be silent, one was ill but nevertheless gave thanks to God, and a third ministered to them both with sincere goodwill, then these three are as much alike as if they were all doing the same work."

V.x.53. Again he said, "Evil can in no way drive out evil. If anyone does evil to you do good to him, for your good deed will destroy his evil ones."

V.x.54. Again he said, "A grumbler is not a monk. Someone who returns evil for evil is not a monk. An angry person is not a monk."

V.x.55. A brother came to abba Pastor and said, "There are many dangerous thoughts which come into my mind."

Abba Pastor took him out into the open air and said, "Spread out your cloak and catch me some wind."

"It's not possible," he replied.

"Neither is it," said the old man. "Neither is it possible to prevent all kinds of thoughts coming in to your mind. What you can do is resist them."

V.x.56. A brother came to him saying, "What should I do with a legacy which I have had?"

And abba Pastor said, "Give me three days to think about it."

He came back as bidden and the old man said to him, "What shall I say to you, brother? If I were to say, 'Give it to the church' the clergy would give you no peace. If I were to say 'Give it to your parents' there's no merit in that. But if I were to say, 'Give it to the poor' at least that would free your mind from worry. Whatever you decide, go and do it. I have no axe to grind."

V.x.57. Again abba Pastor said, "If you think about some material need and you do nothing about it, and the thought comes again and you still do nothing about it, and if it comes a third time and you don't really pay much attention to it, it was probably superfluous in the first place."

V.x.58. A brother said to abba Pastor, "If I come to an understanding of something should I talk about it?"

And the old man said, "Scripture says, 'It is foolish and blameworthy to speak before you listen' (Ecclus.11.8.) So speak only if you are asked to. Otherwise stay silent."

V.x.59. Again abba Pastor said that according to abba Ammon there are some people who go through life carrying an axe without the faintest idea of how to cut down a tree, but there are others who have one and know how to use it and can cut down a tree in a few strokes." He was likening an axe to discretion.

V.x.60. Again he said, "The human will is like a high wall full of sharp stones between the self and God. In order to overcome it say, 'With the help of my God I will leap over the wall. The way of God is an undefiled way.' (Psalm 18.29f.) It is hard work for a human being to train his will in righteousness."

V.x.61. A brother consulted abba Pastor, saying, "My soul is in danger if I stay

with my present abbot. What do you think? Should I stay with him?"

Now abba Pastor knew that this abbot was not a good influence on this brother, and was surprised that he should have come to get advice as to whether he should stay with him. And he said, "If you think it right, stay." And the brother went back and stayed. Later on he came again and said, "He's really doing me harm."

But abba Pastor still didn't advise him to leave. He came back a third time and said, "This time I really am leaving him"

And abba Pastor said, "Now you have found the right path. Go, and don't look back." And he added, "If someone sees that his soul is in danger he shouldn't need to seek advice. For truly, anyone might ask about hidden thoughts and get advice from the seniors, but if it is a case of open wrongdoing there is no need to consult anybody - it should just be dealt with immediately."

V.x.62. Abba Abraham, the disciple of abba Agathon, asked abba Pastor, "Why are the demons attacking me?"

And abba Pastor said, "Demons attacking you? It is not demons fighting with us when we are following our own devices and desires; our own devices and desires have become demons, driving us to fulfil our own desires. But if you would like to know the sort of people with whom the demons do fight, look at Moses and people like him."

V.x.63. Abba Pastor said that abba Moses was approached by a brother who asked, "How should someone set about mortification? By means of one's neighbour?"

And he replied, "You won't get anywhere near the meaning of this word unless you have spent about three years imprinting on your heart that you are already in the grave."

V.x.64. A brother asked abba Pastor, "How should a monk conduct himself in his cell?"

And the old man said, "Sitting in the cell doing the obvious things comprises manual labour, eating, keeping silence, meditating. Making progress in the hidden things requires that people should not worry if they are despised wherever they go, but should make good use of every minute and not neglect their own inner development. When it is time to finish their manual work, let them say the divine office, and bring it to a conclusion with an untroubled mind. The end of all these things is that they should be numbered among the fellowship of the just, having renounced the fellowship of the unjust."

V.x.65. Two brothers came to abba Pambo and the first one asked, "Father, I

fast every second day and then eat two loaves. Am I on the right path, or am I being deceived?"

And the other said, "When I have earned out of my manual work two days supply of beans I keep one lot for my own food and give the other lot away. Am I right in doing this, or am I being deceived?"

They asked him a lot of things like this but he gave no definite answers. After four days they were about to depart, when some of the clergy spoke to them, saying, "Don't be disappointed, brothers, you will have your reward from God, but this old man has the habit of never saying anything unless it is given him by God."

So they went back to the old man and said, "Father, pray for us."

And he said to them, "Oh, are you going, then?"

"Yes, we are," they said. Then he gazed on them, and wrote upon the ground, pretending to take their way of life upon himself, "Pambo fasts every other day and then eats two loaves. Is this what makes a monk? No. And Pambo produces two lots of beans every day and gives one lot in alms. Is that what makes a monk? Not at all."

Then after a pause he said, "It is a good work you are doing, but as long as you maintain a good conscience towards your neighbour you will be on the path of salvation." The brothers found this a great help, and went away happy. V.x.66. A brother once asked abba Pambo, "Why is it that I hear certain voices telling me not to do good to my neighbour?"

And the old man said, "Don't say such things. You are making God out to be a liar. Say rather, 'It is I who have no desire to be merciful.' God has forestalled you with the words, 'I have given you power to tread down scorpions and serpents and the whole strength of the enemy' (Luke 10.19). Why then don't you crush this unclean spirit?"

V.x.67. Abba Palladius said, "It behoves someone trying to live according to the mind of Christ to teach openly what he knows and to keep honestly quiet about what he doesn't know. And if he won't do either when he is capable of doing so, he is suffering from a very unhealthy disease. The first step in departing from God is a scorn for sound doctrine, and a loss of desire for what the true lover of God longs for."

V.x.68. A brother asked abba Sisois why he couldn't get rid of his passions, and the old man said, "The whole package of passions is within you, but if you pay the price for them, they will depart."

V.x.69. A certain brother came to abba Silvanus in Mount Sinai, and seeing the

brothers at work he said to the old man, "'Labour not for the meat that perisheth' (John 6.27), and 'Mary has chosen the better part' (Luke 10.41)." And the old man said to his disciple, "Call Zacharias, and put this brother in an empty cell by himself."

And at the ninth hour he waited at the door for them to come and invite him to the meal, but when nobody came he got up and went to the old man and asked, "Are the brothers not eating today, father?"

And the old man said, "Yes they're eating at this moment."

"And I'm not invited?" said the brother.

And the old man replied, "You are a spiritual person and don't need that kind of food, but we are very earthy, and because we need to eat we therefore work with our hands. But you have chosen that better part, spending all day reading, without any need for carnal food."

When he heard this he knelt and apologised, saying, "Forgive me, father." And the old man said, "It seems to me that Mary couldn't do without Martha.

Without Martha, Mary could not have been praised."

V.x.70. Holy Syncletica said, "There are those who through hard work amass worldly goods however great the perils of the sea. And when they get rich they want even more, reckoning nothing to what they already have, but bending all their mind to getting what they don't yet have. And yet we are lacking in those things which really ought to be sought after, and lack the will to strive after those things which are necessary for the fear of God."

V.x.71. She also said, "There is a sort of heavy-heartedness (*tristitia*) which is profitable and another sort which is destructive. The profitable sort is when you mourn for your sins and for the blindness of your neighbours, or when you fear lest you fall away from your first good intention of striving after perfection. These constitute a sound sort of heavy-heartedness. But there is a down-side which comes from our enemy. For he can induce an irrational kind of heavy-heartedness. It's called depression (*taedium*). You need much prayer and psalmody to drive that sort away."

V.x.72. She said again, "The devil can induce a kind of hard and long drawn out abstinence which his followers go in for. But how do you distinguish a divine and royal abstinence from a diabolical and tyrannous one? It is obvious that as you progress along your path of life you should have a rule of fasting. Then gradually you get to fasting for four or five days at a time, followed by eating too much. Do you think that will help you increase in virtue? That simply gladdens the devil's heart. It is always the unbalanced actions which are

the most debilitating. Don't bring out all at once every weapon you have, lest you find yourself in the midst of battle with no weapons left. The body is our armoury, the mind is the soldier. Treat each of them judiciously so that you can be ready for anything."

V.x.73. Two old men once came to Amma Sara and said to each other on the way, "Let's keep this old woman in her place." So they said to her, "Don't get ideas about yourself, and boast about these two solitaires who came to see you even though you are only a woman." And Amma Sara said, "I may be a woman in body, but not in spirit."

V.x.74. She also said, "If I were to ask God that everyone should be edified by my example, I would soon find myself at each one's door having to ask their pardon. Rather I should pray that my heart becomes pure in the sight of all people."

V.x.75. Abba Hyperichus said, "The truly wise man is he who teaches others by his deeds, not his words."

V.x.76. There was once a monk who had lived in a vast mansion in Rome, but in Scete lived near the church with a servant to look after him. The presbyter of the church realised his weakness in that he had been used to all kinds of luxury, and shared with him all that the Lord sent him and all that was given to the church. After living for twenty-five years in Scete, he had become well known as a contemplative of discernment. Hearing of his reputation, one of the foremost Egyptian monks came to see him, expecting to find that his way of life was physically fairly arduous. After their greetings they said the prayers and sat down together. The Egyptian was shocked to notice that his companion was clothed in fine raiment, that his bedding was of finely woven reeds over a layer of tanned leather, that he had a little scarf of soft material round his neck, and that he was wearing sandals on his clean feet. Such a way of living was not customary in that place; severe abstinence was rather the usual rule. Seeing that he had the gift of prayer and discernment, the old Roman realised that his companion was shocked and said to his servant, "Let's do things well today for the sake of this abba who has visited us."

And he cooked a few vegetables which he had, and sat down for the meal as soon as they were ready. They also drank some of the wine which he kept for his infirmity. And when Vespers was done they said the twelve psalms, went to bed and slept all night. When they got up in the morning the Egyptian said, "Pray for me" and departed, totally disillusioned in him.

He hadn't gone far before the Roman sent after him and called him back,

because he wanted to clear up the misunderstanding. After welcoming him gladly he asked, "What nationality are you?"

"I am an Egyptian," he replied.

"And from what city?" he asked.

"I wasn't born in a city and have never lived in one," was the answer.

"Before you became a monk, what did you do? Where did you live?" he asked.

"I was a farm worker," he said.

"You had a bed to sleep in?" he asked.

"As a farm worker should I have been so lucky as to have a bed to sleep in?" he replied.

"Where did you sleep then?" he asked.

"On the bare ground," he replied.

"What did you eat in your field, and what sort of wine did you drink?" he asked.

"What sort of food and wine do you think you are likely to get as a farmworker?" he replied.

"Well, tell me how you lived," he said.

"I ate dry bread and perhaps a little salted fish if I could get it, and my only drink was water," he replied.

"A hard life" the old man said, and went on, "You had no bath to wash in?"

"No, I washed in the river when I could," he replied.

When the old man had learned from these replies everything about his former life and work he told him about his own previous life before becoming a monk, hoping to open his eyes a bit.

"This poor sinner that you see before you came from the mighty city of Rome," he said. "I had an important position under the Roman Emperor."

At these words the Egyptian was taken aback and began to listen carefully to what was being said.

"I left Rome and came here to solitude. "I used to have an enormous house and plenty of money, but I counted them as nothing and came to live in this tiny cell. I used to have couches decorated with gold and covered with expensive drapes, in place of which the Lord has given me this bedding of reeds and leather. My clothing was of the highest and most expensive quality, instead of which I now wear this simple garment. I used to spend a great deal of money on food, instead of which God gives me a few vegetables and a small cup of wine. I used to have countless numbers of servants to look after

me, and the Lord has spared me this one servant only to look after me. Instead of my bath I do wash my feet a little and wear sandals in my weakness. Instead of lyre and pipe and other kinds of music which I used to enjoy as I feasted, I now say my twelve psalms by day and twelve by night. And for the sins which I formerly committed I now find peace in offering my poor and unworthy service to God. So you see, father, you need not be scandalised because of my weakness."

Having listened to all this, the Egyptian had a complete change of heart, and said, "Woe is me! For I came into the monastic way from a background of great deprivation and hard work, and I now possess such a lot of things which I did not possess before. You however chose to come from a life of great luxury into a life of deprivation, from great distinction and riches into humility and poverty." Greatly edified, he departed, but became a great friend of his and often came back because he found it so profitable. For he was indeed a man of discernment, filled with the life-giving breath of the holy Spirit.

V.x.77. An old man said, "There is no need for a lot of words. Human beings have plenty to say for themselves in these days, but it is deeds you want. This is what God wants, not mere words which bear no fruit."

V.x.78. A brother asked some of the fathers if you could be polluted by unclean thoughts coming into the mind. In reply to this question some said; "Yes, you are polluted", but others said, "No, because if we were polluted we simple people would be beyond salvation. The important thing about salvation is that we don't do evil things even if we think them."

The brother was not satisfied with these conflicting answers, and went to an old man of rather greater reputation and asked him about the same thing. And the old man replied, "From each person according to his ability."

The brother asked him for the love of God to explain this saying.

And the old man said, "Suppose that there were a valuable object lying here, and two brothers came in, one of whom was highly developed in his way of life and the other not. The first one of great virtue might see the object and think to himself, "I would like to have that", but if he doesn't dwell on the thought and cuts it out of his mind immediately, he is not polluted. The second one who is not yet highly practised in virtue might also see the object and desire it and might have to go through a long struggle in his mind against that desire, but as long as he finishes up by not taking it. he also is without sin."

V.x.79. An old man said, "Whatever your situation, if you don't take advantage

of what it has to offer you, the place itself will drive you out because you haven't used it profitably."

V.x.80. An old man said, "If anyone in sheer ignorance follows his own will without thought for the will of God, later there may be an opportunity of returning to the way of the Lord. But someone who follows his own will and not the will of God and won't listen to anyone else, but thinks he knows it all, will find it very difficult to come back to the way of the Lord."

V.x.81. An old man was asked the meaning of the words, "strait and narrow way." (Matt 7.14).

And the old man replied, "The strait and narrow way is that you should do violence to your own thoughts, and renounce your self-will for the sake of the Lord. This is what the Scripture means when it says that the Apostles 'left all and followed him'" (Matt.19.27).

Discretion (continued) Book V

(Living Soberly begins nearer bottom of this page)

V.x.82. An old man said, "Just as the monastic order is more to be held in honour than the secular way, so should the pilgrim monk be in all respects as a mirror for those he comes among."

V.x.83. One of the fathers said, "If a diligent person lives with those who are not, he does not make any progress, for the whole point of being diligent is to prevent yourself by means of your work from becoming second rate. But if a lazy person lives with those who are diligent, he does make progress, or if he doesn't, at least he cannot get any worse."

V.x.84. An old man said, "One who has plenty of words but no deeds is like a tree with leaves but no fruit. Just as a tree with plenty of fruit is sure to be one with plenty of leaves, so good words follow on from good deeds."

V.x.85. An old man told how a certain monk who had fallen into serious sin and repented went to consult one of the old men. However, he didn't actually say in so many words what he had done, but put it in the form of a question, "If someone had fallen victim to such and such a thought could he find salvation?"

The old man was one with no discernment and replied, "You've lost your soul."

At this the brother said, "Well if I am perishing anyway I might as well go back to the world."

He didn't give up however but decided to go and consult abba Silvanus, a man of great discretion. When he got there, he again did not actually say what he had done, but put in the form of the same question which he had put to the former old man, "If someone had fallen victim to such and such a thought could he find salvation?"

Abba Silvanus opened his mouth and began to speak to him from the Scriptures, "Judgment on thoughts is not always the same as on sins."

When the brother heard this he took to heart what was being said and with renewed hope he confessed his actual sins. Having heard what he had done, abba Silvanus like a good doctor applied a bandage to his soul from the Scriptures, by saying that there is always repentance for those who from genuine love turn to God (Ezekiel 18.27).

A few years later it so happened that this distinguished father visited the old man who had nearly driven the brother to despair and after telling him what had happened went on to say, "See now, this brother who would have despaired and gone back to the world because of what you said is now like a shining star in the midst of his brothers."

This story is told so that we may realise that it is dangerous to consult someone with no discernment about either sinful thoughts or sinful deeds.

V.x.86. An old man said, "We shall not be condemned because our thoughts are evil, but only if we make evil use of them. Through our thoughts we can either suffer shipwreck or be crowned with glory."

V.x.87. An old man said, "Don't have commerce with worldly men, don't be familiar with women, and don't put excessive trust in boys."

V.x.88. A brother asked an old man what he should do about the multitude of thoughts which bothered him for he didn't know how to fight them.

The old man said, "Don't fight against all of them, but only against one. All the thoughts that a monk might have stem from one principal source. You need to decide which one it is and what it is like, and concentrate on that. The others will then also be beaten down."

V.x.89. An old man spoke against evil thoughts thus, "I beg you, brothers, just as you repress evil acts so also repress evil thoughts."

V.x.90. An old man said, "The one who lives in the desert should be a teacher rather than one who needs to be taught, lest he come to harm."

V.x.91. An old man was asked by a brother how to find God, by fasting, by work, by vigils or by compassion.

And he replied, "By all those things which you mention, plus discretion. I tell

you, there are many who afflict their flesh, but because they do it indiscreetly they end up empty, profiting nothing. Our mouths may be dried up through fasting, we may have studied the Scriptures and learned the psalms by heart and yet lack what God requires, humility."

V.x.92. A brother asked an old man, "Father, what is the point of asking the seniors and getting good spiritual advice from them if I don't remember anything of what they say? Why ask seeing I don't profit by it? I feel as if I'm totally unclean."

There were two empty bowls near at hand, and the old man said, "Take one of those bowls, pour some oil into it, burn some flax in it, pour the oil back and put the bowl back in its place."

And he did so.

"Do it again," said the old man.

And he did so.

After this had been done several times, the old man said, "Now pick up the other bowl and tell me which is the cleaner."

"The one I put the oil in," he said.

"It's the same with the enquiring mind," said the old man. "Although you can't remember what you have been told, nevertheless you become cleaner than those who never ask any questions at all."

V.x.93. A brother sitting silently in his cell was being pestered by demons disguised as angels who appeared to him in a bright light attempting to seduce him into going back to communal living. He went to a certain old man and said, "Father, angels have appeared to me in a bright light, telling me to go back to communal living."

"Don't listen to them," said the old man, "for they are demons. When they come to tempt you say, 'I'll go when I decide, not at your bidding.'"

He listened to the old man's advice and went back to his cell. The next night the demons came as usual, pestering him, but he as he had been advised answered them, "I'll go when I decide, not at your bidding."

But they said to him, "That evil old man is a liar and has deceived you. We know this because one of the brothers went to him wanting to borrow some money, and although he had some he lied, saying that he didn't have any, and gave him nothing."

At daybreak the brother went to the old man and told him about this. And the old man said, "It is quite true that I had some money and wouldn't give any to the brother who wanted to borrow some, because I knew that if I were to give

it to him it would only do harm to his soul. I judged that there was one commandment which took precedence over a bit of prevarication in all ten."

V.x.94. Three brothers once came to an old man in Scete, and one of them said, "Father, I have committed the old and new Testaments to memory."

And the old man replied, "You have made a cloud of words around yourself." (lit. 'you have filled up the air with words')

And the second one said, "I have copied out the old and new Testaments all by myself"

And the old man replied, "You have blocked up the windows (sc. 'of your mind?') with books."

And the third said, "The grass is growing in my fireplace."

And the old man said, "You have saved yourself from having to receive guests." (lit. 'You have driven out hospitality from you')

V.x.95. One of the fathers told of how a certain highly respected old man would say very forcefully to anyone who came to ask him for advice, "See now, I take the nature of God upon myself and sit in the seat of judgment, and what would you that I do for you? If you say, 'Have mercy on me', God says, 'If you want me to have mercy on you have mercy yourself on your brothers, and then I will have mercy on you'. If you want me to forgive you, forgive your neighbours. Is God to be held responsible in this? Not at all. It is within ourselves that the will to walk in the path of salvation lies."

V.x.96. It was said of a certain very industrious old man in the Cells that when he was reciting his prayers in his cell it so happened that another holy old man passing by heard him arguing with his thoughts and saying, "How is it that I should have forgotten everything except one single word?"

The man standing outside thought that he was arguing with someone else and knocked on the door so that he could go in and make peace between them. But when he had gone in and seen that there was no one there with the old man, he took it upon himself to ask, "Who were you arguing with, father?"

"With my thoughts," he replied. "For although I have committed fourteen books to memory, when I came to say my office today I found that I could remember nothing except one word which I had heard outside, and therefore I was arguing with my own thoughts."

V.x.97. Some brothers from the monastery came to the desert and stayed with a hermit who gave them a friendly welcome. And as is the custom among hermits, when he saw that his guests were tiring in their manual work he gave

them a chance to rest by having the meal earlier than usual, sharing with them what he had in his cell. They said twelve psalms when evening was come and likewise twelve at night. But when the old man was keeping vigil, he overheard them saying, "These hermits rest a lot longer than we do in the monastery."

In the morning, when they were about to depart to another hermit nearby, he said to them, "Give him my greetings and tell him not to water the vegetables."

This other hermit knew what that meant, and so he kept the brothers working hard till the evening without any food. At evening time he first of all said a very long office and then said, "For your sake we'll stop there, because you are tired after your hard work. We don't usually eat today, but for your sake we'll eat a little."

And he gave them some dry bread and salt, and added, "Seeing you are here we will make a feast day", and he added a little vinegar to the meal, after which they got up and continued singing psalms till morning, when he said, "Seeing you are with us we won't fulfil our usual rule but we'll pause a little here, seeing you are pilgrims."

The brothers decided it was time to get away, but he urged them to stay a little longer.

"Stay three days with us as is usual among hermits, if for no other reason than to observe the custom." But when they saw that he was not going to give them any relaxation they slipped away while he wasn't looking.

V.x.98. A brother said to an old man, "If I happen to sleep in past the hour for saying the office I feel inhibited from saying it at all for very shame."

And the old man said, "If you happen to sleep in, get up when you do awake, shut the doors and windows, and say your office, for it is written, 'The day is thine and the night is thine' (Psalm 74.17). At all times therefore God is glorified."

V.x.99. An old man said, "One person might eat a lot and still feel hungry, whereas another might eat very little but be satisfied with it. The one who eats and still stays hungry has greater merit than the one who eats little and is satisfied."

V.x.100. An old man said, "If you and your brother get involved in a rather peevish conversation and he says, 'That's not what I said', don't argue with him and say, 'Yes, you did', for he will only get irritated and say, 'I did not.'"

V.x.101. A brother asked an old man, "I have a sister who is very poor. If I

give her some money does that count as giving alms to the poor?"

"No", the old man said.

"Why not, father?" asked the brother.

And the old man said, "Because you are being swayed by your own flesh and blood."

V.x.102. An old man said, "A monk ought not to disparage others, nor listen to those who disparage, nor be easily shocked."

V.x.103. An old man said, "Don't be satisfied with all you hear or agree with everything that is said. Be careful about what you believe, but be eager to tell the truth."

V.x.104. An old man said, "Sometimes a saying comes into the mind of a brother as he sits in his cell, and he can't get at the meaning of it, however much he turns it over in his mind. If he has not been drawn in this direction by God, the demons will put any sort of meaning they want into this saying."

V.x.105. An old man said, "Once when we used to meet together we talked of things which were to our mutual benefit and were lifted heavenwards thereby. Nowadays when we meet we get caught up in scandalous gossip and drag each other down to the depths."

V.x.106. Another old man said, "If a person maintains an inner discipline, he can also control his actions. But if this is not the case, how can we possibly guard our tongues?"

V.x.107. The same person also added, "Spiritual work is necessary if we are to arrive at that state. For it is an impossible task to speak of anything which has not been arrived at by actual experience."

V.x.108. Another of the fathers said, "It is important that one should have work in the cell at which to labour. As long as one is occupied in the work of God, the devil may come day after day and will not find room in which to lodge. But if the devil does overcome and leads someone into captivity, the Spirit of God will often return, though if he finds no room in us because of our own malignity, he departs."

V.x.109. Some Egyptian monks went down to Scete to visit the seniors of that place and were scandalised to find them so undone by hunger that they were impatient to get at their food after a long fast. The presbyter [of Scete] realised this and with the intention of teaching them something before sending them away, he preached to the people in the church encouraging them to fast and cultivate abstinence. For the monks from Egypt had wanted to go but he kept them there. And when he had made them fast for two days they were

shattered. The dwellers in Scete, however, had fasted for a week before they and the Egyptians sat down to a meal on the Sabbath. The Egyptians then rushed madly to get at the food and one of the old men restrained their hands and said, "Eat properly as a monk should."

One of the Egyptians shook his hand off saying, "Let me go for I am dying. I haven't eaten any cooked food for a week."

And the old man said, "If you are reduced to such straits after fasting for only two days, why are you so dismayed by these brothers who habitually consider abstinence to be of such importance that they fast for a week." This shamed them, and edified by their abstinence they went away in a happier frame of mind.

V.x.110. A certain brother who had renounced the world and taken the monastic habit, almost immediately shut himself up saying, "I want to be a solitary."

When the nearby seniors heard of this, they went and dragged him out and made him go round the cells of all the brethren doing penance at each one, saying, "Pardon me, for I am not a solitary, since I am only at the beginning of my monastic life."

V.x.111. The old men had a saying, "If you see one of the young men going up to heaven by his own efforts, grab his heel and bring him down to earth, for it is not fitting."

V.x.112. A brother said to a highly respected old man, "Father I would like to find an old man of my own choice and stay with him." And the old man said, "A noble desire, sir."

He didn't understand the old man's sarcasm, and continued to say that was what he wanted.

When the old man saw that the young man thought he was approving his wishes he said, "And if you found such an old man of your own choice, would you really stay with him?"

And he replied, "Yes, indeed, if I could find someone of my own choice."

And the old man said, "Not so that you could follow the will of the old man, but that he could do what you want - and that would give you peace." The brother suddenly realised what was being said and prostrated himself in penitence, saying, "Forgive me, I was being vainglorious, and thought I was speaking on the right lines, when there was no real good in it at all."

V.x.113. Two brothers according to the flesh both left the world, but it was the younger of them who first began his monastic life. One of the fathers came to

visit them and they brought out a basin (to wash his feet), and the younger in age came to wash the old man's feet, but he reached out his hand and prevented him, giving that privilege to the elder, although it was usually the one who had entered the monastery first who did this. Some bystanders said, "Father, the younger one is the senior in monastic terms." And the old man replied, "And I take away the primacy of the younger and give it to the elder." V.x.114. An old man said, "The prophets wrote books, our fathers who came after them carried out many of their precepts, and their successors committed them to memory. But this present generation has copied them out onto paper and parchment and leave them idly on their window sills."

V.x.115. An old man used to say, "The cowl that we wear is the sign of innocence, the garment that we wear round our shoulders and on our necks is the sign of the cross, the belt we are girded with is the sign of fortitude. Let us live then according to what our habit signifies; if we bend our desires to all these things we shall not be overcome."

Libellus 11: Living soberly.

V.xi. 1. A Brother came to abba Arsenius for advice and the old man said, "To the best of your ability try to live an interior life according to God's will and conquer your outward passions." He added, "If we seek God, he will appear to us, and if we grasp him, he will stay with us."

V.xi. 2. Abba Agathon said, "A monk should not allow his conscience to accuse him in everything indiscriminately." When he was at the point of death this illustrious abba Agathon remained motionless for three days with his eyes open, and the brothers shook him and said, "Where are you, father?" "I am standing before the judgment seat of God," he replied. "Are you afraid?" they asked. "I have worked to the best of my ability at keeping the commandments of God," he replied, "but I am only human and I know not whether what I have done is pleasing in the sight of God." "You have no trust in what you have done, even though you have been following God?" they asked. And the old man said, "I would not presume so much, not before appearing before God, for the judgments of God are different from human judgments." They very much wanted to ask him more questions, but he said to them, "Please, don't talk any more for I am very busy." As soon as he had said this he cheerfully gave up his spirit, as they watched him assume the expression of one about to greet some dear friends. He had always been very disciplined in

all things and used to say, "Without discipline it is not humanly possible to grow in virtue."

V.xi. 3. It was told of abba Ammoys that when he went to church he didn't allow his disciple to walk with him but to follow at some distance behind. If the disciple came closer to ask something he would answer him very briefly and then tell him to go back, saying, "Although we may be talking about something of spiritual benefit, it is just possible that we may get on to something which is totally irrelevant, so that is why I don't allow you to stay close."

V.xi. 4. When abba Ammoys first met abba Arsenius he asked, "In what light do you see me now?" And he replied, "Like an angel, father." At a later date he asked him again, "How do you see me now?" And he replied, "Like Satan, for even when you speak good words to me they pierce me like a sword."

V.xi. 5. Abba Allois said, "Unless you say, 'God and I are alone in the world' you will never find peace."

V.xi. 6. Again he said, "If you really wanted to, you could arrive at the measure of divinity (find union with God?) in the course of only one day before Vespers."

V.xi. 7. Abba Bessarion on his deathbed said, "A monk should be all eye, like the Cherubim and Seraphim."

V.xi. 8. Abba Daniel and abba Ammoys were going on a journey when abba Ammoys said, "Do you think we shall be sitting in our cell before long, father?" Abba Daniel replied, "Who shall separate us from God? God is now with us on our journey, and he will be with us again in the cell."

V.xi. 9. Abba Evagrius said, "It is a great thing to pray without distraction, and greater still to sing psalms without distraction."

V.xi. 10. He also said, "Remember you must die and forget not eternal judgment, and your soul will not slip."

V.xi. 11. Abba Theodore of Ennato said, "If God can accuse us of slackness in our times of prayer and distractions when we are singing psalms, we are not on the path of salvation."

V.xi. 12. Abba Theonas said, "We are taken away captive by earthly passions because of mental blockages which withdraw us from the contemplation of God."

V.xi. 13. Some brothers once put John the Dwarf to the test because he had the reputation of never allowing his mind to be distracted by worldly affairs, nor did he argue over worldly controversies. "Thanks be to God," they said. "The

rainfall has been good this year and the well-watered palm trees are putting forth fresh branches providing plenty of work for the brothers who work with their hands." "It's like what happens when the Holy Spirit descends into the hearts of his saints," abba

John replied. "They are renewed in strength and become clothed in the fear of God."

Living Soberly (continued) Book V

(Prayer without Ceasing begins nearer bottom of this page)

V.xi. 14. It is also told of abba John that he once made enough plaits to weave two baskets but used them all up on one basket and didn't realise it until his weaving touched the wall, his mind was so taken up with the contemplation of God.

V.xi. 15. There was an old man in Scete who had great physical stamina, but was not very good at remembering anything. He went to abba John the Dwarf and asked him about forgetfulness, listened to what he had to say, went back to his cell and couldn't remember a thing of what abba John had said. He went back and asked again, listened and likewise returned, and still couldn't remember a thing once he had got back to his cell. He did this several times, but still could not master his forgetfulness. At last he came again and said, "Do you know, father, I have forgotten again what it was you said to me. I don't want to be a nuisance to you. I won't come again." Abba John replied, "Come, light this lantern (or 'candle') for me." And he did so. "Bring another lantern," he said, "and light it from this one." And he did so. "Is the light of the first lantern any the less," he asked, "because you have lit another lantern from it?" "No", was the reply. "Nor is John any the less," said John, "even if all of Scete came to me. Nor could that separate me from the love of God. So come whenever you like, don't hesitate." And so by their mutual forbearance, God did take away the old man's forgetfulness. But this was the way they carried on in Scete, encouraging those who were beset by any kind of passion whatsoever and making demands on each other to their mutual advantage.

V.xi. 16. A brother asked abba John, "What shall I do? There is a certain brother who is always coming and asking me to help him in his work, but I'm afraid I'm not really strong enough for it and it's wearing me out. How do I fulfil the commandments of God?" The old man replied, "Caleb the son of Jephunneh said to Joshua the son of Nun, 'I was forty years old when Moses

the servant of the Lord sent me with you to this land and I am now eighty, and I am just as strong and fit for warlike comings and goings now as I was then.' (Joshua 14.7, 10-11) But you, do what you can. If you are able to go out and come back, do. But if you can't, sit in your cell and weep for your sins. And then if he comes and finds you weeping he won't compel you to go."

V.xi. 17. Abba Isodore the presbyter of Scete said, "When I was young and sat in my cell I used to keep no count of how many psalms I said in serving God, for I just kept on saying them night and day."

V.xi. 18. Abba Cassian told of an old man living in the desert who begged God to grant that he might remain attentive when spiritual matters were being discussed, but that he might go to sleep if there were any slander or bad language, so that his ears might not be filled with such poison. He said that the devil was the enemy of all spiritual doctrine, and eager to incite people to bad language (or, 'harmful language' *otiosa verba*). As an example of this he offered the following, "Once when I was talking to certain brothers for the good of their souls they fell into such lethargy that they couldn't keep their eyelids apart. So in order to teach them what the work of the devil was like, I introduced an account of some very shameful things, upon which they woke up and became very interested. Then I groaned, and said, 'Up to now we have been talking of spiritual things and your eyes have been weighed down by irresistible sleep. But as soon as I start talking about anything shameful you all promptly begin to listen. I beg you therefore, brethren, be aware of the wiles of the devil, and pay attention and stay awake whenever you are doing or listening to anything spiritual.'"

V.xi. 19. When abba Pastor was young, he went to an old man to seek advice on three matters. But when he got there he couldn't remember one of the three, so he went back to his cell. As he was reaching out his hand to open the door he remembered what it was that he had forgotten before and drawing back his hand he went back to the old man, who said, "You are soon back, brother." So he explained how, as he was about to open the door, he remembered his query and came straight back without going in. And it was a very long way that he had had to travel. And the old man said, "You are a real Pastor of the flock, and your name will be renowned throughout the whole land of Egypt."

V.xi. 20. Abba Ammon came to abba Pastor and said, "If I go to my neighbour's cell, or he comes to me about anything, we show consideration for each other by taking care not to allow any unsuitable stories or anything else contrary to a monastic profession." And the old man said, "Well done. When

you are young you need to take great care." "How do the older men go on, then?" asked abba Ammon. "The older men, who are skilled and proven, take no thought for anything other than their pilgrimage, and they talk about that," he replied. Abba Ammon asked, "So if you have to talk with your neighbour do you think it is better to talk with him about Scripture or the sayings of the fathers?" And the old man said, "If you can't keep silence it is better to talk about the sayings of the fathers than about Scripture. There is not a little danger there."

V.xi. 21. When asked about impurity abba Pastor said, "Once we have established the conduct of our life in the fear of God and in sobriety (or 'steadfastness') there will be no room for impurity in us."

V.xi. 22. It is said of abba Pastor that before he went out to take part in the work of God he would first sit as if in harness for an hour, meditating on the meaning of the texts.

V.xi. 23. Abba Pastor told how someone asked abba Paysion what he should do about his inner feelings, for he had become benumbed and did not fear God. And the old man said, "Go and join yourself to someone who does fear God, and by cleaving to him you will learn to fear God."

V.xi. 24. Again he said, "The fear of the Lord is the be-all and end-all. For it is written, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Psalm 111.10) and again when Abraham had finished building an altar the Lord said to him, 'Now I know that you fear God'" (Genesis 22.12).

V.xi. 25. Again he said, "Have nothing to do with anyone who never stops talking contentiously (or 'who is always stirring up strife')."

V.xi. 26. Again he said, "I once consulted abba Peter, the disciple of abba Lot, about how my mind would be in a turmoil if another brother visited me and told me the gossip about all the others, whereas my soul would be at peace while sitting alone in my cell. And abba Peter replied that abba Lot had a saying 'It is you who have the key to my door'. 'What was the meaning behind that?' I asked. And he replied; 'If someone visits you and you ask him how he is, where he comes from, what's going on with this brother or that brother, whether you get on with them or not, then you open a door for your brother, and you hear things you would rather not.' And I said, 'Yes, that's quite true. How then should one behave when visited by another brother?' And he said, 'All sound doctrine is learned through serious thought (= 'luctus', lit. 'mourning', 'lamentation'). Where there is no serious thought it is impossible to have a calm mind.' And I said to him, 'I do have serious thoughts when I am

in my cell, but when anyone comes to see me, or when I go out, they vanish.' And the old man said, 'You haven't yet got control of them, but are only able to make use of them temporarily.' 'How do you mean?' I asked. 'Whatever you work at, once you have mastered it, you can make use of it whenever you need.'

V.xi. 27. (Also in VII.xxxii.2) A brother said to abba Sisois, "I would love to be able to keep guard over my heart (*custodire cor meum*). And the old man said, "How can we keep guard over our heart if our mouth is like an open door?"

V.xi. 28. The disciple of abba Silvanus of Mount Sinai once asked the old man to draw some water to water the garden while he went about another task of his. As the old man went to draw the water he wrapped his cowl closely about his face, looking only at his feet. Somebody else then coming along saw him from a distance and observed what he was doing. When he got near he asked, "Tell me father, why do you water the garden with your cowl so closely wrapped about your face?" And the old man said, "So that I can't see the trees, and in looking at them be distracted from what I am doing."

V.xi. 29. Abba Moses asked abba Silvanus, "Is it possible for anyone to begin a new way of life every day?" "Anyone who is a genuine workman," replied abba Silvanus, "can begin a new way of life not only every day but every hour."

V.xi. 30. Once abba Silvanus was asked, "How have you lived your life that you have acquired such sagacity?" (*prudentia*) And he replied, "I have never harboured disturbing thoughts in my heart."

V.xi. 31. Abba Serapion said, "The soldiers of the Emperor stand before him looking neither to the right or the left. Even so should the monk stand in the sight of God, intent upon him, fearing him. None of the devil's wiles can then make him afraid."

V.xi. 32. Holy Syncletica said, "Let us live soberly. It is through our bodily senses that we can be despoiled if we are not careful. How can the house possibly not become darkened if we let smoke in from outside through an open window?"

V.xi. 33. She also said, "We must maintain everywhere an armed defence against the demons, for they attack us from outside and stir us up inside, according to our experience. Just as a ship is sometimes buffeted from the outside by the force of the waves, and sometimes sunk because of a build-up of bilge water inside, so we are sometimes lost because of the evil of the deeds

we do outwardly, and sometimes betrayed by the maliciousness of our inner thoughts. We must therefore not only watch out for the external attacks of evil spirits, but also expel the uncleanness of our inner thoughts."

V.xi. 34. Again she said, "We have no security in this world. As the Apostle says, 'Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' (1 Cor.10.12) We are sailing indeed in uncertain waters, like the psalmist who likens our life to the sea (Psalm 104). There are regions of the sea which are full of danger and others which are safe; we seem to travel in the safe areas of the sea, it is people in the world who seem to be in the areas of danger. We travel in the light, led by the sun of righteousness, they are tossed about in a night of ignorance. It often happens however that people in the world who travel in tempest and darkness are able to save their ship when afraid of danger by crying to the Lord and by renewed vigilance. We in our places of calm can be sunk by very complacency, having loosed our hold on the rudder of righteousness."

V.xi. 35. Abba Hyperichus said, "Let your thoughts be always of the kingdom of heaven, and you will soon receive it as your inheritance."

V.xi. 36. Again he said, "Let a monk live in imitation of the angels, burning and destroying all sin."

V.xi. 37. Abba Orsisius said, "Unless a man keeps guard over his heart, he will forget and neglect all that he hears and sees, and the enemy will gain a foothold there and eventually take control. A lamp supplied with oil (and 'lychino') will give forth light; but if through neglect it has not been given oil it will soon go out and darkness will prevail. If a mouse should come looking for food before it has completely gone out he will be put off by its heat, but once he is certain that it no longer gives off either light or heat he will knock the lamp on to the floor in his efforts to get at the contents. If it is made of pottery it will break, but if bronze its owner will pick it up again. In the same way, if the soul gets careless the Holy Spirit will begin to depart until finally its heat will be totally extinguished, and then the enemy will grasp and devour the resolution of the heart and exterminate and render useless the sinful body. If however one basically has a good intention towards God, and has simply been trapped unawares into negligence, the merciful God will prick his conscience with the thought of the punishment which is prepared for sinners in the world to come, and he will study to live more soberly, and govern himself in all things with great circumspection until the time of his visitation.

V.xi. 38. When two old men were having a conversation one of them said, "I

am dead to this world." The other said, "Don't be too sure. It's all very well saying you are dead to the world, but Satan is not."

V.xi. 39. An old man said, "A monk should be thinking early and late about what he has done according to God's will and what things he has left undone. In this way a monk should be directing his whole life towards doing penance. This is the way that abba Arsenius lived."

V.xi. 40. An old man said, "If you lose silver or gold it is possible to find it again (but not salvation).

V.xi. 41. An old man said, "Soldiers and hunters going about the tasks set before them take no thought about whether they will be wounded or whether anyone else will be safe from harm. Each one strives on his own behalf alone, and so it ought to be for the monk."

V.xi. 42. An old man said, "No one is able to cause harm to somebody who stays close to the Emperor; similarly Satan cannot harm us if our soul is rooted in God. For it is written, 'Return to me and I will return to you' (Zachariaiah 1.3) It is because we are often drawn away from him that the enemy is easily able to lead our miserable souls captive to shameful passions."

V.xi. 43. A brother said to an old man, "I don't have any conflicts in my heart." And the old man said, "You are like someone with forty different doorways and anyone from anywhere can go in and out as they please and you have not the least idea what's happening. If you had only one doorway, firmly shut, and forbade entry to evil thoughts, you would then be aware of them outside you, striving against you."

V.xi. 44. It was said of a certain old man that when his thoughts said to him, "Never mind today. Repent tomorrow," he gainsaid them, saying, "No, I will repent today and tomorrow let God's will be done."

V.xi. 45. An old man said, "If you can't conduct yourself properly in your outward behaviour, you certainly won't be able to govern yourself inwardly."

V.xi. 46. An old man said, "Satan has three weapons which are deployed before we get to committing any sin whatsoever. The first is forgetfulness, the second negligence, the third disordered desire. For forgetfulness breeds negligence and negligence breeds disordered desire from which human ruin proceeds. But if you maintain your mind in sobriety, casting out forgetfulness, you will not become negligent, and so your desires will not be disordered, and so with the help of the grace of Christ you will not fall."

V.xi. 47. An old man said, "Cultivate silence and think no vain thoughts. Whether sitting still or moving about govern your thoughts (or 'turn to

meditation') always in the fear of God. If you do this you will not fear the attacks of the enemy."

V.xi. 48. An old man said to a brother, "The devil is the enemy and you are like a house. The devil ceases not to assail you with whatever kind of murky thoughts he can find, pouring out all kinds of uncleanness into you. What you have to do is to take care to throw outside whatever he throws at you, and if you neglect this your house will be so filled with rubbish that you will strive to enter in vain. Right from the start, throw out the things he throws at you and by the grace of Christ your house will stay clean."

V.xi. 49. An old man said, "If a beast is blindfolded he will more readily go round and round at the mill. The blindfold is taken off when he is not at the mill. Similarly the devil tries to blind us in order to subject us to all kinds of sin, but if our eyes are open we can more easily fly from him."

V.xi. 50. The old men told of how there were seven monks in abba Antony's mountain at the time of the fig harvest, one of whom had to drive the birds away from them. There was one of those old men who when it was his turn to guard the dactyls used to cry, "Be off you birds, and fly away all evil thoughts."

V.xi. 51. A brother in the Cells soaked his palms and sat down to make plaits, when his thoughts suggested to him that he should go and visit a certain old man. And he decided that he would go in a few days time. And his thoughts said to him, "What if he should die in the meantime? Go and see him now. It's summertime." But again he said, "It's not the right time." His thoughts again said, "But when you have cut the rushes up it will be the right time." And he replied, "I will spread these palms out and then I will go." Again his thoughts said, "It's such a fine day today." And he left his palms soaking, put on his sheepskin and went out. His neighbour however was an old man with discernment and when he saw him striding off so vigorously he shouted out, "Prisoner, prisoner, where are you off to? Come here to me." And when he had approached, the neighbour said, "Go back to your cell." And the brother having told him about the internal conflict he had had went back to his cell and entering in prostrated himself and did penance. When he had done this, the demons suddenly shouted with a loud voice; "You have conquered us, monk, you have conquered us." And his bedding looked as if it had been singed with fire, but the demons vanished like a smoke. Thus the brother learned something of their wiles.

V.xi. 52. A certain old man in Scete was dying and his brothers stood around

his bed and covered him with a garment and began to weep. He however, opened his eyes and laughed, and laughed again, and then a third time. When they saw this, the brothers said, "Tell us, father, why do you laugh while we are weeping?" And he said to them, "I laughed the first time because you are frightened of death, the second time because you are not prepared for it, and the third time because after my labours I am now going to my rest, and you are weeping." Having said this he straitway closed his eyes in death.

V.xi. 53. A brother once came to one of the fathers and said that he was troubled by his thoughts. And the old man said, "You have cast away a stout staff tipped with iron, that is the fear of God, and have picked up a flimsy reed, that is evil thoughts. Take some fire, then, which is the fear of God, and then when evil thoughts like flimsy reeds come near you they will be burned in the fire of the fear of God, for the evil one will not prevail against those who have the fear of God."

V.xi. 54. One of the fathers said, "You can't love unless you first of all hate. For unless you hate sin you can't love righteousness, as it is written, 'Flee from evil and do the thing that is good.' (Psalm 37.27) Truly in everything and everywhere this commandment is required of your soul. Adam in paradise disobeyed the commandment of God; Job sitting in ashes obeyed. It follows therefore that God requires us to cleave to his commandments at all times.

Libellus 12: Prayer without ceasing

V.xii. 1. It was said of abba Arsenius that at sunset after the lighting of lamps at Saturday Vespers, he would stretch out his hands to heaven in prayer until the sun rising on Sunday morning lit up his face. And then he would sit.

V.xii. 2. The brothers asked abba Agathon, "Father, What is the most important work in our way of life?" And he replied, "May I be allowed to say that there is no work like the work of prayer to God. When anyone decides to pray to God, the demons always rush in to try and break up that prayer, knowing that nothing is a greater obstacle for them than prayer poured out to God. In every other sort of work which a religious person takes on, however important and lengthy it is, there does come a time to enjoy a rest from it, but the work of prayer must needs be a great battle until your very last breath."

V.xii. 3. Abba Dulas the disciple of abba Besarion said, "Once I went into his cell and found him standing at prayer with his hands stretched out to heaven, and he remained steadfastly in this position for fourteen days. After this, he

called me and said 'Follow me,' and led me out into the desert. When I told him I had got thirsty he took off his sheepskin and went off about a stone's throw and prayed. He came back with his sheepskin full of water. When we arrived at the city of Lyco we visited abba John, and after greeting each other we prayed. Then we sat down and they began to speak of the visions they had seen. Abba Besarion said, 'A command went out from the Lord that the temples should be destroyed, and it was done; they were destroyed.'"

V.xii. 4. Abba Evagrius said, "If you start to weaken in resolve, pray. But pray with fear and trembling, work at it seriously and vigilantly. You must pray like this because the hostile and invisible enemy is wickedly tempting us to evil, and above all tries to hinder our prayer."

V.xii. 5. Again he said, "When contrary thoughts come into your head, don't seek in prayer to drive them out by other thoughts. Wield the sword of tears against the one who is attacking you."

V.xii. 6. Epiphanius the bishop of Cyprus was urged by the abbot of his monastery in Palestine not to neglect the rule of observing carefully the third, sixth, ninth and evening hours of prayer. But he rebuked the abbot and said, "You may have decided not to pray during the other hours, but a true monk ought never to cease from prayer, or to sing psalms in his heart."

V.xii. 7. Abba Isaias said, "When the presbyter at Pelusium was celebrating an agape and the brothers were eating and talking among themselves, he rebuked them saying, 'Hush, brothers, for I perceive that the prayer of one of the brothers eating with you is rising up in the sight of God like fire.'"

V.xii. 8. Abba Lot came to abba Joseph and said, "Father, to the best of my ability I keep my little rule, and fast a little and pray and think and sit still, and to the best of my ability I try to purge my thoughts. What else should I do?"

The old man rose and stretched out his hands to heaven and his fingers became like ten flames of fire. And he said, "If you will, you can become like fire all through."

V.xii. 9. Abba Luke was visited once by some monks known as "euchitae", that is "pray-ers", and he asked them, "What manual work do you do?" And they replied, "We don't have anything to do with manual work, but pray without ceasing as the Apostle said." (1 Thess.5.17). "You don't eat then?" the old man asked. "Of course we eat", they said. "Who prays for you when you are eating, then?" he asked. "And don't you sleep at all?" "Yes, we do sleep," was the reply. "And who prays for you while you are asleep?" he asked. And they didn't know what to say in answer. "I'm sorry, brothers, but your deeds

don't match your words. Now let me show you how to pray without ceasing while doing manual work. With God's help I sit here soaking palm leaves to make plaits and I say, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness, and according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.' (Psalm 51.1) Is that prayer or not?" "Well, yes, it is," they said. "After I have stayed here all day," he said, "praying either silently or aloud, I have earned about sixteen coins. Two of them I place outside the door, and the rest I keep to buy food. Whoever takes those two coins prays for me while I am eating or sleeping, and thus by the grace of God I fulfil what is written, 'Pray without ceasing'"

V.xii. 10. Abba Macarius was asked how we ought to pray and the old man said, "There is no need for many words in our prayer. Just stretch out your hands from time to time and say, 'Lord as you will and as you know, have mercy upon me.' And if conflict arises in your heart say, 'Help'. And because he knows your needs, he will have mercy upon you."

Prayer without Ceasing (continued) Book V

(Hospitality begins further down page, and Obedience further down still)

V.xii. 11. It was said of abba Sisois that if he did lower his hands fairly quickly when standing to pray his mind would get caught up into higher realms. If another brother happened to be praying with him he hurried even more quickly to lower his hands lest his mind get caught up and he die.

V.xii. 12. An old man said, "Earnest prayer heals the mind."

V.xii. 13. One of the fathers said, "Just as you can't see your own face in water which is disturbed, so is it impossible to contemplate and pray to God if the mind is full of strange thoughts."

V.xii. 14. An old man visiting in Mount Sinai was about to leave when he met another brother who said to him in some distress, "We are in dire trouble, father, because of this drought; there is no rain at all." And the old man said, "Why don't you pray and beseech God?" "We have done that", he said, "and begged God earnestly, but it still hasn't rained." And the old man said, "I don't believe you have prayed earnestly enough. Would you like to know why? Come, stand here and pray with me." And lifting up his hands to heaven he prayed, and it began to rain. When the brother saw this he was greatly afraid, and fell down to worship him, but the old man fled.

V.xii. 15. Some brothers told of how they once went to visit some old men and

after the customary greetings and prayers they sat down to talk. And when they were about to depart after their talk they asked if there could be some further prayers. One of the old men then asked them, "What? Haven't you already said some prayers?" "Yes," they replied, "but the prayers were said when we arrived. Since then we have been talking right up to this minute." And the old man said, "I'm sorry, brothers, but there is one who has been sitting and talking here who has said a hundred and three prayers." Having said that he did say a prayer and let them go.

Libellus 13 Hospitality

V.xiii. 1. Some fathers once came to abba Joseph to ask him how you should receive visiting brethren and whether you should relax your usual rule of abstinence and rejoice with them. Before they had had a chance to ask him he had already said to his disciple; "Mark well what I am doing today and concentrate on it." And he placed two chairs made of rushes bound into small strands, one on the left and one on the right and said, "Please sit down." He then went into the cell and put on some old clothes, came out to them, and then went back and put on the clothes he was previously wearing before coming back to them again. Astonished at what he was doing they asked him what it was all about, and he said, "You've seen what I have been doing." "Yes, indeed," they said. "Was I a different person, wearing the old clothes?" he asked. "No, of course not," they said. "And was I any the worse for wearing better clothes?" he asked. "No," they said. "So I was the same person in both cases, and just as I wasn't different wearing the old clothes or any the worse for wearing better clothes so should we be in receiving visiting brethren. It says in the gospel, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's (Matt 22.21); so when brothers are with you, you ought to rejoice, time enough to mourn when you are alone.'" They were very impressed with what he had said, since he knew what they had had in mind even before they had asked him anything at all, and they glorified God.

V.xiii. 2. Abba Cassian said, "After we had left Egypt we visited a certain old man in Palestine, who overwhelmed us by his hospitality, and we asked how it was that when he received visitors he did not observe the rule of fasting as was customary in Egypt. And he replied, 'I can fast any time, but you I only have for a while. Fasting, of course, is useful and even necessary, but it

depends on our own will. It is the law of God, however, which enjoins the fulness of charity. Receiving you as we would Christ we are bound to take every care to fulfil every thing that charity demands. After you have gone then I can resume my rule of fasting. "Can the sons of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is still with them? When the bridegroom is taken away, then they will fast. "(Matthew 9.15)"

V.xiii. 3. Again he said, "We visited one old man who gave us a meal and after we had eaten enough he still kept on urging us to have some more. And when I said, 'I really couldn't eat another thing' he said, 'I have entertained various brothers six times recently, and pressed food on all of them, and eaten myself at the same time, but I still have a good appetite. So why should you not be able to eat any more when you have only been feasted once?'"

V.xiii. 4. The rule was once made in Scete that they should fast for the whole week before celebrating Easter. It happened, however, that some brothers came from Egypt that week to visit abba Moses, who cooked a little pulse for them. When the neighbours saw the smoke of his fire they reported him to the clergy of the local church, saying, "Look, Moses has broken the rules and is cooking pulse." "We'll speak to him about it when he comes," the clerics said. On the Sunday, when they realised what hospitality Moses had been offering they said to him in the presence of all the people, "Moses, you have broken a man-made rule but you have committed yourself totally to the Law of God."

V.xiii. 5. A brother came to abba Pastor in the second week of Lent to seek some advice about what was going on in his mind, and when he had had a satisfactory answer he said, "I wasn't quite sure whether to come to you today or not." "Why not?" the old man said. "I was afraid that seeing it was Lent you wouldn't open your door to me," he replied. And abba Pastor said, "I don't know anything about shutting a door of wood. It is the door of the tongue that we need to keep shut."

V.xiii. 6. A brother said to abba Pastor, "Whenever I give my brother a piece of bread or anything, the demons always spoil it for me, making out that I am only doing it for the sake of human praise." And the old man said, "Even though such acts do seem to be like that, nevertheless it is always right to supply your brother with what he lacks." And he went on to tell this parable, "There were two farmers living in the same area, and one of them sowed seed but reaped a harvest which was meagre and of poor quality. The other one, however, sowed no seed at all, and consequently reaped nothing. If there had been a famine which of them would have been able to get by?" "The one who

had gathered a harvest," said the brother, "even though it was small and deficient." And the old man said, "Well then, let us just sow a few little things, even if flawed, lest we die in the time of famine."

V.xiii. 7. A brother visited a certain solitary and when it came time to leave he said, "Forgive me, father, I've hindered you in your rule of life." "My rule," he said, "is to welcome you hospitably and send you on your way in peace."

V.xiii. 8. There was a solitary fairly near a monastery who observed a number of strict rules. It so happened that some people visiting at the monastery went out to visit the solitary as well, with whom they had a meal even though it was not the regular mealtime. Afterwards the brothers said to him, "Wasn't that a great grief to you, father?" And he replied, "The only grief I ever have is to be self-willed."

V.xiii. 9. It was said of an old man who lived near the road to the desert that he took upon himself the task of eagerly offering hospitality, no matter what time it was, to any monk as he came out. He offered one such solitary a meal on one occasion, but he refused, saying that he was fasting. The old man was disappointed and said, "I wouldn't want you to neglect what is important to you, but on the other hand please don't ignore me entirely. Come, let's pray together, and as you will see, this tree here will imitate anyone who bends the knee and bows in prayer." So the solitary knelt in prayer, but the tree did not move. The old man then knelt and immediately the tree bent forward with him. When they saw this they were delighted and gave thanks to God for this great miracle.

V.xiii. 10. Two brothers visited an old man who did not usually eat every day. But when he saw them coming he welcomed them and said, "Fasting has its own reward, but anyone who eats for charity's sake fulfils two commandments, for he both abandons his own will and also obeys the commandment to give refreshment to the brethren."

V.xiii. 11. There was an old man in Egypt who lived in a remote place quite a long way away from a man called Manichaeus, who was one of those who called themselves presbyters but weren't really. Manichaeus was on a journey to someone else of the same misguided persuasion when night overtook him near the dwelling of this other holy and orthodox old man. Rather worried, he felt like knocking on the old man's door to ask if he could stay the night but hesitated because he knew that he would be recognised as Manichaeus and refused entry, but necessity at last overruled him and he knocked. The old man opened the door, recognised him, welcomed him perfectly happily, prayed

with him, gave him food and showed him where to sleep for the night. Manichaeus thought about this during the night and was quite astonished, wondering how it was that this old man had not treated him with suspicion. "This is truly a man of God," he said to himself. When he got up in the morning he fell at the old man's feet, saying, "As from today I return to orthodoxy, and would like to remain with you." And so he did from that time forth.

V.xiii. 12. There was a monk of the Thebaid whose gift from God was to minister to the poor according to their need. It so happened once that when doing an agape somewhere a woman came in dressed in very shabby old clothes. Seeing her dressed so poorly impelled him to put his hand in his pocket and give her a considerable sum, but when he opened his hand it contained almost nothing. There was another woman there very well dressed and her clothing made him want to give her very little, but when he opened his hand it contained a large sum. After making enquiries about both the women he learned that the well dressed one was an honest woman who had fallen on very hard times and had been given the good clothing because of her family's reputation, whereas the other one had deliberately worn shabby clothing in the hope of being given more.

V.xiii. 13. A story the point of which is that if seculars give alms to monks the monks will bless them and the secular work of the almsgiver will prosper accordingly. V.xiii. 14. An old man told a story of how a certain person who gave alms frequently could be afflicted by the devil with so much scrupulosity in small things that he lose the reward due to him from all the others. It concerned a presbyter whom he was visiting in Oxyrinchus, who gave many free handouts. A widow came to him asking for a little wheat, and he told her to bring a standard measure back to him and he would fill it up. When she brought the measure however he complained to her that it was oversize, which made the widow feel very ashamed. After the widow had gone, the old man asked the presbyter, "Were you lending the widow that wheat, or what?" "No, it was a gift," he replied. And the old man said, "Well, if it was a totally free gift what was the point of your scruples about a trifling amount extra. All you achieved was to make her feel ashamed."

V.xiii. 15. There was a very kindhearted old man who lived a common life with one other brother. It happened that there was a famine and people began to come to him in the hope of receiving charity (agape), and the old man did indeed share his bread with all who came. When the brother saw what was

happening he said to the old man, "Let me have my share of the bread, and you can do what you like with yours." So the old man did indeed divide the bread up and continued to give some of it away as usual out of his share. Lots of people began to come, having heard that he was giving to everyone, and the Lord seeing how his mind was set blessed the bread. But the brother who had taken his share and was giving to no one soon ate it all and said to the old man, "Father, there is only a little bit left of my share of the bread. Can you take me back into a common life again?" "Just as you like," said the old man. And they began to live their common life again. Another shortage of food occurred and the needy came once more to beg alms (agape). And it happened one day that the brother went in and found that the bread supply was almost gone when a poor person came begging alms. The old man said to the brother, "Give him some bread," and the brother replied, "There isn't any, father." And the old man said, "Go in and make sure." The brother went in and looked, and found the place where the bread was kept full of bread. When he saw this he was dumbfounded and gave some bread to the poor person, and suddenly realised the faith and goodness of the old man, and he glorified God.

Libellus 14 Obedience

V.xiv. 1. Abba Arsenius of blessed memory once said to abba Alexander, "When you have used up all your palm leaves come to me and we shall have some food, but if any pilgrims turn up eat with them." Abba Alexander however was but a rather slow and indifferent worker and when the usual time for a meal came he still had some palms left. Wishing to fulfil what abba Arsenius had said, he kept on working in order to use his palms up. When abba Arsenius realised he hadn't turned up, he began the meal without him, thinking that perhaps some pilgrims had arrived and that he was eating with them. He didn't come back to abba Arsenius until Vespers were over and abba Arsenius said, "You had some pilgrims then?" "No," he said. "Why didn't you come then?" he asked. And he replied, "Because you said not to come until I had used up all my palms. So I kept in mind what you had said and didn't come because I was only half way through." The old man was very impressed by how exactly he had obeyed, and said, "You can stop your work now, and sing some psalms, and refresh yourself with some water lest your body suffers."

V.xiv. 2. While abba Abraham was visiting abba Arem and they were sitting down together, a brother came and said to abba Arem, "Tell me what I should

do to be walking on the path of salvation." And the old man said, "Go and spend a year waiting till after Vespers before eating your bread and salt, and then come back and I will talk to you," which he conscientiously did. After a year he came back to abba Arem and it so happened that abba Abraham was again with him at the time. Abba Arem said to the brother, "Go and fast for another year, eating only every other day." After he had gone abba Abraham said to abba Arem, "Why do you impose only light regimes on all the other brothers except this one whom you load up so heavily?" And the old man said, "Other brothers come and go, but this one is really searching for the word of God and works diligently. Whatever I tell him he carries out with the utmost care. So therefore I speak to him the word of God."

V.xiv. 3. It is said of abba John the Dwarf that he went to an old man of Thebes who at that time was living in the desert of Scete. This old man took a dry stick and planted it in the ground, saying, "Pour a jug of water around it each day until it bears fruit." The water was such a long way off that when he went to get it at a late hour he wouldn't get back till morning, but after three years the stick thrived and bore fruit. The old man took some of the fruit to the church and said to the brethren, "Have some of this and eat the fruit of obedience."

V.xiv. 4. John, the disciple of abba Paul was said to be of remarkable obedience. There were some tombs in a certain place frequented by a fierce lioness, and when abba Paul saw some of her droppings in that place he said to John, "Go and bring those droppings back here." "And what if I should see the lioness, father?" he asked. And the old man just smiled and said, "If it comes at you tie it up and bring it here." John went out that evening and there was the lioness coming towards him, but mindful of what the old man had said he rushed towards it trying to grab it. The lioness fled and he rushed after it, crying, "Wait! My abba has told me that I have to tie you up" And catch her and tie her up he did. The old man had been waiting for him for a long time and was beginning to get worried, when at last he came back, leading the lioness after him. The old man was amazed, but wishing to give him a lesson in humility he struck him a blow, and said, "Stupid! Why have you brought back this ridiculous dog to me?" And he loosed the lioness and let her go back to her own place.

V.xiv. 5. It was said of abba Silvanus that he had a disciple in Scete called Mark who copied ancient writings, and whose obedience was exemplary. Silvanus loved him for his obedience. He had eleven other disciples who were

however jealous because he loved Mark more than he loved them. When the neighbouring seniors heard about this they were annoyed that he should love one more than the others, so one day they went to visit Silvanus who came out of his cell and beckoning them to follow went and knocked on the door of each of his disciples in turn, saying, "Brother, can you come please? I need your help." And there wasn't one who came out immediately. He then knocked on Mark's door, and called him, "Mark!" And as soon as he heard the old man's voice he came out ready to do whatever job he was asked. So abba Silvanus said to the old men, "See now, where are the other brothers?" And going into Mark's cell he found a manuscript which he had just begun and had got only as far as a letter O. When he had heard the old man's voice he hadn't formed it completely, the pen had not been turned around the whole way in order to finish off the letter which he had started. And the old men said, "Truly, father, the one you love we must love too since it is obvious that he is beloved of God"

V.xiv. 6. The mother of this Mark, together with several companions, once came to visit him. Abba Silvanus went out to meet her and she asked him to ask Mark to come out so that she could see him. Silvanus went in and said to Mark, "Go out. Your mother wants to see you." So he put on an old sack, torn and patched, and put ashes and soot from the fire on his head and face, before fulfilling his obedience to his abba by going out. He greeted his mother and those with him with his eyes all screwed up and just said, "I hope you are well." No one, not even his mother, recognised him, so she went again to the old man and said, "Father, send my son out so that I can see him." Abba Silvanus said to Mark, "Didn't I tell you to go out and see your mother?" to which Mark replied, "But it was me who went out just now as you told me to, father, only please don't ask me to go out again lest I should seem to be disobedient to you." The old man went out again and said to the mother, "It was your son who came out to you just now and greeted you with the words; 'I hope you are well.'" With that she had to be satisfied, and so she made her departure.

V.xiv. 7. Four brothers dressed in skins once came from Scete to abba Pambo, and each of them spoke of the others' strong points while they were out of earshot. One of them fasted a lot, another had no possessions, another was brimming over with charity, but the fourth was said to have lived for twenty years in continuous obedience to the seniors. Abba Pambo said, "I tell you that this last one is greater than all the others, for each of the strong points of the

others is exercised without any denial of self will. This last, however, has mortified his self will (or 'ceased to follow his own bent?') and has made himself subject to the will of another. Such men are to be rated as 'confessors', if only they can persevere in this path till the end."

V.xiv. 8. Someone wanting to be a monk came to abba Sisois in Thebes, and Sisois asked him if he had any worldly responsibilities. "I have a son," he replied. "Go and throw him in the river," said the old man, "and then you can become a monk." As he went away intending to do this, the old man sent one of the brothers to prevent him doing so. The brother stopped him as he was on the point of throwing him in and said, "Wait! What do you think you are doing?" "The abba told me to throw him in," he replied. "Well, the abba has sent me to tell you not to," said the brother. So he left his son and went back to the abba, and became an exemplary monk because of his obedience.

V.xiv. 9. Holy Syncletica said, "We who live in community can prove to anybody that obedience is an even greater virtue than continence. For continence is always in danger of breeding arrogance, but obedience always brings humility in its train."

V.xiv. 10. Again she said, "We who live in community should discipline ourselves not to be always seeking to serve our own interests, or bend everything to our own will. Rather, living as exiles, we should have handed ourselves over to a single fatherland of faith, distancing ourselves from any worldly ways. Having left the world we should not feel the need for anything further from it. There we might have achieved fame. There we had luxury living. Here there is but a meagre supply of bread."

V.xiv. 11. Abba Hyperichius said, "Obedience is the chief work of the monk, for he who has it hears what is demanded of him and with complete trust adheres to the cross. The Lord himself endured the cross, having become obedient unto death."

V.xiv. 12. An old man said, "If you trust someone and give yourself to him in obedience, you need not concentrate on keeping the commandments of God, because as long as you commit yourself wholeheartedly to your spiritual father and obey him in everything, you are sure to be free from sin in God's eyes."

V.xiv. 13. An old man said, "What God requires of Christians is that they obey (or 'live by?') the divine Scriptures wherein they may find a model of how to speak and act, and to consent to the teachings of the orthodox fathers."

V.xiv. 14. A brother in Scete was on the way out at harvest time when he

approached an eminent old man and asked him, "Tell me father what shall I be doing in the harvesting?" And the old man said, "If I tell you will you do as I say?" "Yes, I will follow your instructions," replied the brother. And the old man said, "If you are willing to listen to me, don't go out to the harvesting but come with me and I will tell you what to do." So the brother turned back from going to harvest and went with the old man. And the old man said, "Go into your cell and spend fifty days without a break eating bread and salt once a day. Then come back and I will tell you what to do next." This he did, and so came back to the old man, who, knowing that this brother was a diligent workman, then told him how to conduct himself in his cell. The brother went to his cell and stretched himself out on the floor for three days and three nights, weeping in the sight of God, after which his thoughts said to him, "How greatly exalted you have now become," but he countered the wickedness of such thoughts by humbly calling to mind his frailty, saying; "And what about all the sins which I have committed?" And if the thought of how he had neglected the commandments of God threatened to overwhelm him he said, "Nevertheless I will do what little I can to serve God and I believe he will have mercy on me." In this way, he conquered the demons of his evil thoughts, until they visibly appeared to him, saying, "You have put us to confusion. When we praised you up to the heights you ran back to humility, and when we brought you down low you rose up on high."

Obedience (continued), Book V
(Humility begins further down page)

V.xiv. 15. The old men used to say, "God requires nothing from beginners except the labour of obedience.

V.xiv. 16. There was a certain solitary who was provided for by certain estates which he owned, and it so happened once that he began to run short of supplies because the steward of those estates hadn't turned up. When some time had passed and the steward still hadn't arrived, and both his food and the things he needed for his manual work had almost completely gone, he said to his disciple, "Would you mind if I asked you to go to my estates and tell my steward to bring our usual supplies?" And the disciple replied, "Of course, I'll do whatever you say." But the old man put it off for a while, being not really willing to send him. But after worrying and agonising about the steward's non-arrival for a while he said to his disciple, "Would you really be willing to go to

my estates and bring the steward back here?" "I'll do whatever you want." he said, even though he was rather perturbed at the idea of going to the estate for fear that he might be shocked by people. But he agreed to go for the sake of being obedient to the wishes of his spiritual father. So the old man said, "Go then, and trust in the God of your fathers who will protect you in all temptations." And they prayed together and off he went. When the brother arrived at the estate he enquired where the steward lived and found the house, where it so happened that the steward and everyone else had gone out except one of his daughters, who opened the door in answer to his knock. He asked to see her father, and she invited him to come inside, even putting her hand on his arm to draw him in. He did not really want to go in but her insistence at last prevailed and she began to touch him and invite him into bed. But he, confused in thought and seeing himself about to be enticed by lust groaned and cried out to God, saying, "Lord, by the prayers of my spiritual father set me free in this hour of need." As soon as he had said this he suddenly found himself by the river on the way to the monastery, and was reunited safely with his abba.

V.xiv. 17. Two brothers according to the flesh came to live in a monastery, one of whom excelled in abstinence, the other in obedience. The abbot would say to him, "Do this" and he would do it, "Do that" and he would do it, "Eat tomorrow" and he would. Because of this obedience of his he was held in high regard in the monastery. His abstemious brother however was pierced with the dagger of jealousy and said, "I'll test him, to see how obedient he really is." So he went to the abbot and asked him to let his brother be with him so that they could go out somewhere. And the abbot let them go. Going along with his abstemious brother he set about testing him. They came to a river infested with crocodiles and he said, "Go into the river and swim across." He went in immediately, and the crocodiles came and licked his body without doing him any harm. Seeing this, his brother cried, "Alright, get out again." Going on a bit further they came to a human body lying on the pathway, and the abstemious brother said, "If we had some sort of cloak we could have covered him over with it." And the obedient brother said; "Better still, let us pray and perhaps he will be all right." So they prayed earnestly and the dead came back to life. The abstemious brother seeing this praised God and said, "It's because of my abstinence that the dead has come back to life." It was all revealed by God to the abbot of their monastery how he had tested his brother by the crocodiles and how the dead was raised to life, and when they got back to the

monastery he said to the abstemious one, "Why did you treat your brother like that? See now, it was obedience which brought the dead to life."

V.xiv. 18. Another man living in the world with three sons joined the monastery, leaving his sons behind. And after he had been there three years, thoughts of his sons frequently began to fill his mind, making him feel very sad. Now he had not told the abbot that he had three sons, but when the abbot noticing his sadness asked him what the matter was he told him that he had these three sons and that he would like to bring them to the monastery with him, and the abbot granted his request. When he got back home he found that two of the sons had died and there was only one left whom he took back to the monastery with him. Asking for the abbot and not finding him he was told that he had gone to the pounding-mill, so taking his son with him he likewise went to the pounding-mill. The abbot saw him coming, and greeted him, taking the child and giving him a hug. "No doubt you love him?" said the abbot to the father. "Indeed, yes," he replied. "Are you really very fond of him?" the abbot asked. "Yes, I am," his father said. "Then if you love him take him and throw him in this oven," the abbot then said. Now the oven was very hot. And the father took his son and threw him into the oven, and the oven immediately became as cool as the refreshing dew. So they became glorious in their own lifetime, in the same manner as the patriarch Abraham.

V.xiv. 19. An old man said that the brother who gave his whole mind to being obedient to his spiritual father was worthy of a greater reward than one who lived alone in the desert. "One of the fathers," he said, "had discerned four orders in heaven, of which the first consisted of people who were not very strong but who constantly gave thanks to God, the second those who were given to hospitality and unremitting service, the third those who maintained their solitude apart from the rest of humanity, the fourth those who for God's sake gave themselves in obedience to their spiritual fathers. Those in this order of obedience wore a golden crown and neckband and excelled the others in glory. So I asked the father who had said these things, 'Why should this last order which is small in numbers excel the others in glory?' And he replied, 'Those who are given to hospitality follow their own will. Likewise those in the desert have separated themselves off from humanity by an act of their own will. But those who give themselves to obedience have denied their own will and depend solely on God and the directions of their spiritual father.

Therefore, they are given the greater glory. For all these reasons, my son, obedience entered into for God's sake is good. Take note therefore, all of you,

of all the various aspects of this virtue. Obedience is the salvation of all the faithful. Obedience is the root of all virtues. Obedience brings the kingdom of heaven into sight. Obedience opens the heavens and lifts human beings up from the earth. Obedience lives with the angels. Obedience is the food of all the saints. On this they were nursed and by this they arrived at perfection.

Libellus 15 Humility

V.xv. 1. Abba Antony, failing to understand the judgments of God, asked, "Lord, why is it that some die young, and others live to a ripe old age, and why are some incompetent while others abound in all manner of skills, and why are some people unjustly rich while others live in the extremes of poverty?" And a voice came to him saying, "Antony, mind your own business. It is not for you to understand all the judgments of God."

V.xv. 2. Abba Antony said to abba Pastor, "It is an enormous human task to arrive at acknowledging your guilt before God, and to accept that you will be tempted up to the last moment of life."

V.xv. 3. Again abba Antony said, "I saw all the snares of the ungodly set in place throughout the world, and I groaned and said, 'Who shall be able to pass through these?' And I heard a voice saying, 'Humility.'"

V.xv. 4. Some old men once came to abba Antony, among them abba Joseph. Wishing to test them abba Antony quoted some texts of Holy Scripture and began to ask the younger among them what they meant. And each one had something to say. But he replied to them all, "You're not quite there yet." Then he turned to abba Joseph and said, "What about you? How do you interpret this text?" And abba Joseph said, "I don't really know." And abba Antony replied, "Truly, abba Joseph is on the right path because he knows that he does not know."

V.xv. 5. The demons once came to abba Arsenius as he sat in his cell and greatly troubled him. When the brothers who usually ministered to him came and stood outside his cell they heard him crying out to God and saying, "Lord, do not abandon me for being of no worth in your sight, but of your great mercy at least show me how to make a beginning of a useful life."

V.xv. 6. It was said of Arsenius that when he lived in the Emperor's palace no one dressed more fashionably than he, and after he had been a monk for a while nobody dressed more meanly.

V.xv. 7. Abba Arsenius was once seeking advice about his thoughts from an

elderly Egyptian, and someone listening to this said, "Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with your vast scholarship in both Greek and Latin are seeking advice about your thoughts from this rustic?" And he replied, "I may have gathered a great deal of erudition in Greek and Latin according to a worldly view, but as for this rustic I haven't even begun yet to learn his ABC."

V.xv. 8. The old men told of how someone once gave a few figs to the brothers in Scete, but because they were so small they did not send any to abba Arsenius lest he should be insulted. But when he heard about this he absented himself from his usual attendance at the offering of the Opus Dei, saying, "You have excommunicated me by not sharing with me the gifts which the Lord has sent to the brethren and which I wasn't worthy to receive." They were all impressed by his humility, and the presbyter gladly took him some of the figs and welcomed him back into the congregation.

V.xv. 9. It was said of Arsenius that people found it difficult to grasp his way of life. Once when he was settled in the lower parts of Egypt he was greatly troubled by the unruliness of those about him, and was seen to abandon his cell. He said to his disciples Alexander and Zoilus, "Alexander, take a ship out of here, and Zoilus come with me to the river and find a ship for me going to Alexandria and then go along with your brother." Zoilus was very upset by this but had no answer to it, and so they all parted from each other. Arsenius departed to a place near Alexandria, where he fell seriously ill. In the meantime, his disciples began to wonder whether he had left them because of something they had done to upset him, but they could not find in themselves any ingratitude or disobedience towards him. When Arsenius had recovered from his illness he said to himself, "I will go back to my native land", and he came to a place called Petra where his two disciples were. But near the river, an Ethiopian woman grasped his cloak and he shook her off angrily. "If you are a monk, go back to the mountain," she said. Smitten by these words he too said to himself, "Arsenius, if you are a monk, go back to the mountain." At this point Alexander and Zoilus chanced upon him, and when they fell at his feet Arsenius also threw himself on the ground and they all wept together.

"Had you heard that I had been ill?" asked Arsenius. "Yes, we had heard," they replied. "Why didn't you come and seek me out, then?" he asked. "Because we were angry that you had left us," they answered, "though many disappointed people were beginning to say that you wouldn't have left us if we hadn't been disobedient to you." And the old man said, "Yes, I thought people would say that. But in future they will be able to say, 'The dove, finding no rest for her

feet flew back to Noah in the ark' (Genesis 8.9). By these words the minds of his disciples were healed, and they remained with him to the end of his life. When he was dying they were very distressed. But he said, "I'm not dead yet - I will tell you when the time has come. And I will hold you responsible before the judgment seat of Christ if you allow anyone to have anything to do with my body." "What should we do, then?" they asked. "For we don't know anything about laying out the dead and burying them." "Surely you would know how to tie a rope around my feet and drag me up the mountain?" he said. When he was at the point of giving up his spirit they saw him weeping and said, "Surely you are not frightened of death, father?" they asked. "I am indeed afraid," he said, "because the flaws that made me want to become a monk are still in me." And saying this, he peacefully fell asleep. One of his favourite sayings was, "Why have you come? I have often had to repent of what I have said, but never of keeping silent." When abba Pastor heard that Arsenius had departed this life he wept and said, "Blessed art thou, Arsenius, for you grieved in this present world. Anyone who grieves not in this world will assuredly weep in the next. We cannot avoid grief, either willingly in this world or goaded by torment in the next."

V.xv. 10. Abba Daniel said of abba Arsenius that he was never very willing to talk about Scripture, though he could do so magnificently when he wanted to, nor was he prompt in writing letters to anyone. When he came back into the assembly after a considerable absence he would sit behind a column, so that no one could see him and he would not need to see them. His was angelic of expression, like Jacob, a handsome creature, elegant of body though spare and lean. He had a long beard reaching down to his waist, his eyelashes were all worn away from much weeping, he was tall though very bent in old age, and he died at the age of ninety-five. He spent forty years in the palace of the Emperor Theodore of blessed memory, the father of Arcadius and Honorius, forty years in Scete, ten years in a place called Trohen near Babylon by the city of Memphis, three years in Canopus near Alexandria before returning again to Trohen, completing his course of life in peace and the fear of God. He was a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

V.xv. 11. Abba John described how abba Anub and abba Pastor, together with his brothers according to the flesh, were monks in Scete when the Mazici invaded and laid the place waste, whereupon they left and went to a place called Therenuthum until they could decide where they were going to live. And they stayed for a while in an old temple. Abba Anub said to abba Pastor,

"Let us each live our own lives this week, you and your brothers too, if you would kindly agree to that, but let us all come together again in a week's time." Abba Pastor said, "Let's do as you wish," and so they did. Now there was a stone statue in that place and every morning when Anub got up he threw stones at it and every evening he begged the statue's forgiveness. He did this for the whole week until on the Saturday they all met together. And abba Pastor said to abba Anub, "I have watched you, abba, throwing stones at the face of that statue all week and then begging the statue's forgiveness. Why is a man of the faith doing that?" And the old man replied, "When you saw me throwing stones at the face of that statue, did it speak to me, or get angry at all?" "No, it didn't" said abba Pastor. "And again when I begged forgiveness from it did it rant at me and refuse forgiveness?" "No." "Well then if we seven brothers wish to stay together we ought to be like that statue which took no offence when ill treated. But if we don't want that, well, there are four doors to this temple. Anyone who wishes to go has got a choice as to which one he uses." When they heard this they threw themselves at abba Anub's feet and said, "Whatever you wish, father, so be it. We will do whatever you say." In later life abba Pastor reflected on this saying, "We remained together for the rest of our life working and living according to the old man's directions. One of us was made cellarer, and we ate whatever it was he gave us. None of us could say, "Bring me something different" or "I don't want to eat that." And so we passed out time in peace and quietness.

V.xv. 12. The story is told of abba Ammon that two women came to him asking him to judge between them, but the old man hid. And one of them said to the other standing next to her, "This old man is just a waste of time." He overheard her, however, and coming out to her said, "How much toil do you think I have undergone in various solitary places in order to acquire this wastefulness, and because of you today I have lost it."

V.xv. 13. The story is told of Affy, the bishop of Oxyrinchus that as a monk he had lived a very austere life. He tried to continue with this straitened existence in the city just as he had done previously in the desert, but found it impossible. So he prostrated himself in the sight of God and said, "O Lord, now that I am a bishop have you withdrawn your grace from me?" And it was revealed to him, "Not at all, but when you were in solitude with no human company God was your only support; now that you are back in the world, your help is mediated to you by other human beings."

V.xv. 14. Abba Daniel told a story about a distinguished citizen of Babylon

whose daughter was possessed of a devil. A friend of his who was a monk told him that no one could cure his daughter except some solitaries that he knew, but that if asked they would refuse out of humility. "But what we could do," he said, "is to say you wanted to buy some of their goods when next they bring them here to sell. When they come into the house to get the money then ask them to pray and I am sure your daughter will be healed." Going out into the market place they found a disciple of one of the old men sitting in front of the baskets he was selling, and they asked him back to the house as if to receive the money for some baskets. As soon as they went inside the devil-possessed daughter gave the monk a box on the ear. His response was to offer her the other cheek, according to the divine command, and the devil, conquered, began to shout, "Oh! Murder! the commands of Jesus Christ have driven me out!" And the daughter was healed in that self-same hour. When the disciple got back he told his abba everything that had happened, and they glorified God, saying, "The pride of the devil can always be conquered by the humility of the commands of Jesus Christ

V.xv. 15. Abba Evagrius said, "The beginning of salvation is to distrust your own arguments."

V.xv. 16. Abba Serapion said, "I have performed many more feats of abstinence (lit. 'bodily labours') than my son Zacharias, but I haven't got anywhere near him in humility and silence."

V.xv. 17. Abba Moses said to Brother Zacharias, "You should really be giving me some instructions." At these words Zacharias threw himself on the ground before him and said, "You're asking me, father?" And the old man said, "Believe me, my son, I have seen the Holy Spirit coming down on you, and because of that I am led to ask you for advice." Zacharias took the cowl from off his head, threw it down and trampled on it, saying, "Unless you are trampled on like this you cannot be a monk."

V.xv. 18. Abba Pastor said that when Brother Zacharias was dying abba Moses asked him, "Can you see anything?" "Nothing better than to keep silence father," the brother replied. "How true, my son," said Moses. "Say nothing." Abba Isidore was with him when he died, and he looked up to heaven and said, "Rejoice, my son Zacharias, for I have seen the doors of the kingdom of heaven open up to you."

V.xv. 19. Theophilus of blessed memory, bishop of Alexandria, once went to Mount Nitria where he was met by the Abbot (or, 'an abba'), to whom he said, "What have you found to be the most important thing in this sort of life,

father?" And the old man replied, "To blame and berate myself unceasingly." And the bishop said, "There can't be a better path to follow than that."

V.xv. 20. When abba Theodore ate with the brethren, they drank wine (lit. accepted the chalices) in silence and with reverence, and without the usual apology (lit. nor did anyone say Pardon, according to the custom.)

V.xv. 21. They said of this same abba Theodore that when he was chosen to be the Deacon in Scete he ran about from place to place, trying to escape from this ministry. But the old men summoned him and said, "Don't turn your back on this ministry." Abba Theodore said, "Well, let me go and pray to God about it, and if I am shown that it is my duty to take this on I will do it." And he prayed to God, saying, "Show me, O Lord, if it is your will that this ministry is for me." And he was shown a column of fire reaching from earth up to heaven, and he heard a voice, saying, "If you can be like this column of fire, go, minister." At these words he immediately decided that he couldn't possibly be a minister. But when he came back to the church they told him that they would be very upset if he wouldn't be ordained to administer the chalice. He wouldn't agree however, and said, "If you don't stop worrying me about it I shall have to leave this place." And so they left him alone.

V.xv. 22. Abba John the Dwarf said, "The gateway to God is humility. Our fathers lived through many humiliations and have entered with joy into the city of God. Humility and the fear of God are greater than all the other virtues."

V.xv. 23. Abba John of Thebes said, "Above all the monk should be humble, for the first of the Saviour's charges is, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matt.5.3)

V.xv. 24. Once when some brothers in Scete were meeting together without having thought to ask abba Copres they began to argue about the priesthood of Melchisedec. Eventually they did invite abba Copres to give his opinion on this question, and he tapped his mouth with his finger three times and said, "Woe to you Copres, for you have often left undone what God requires of you, and now you presume to scrutinise what God does not require of you." At this the brothers fled each one to his cell.

V.xv.25. Abba Macarius told this tale about himself, "When I was a young man in my cell in Egypt, they took me and made me the cleric for the village. But I didn't want that and fled to another neighbourhood. There I was joined by a devout secular who shared with me the labour of the manual work I was doing and helped me in everything. Now it so happened that a young woman

in that place being tempted by the devil was corrupted and fell. And when her pregnancy became obvious she was asked who the father was and she replied, 'It was that solitary who slept with me.' They rushed out of the town, seized me, dragged me back to the town, hung bags of excrement around my neck, and made me go right through the town, beating me as I went, and crying, 'This is the monk who corrupted our daughter. Get rid of him! Get rid of him!' (tollite) And they beat me nearly to death, until one of the older men intervened saying, 'How much longer are you going to go on beating this pilgrim monk?' Now the man who lived with me had followed on behind me in some distress, for people had turned on him too, shouting, 'You supported this solitary monk and look what he has done!' And when the parents of the girl said, 'We can't let him go till he can produce someone who will guarantee the girl's support', this man stepped forward as my guarantor and swore an oath on my behalf. We went back to the cell, where I gave him all the baskets I had and told him to sell them and give the money to 'my wife'. For I had already said to myself, 'Macarius, seeing you seem to have got yourself a wife, you will have to work twice as hard in order to feed her.' And I worked night and day for her support. When the time came for her to give birth she spent several days in labour with no result. 'What is the reason for this?' they wondered. 'I know why I am suffering thus,' she said. Her parents asked her why and she replied, 'It's because I laid the blame for this on that monk and falsely accused him when it wasn't his fault at all.' And she named the youth who was really responsible. When my companion heard about this he came to me with great joy and said, 'That girl was unable to give birth until she had confessed that you were not to blame in the matter, and that she had lied about you. And all the inhabitants of the town have decided to come out to you here, to give thanks to God and to make amends to you.' When I heard this I immediately got up and fled here to Scete, for fear that I should be once again importuned by people, and that is the main reason why I began to live here."

Humility (continued), Book V

V.xv. 26. Once when abba Macarius was walking back from the marsh with some palm leaves, the devil met him armed with a reaping hook with which he tried to cut him down but failed. "I suffer great injury because of you, Macarius," he said, "for I am never able to prevail against you. I tell you, whatever you do I am forced to do also. For when you fast, I get no bread, when you keep vigil I can't sleep. And it is one single thing of yours which

beats me." "Oh? And what's that?" said Macarius. "Your humility," said the devil. "That's where I lose."

V.xv. 27. Abba Mathois of Raythum once visited Gebalon with his brother, and the bishop of that place came to this famous man and ordained him presbyter. And while they were eating together the bishop said, "I'm sorry, father. I know you didn't really want me to do this, but I ventured to do so as I wanted your blessing." The old man humbly said, "It's something I hardly expected, and the worst thing about it is that I shall be compelled to part from my brother, and I'm sure I shan't be able to say by myself all the prayers which we usually say together." Well, I'll ordain him too," said the bishop, "if you think he is worthy of it." "Whether he is worthy of it I know not," said abba Mathois. "All I do know is that he is better than I am." So the bishop ordained him as well, but they distanced themselves from the honour of that kind of life and never actually approached the altar to offer the holy sacrifice. For the old man said, "I trust that God won't judge me harshly for not daring to fulfil my ordination by consecrating the oblations. That task is for those who live without reproach."

V.xv. 28. Abba Matthois said, "When people come close to God all they can see is their own sin. When Isaiah the prophet saw God all he could say was, 'Woe is me, for I am a person of unclean lips'" (Isaiah 6.5)

V.xv. 29. It was said of abba Moyses that when he was ordained and they vested him with the superhumeral, the Archbishop said to him, "See, abba Moyses, you've been made white." "Inside or outside, do you think?" said Moyses. Wishing to test him, the Archbishop said to the other clerics, "When Moyses tries to go to the altar, drive him out, but follow him and listen to what he has got to say about it." So they began to drive him out saying, "Get out of here, you Ethiopian." As he went he said to himself, "You are only being given what you deserve, you creature of earth and filth. You are scarcely human yourself, so how can you dare to intrude yourself among people?"

V.xv. 30. When abba Pastor was in the monastery, he asked the Abbot if he could see abba Nestoro, of whom he had heard a great deal. But the Abbot was unwilling to send him there alone and would not allow it. After a few days however, the cellarer of the monastery asked if he could go and see abba Nestoro for spiritual advice and the Abbot gave permission saying, "Take this other brother with you who also asked to see abba Nestoro. I refused him before because I didn't want to send him alone. When the cellarer was with abba Nestoro he opened his mind to him and the abba helped him greatly in

what he replied. Then abba Pastor spoke to the old man, saying, "Abba Nestoro, how did you find the strength to suffer a great deal of trial and tribulation once in the monastery without complaint or discouragement?" It took a lot of persuasion, but at length the old man said, "Forgive me (if you think I am boasting), father, but when I joined the monastery I said to myself, "You and the ass are one. Just as an ass is beaten and says nothing, suffers all sorts of indignities and does not retaliate, so should you be like that, as it is written in the psalms, 'I am become as it were a beast before thee, nevertheless I am always by thee' (Psalm 73.22).

V.xv. 31. It was said of abba Olympius in Scete that he was a slave and took what he had earned each year to his masters in Athens. They would meet him and greet him, but the old man poured water into a basin to wash their feet. But they would say, "No, father, you embarrass us." And he would reply, "But I declare that being your slave I am so thankful that you have released me to serve God. So I wash your feet, and bring you my earnings." But they wouldn't have it. In reply to their refusal he said, "If you won't accept my earnings there would be nothing for it but to remain here and continue as your slave." So then they respected his wishes and said, "All right, have it your own way." And in their turn they treated him as an honoured guest, and provided him with what was necessary for him to do an agape with them. For this he became famous throughout Scete.

V.xv. 32. Abba Pastor said, "You should constantly breathe an atmosphere of humility and the fear of God, like the air which you breathe in and out."

V.xv. 33. Abba Pastor was asked by a brother, "How should I conduct myself in the place where I live?" And the old man replied, "Take care to be like a pilgrim, and don't imagine that what you say is of any importance where you live, and be content."

V.xv. 34. Again he said, "To humble yourself in the eyes of God, not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, and to thrust away your own will from you - these are the tools by which the soul operates."

V.xv. 35. Again he said, "Don't measure yourself by your own standards, but by someone who is known to live a good life."

V.xv. 36. Again he said that a brother asked abba Alonius how he understood the word 'contempt'. And he answered, "Put yourself on a lower level than the irrational beasts while realising that they cannot be adjudged blameworthy."

V.xv. 37. Again he said, "Humility is the ground on which the Lord demands that sacrifices be made."

V.xv. 38. Again he said, "If you know your own place you will not be upset.

V.xv. 39. Again he said, "Abba Alonius was the server at table once for the seniors, and they praised the way he did it. But he made no reply. Afterwards somebody asked him why he had not replied and he said, "If I had replied to them it would have seemed that I was taking pleasure in their praises."

V.xv. 40. Abba Joseph said, "Once when we sitting with abba Pastor he referred to Agathon as an abba, and we said, 'He is only a youngster. What are you calling him an abba for?' And abba Pastor said, 'it is what comes out of his mouth that earns him the title Abba.'"

V.xv. 41. It was said of abba Pastor that he never spoke while any other old man was speaking, but always appreciated what anyone else said.

V.xv. 42. Once when Theophilus of blessed memory, bishop of Alexandria, visited Scete, the gathered brethren said to abba Pambo, "Say something to him so that he will be impressed by us here." And the old man replied, "If he is not impressed by my silence he is not likely to be impressed by what I might say."

V.xv. 43. Abba Pystus told of how he and six other solitary brothers went to visit abba Sisois in the Isle of Clysmatus, asking him to give them some spiritual counsel. Sisois begged to be excused on the grounds that he was not sufficiently learned, but told them how he had once visited abba Hor and abba Athre. Abba Hor had at that time reached an infirm old age of eighty-eight. When he asked them to give him some counsel abba Hor said, "I doubt whether I have anything worth saying to you. But watch what we do, if you want an example to follow." Now abba Athre was famed for his obedience, abba Hor for his humility, and Sisois spent some days with them to watch these virtues in practice. He saw abba Athre do something quite remarkable. Someone had brought them one small fish, and abba Athre wanted to prepare it for abba Hor. He had picked up the knife and began to cut it open when abba Hor called him, "Athre! Athre!" He left the knife inside the fish immediately without finishing the task, and ran to abba Hor. I was astonished at his obedience. He hadn't even said, 'Wait until I have finished cutting this fish up.' Sisois said to abba Athre, "Where do you get this obedience from?" to which he replied, "He's the obedient one, not me."

And he beckoned me and said, "Come with me, and you will see how obedient he is." So he deliberately burnt some of the fish in the cooking of it, and gave it to abba Hor, who ate it saying nothing. "Is it all right, old man?" asked Athre. "Yes, very nice." said Hor. Then he took him another little piece,

very well cooked indeed, and said, "Look, I've spoiled this, old man. I burnt it." and he replied; "Yes, it has turned out rather badly." Abba Athre turned to Sisois and said, "Now do you see how obedient this old man is?" After leaving them Sisois tried himself to follow what they did to the best of his ability.

When abba Sisois had finished telling the seven brothers this story one of them said, "Be kind to us and give us a word of your own." And he said, "There is no end to what you must learn if you are to fulfil all the Scriptures." Another one of them said, "How do you define pilgrimage, father?" And he replied; "Silence - And wherever you go, say to yourself, 'I am of no importance here.' That's what pilgrimage is."

V.xv. 44. A brother came to abba Sisois in abba Antony's mountain and in the course of conversation he asked, "Do you think you have now arrived where abba Antony got to, father?" And he replied, "If even one of my thoughts were like those of abba Antony I would by now have become like fire all through. But I do know a man who after immense labour has learned to discipline his thoughts."

V.xv. 45. The same brother asked him, "Do you think that the devil persecutes us in the same way as he did the ancients?" "Much more," said Sisois. "For he knows that the end is approaching and he is worried."

V.xv. 46. To some others who came to him asking for a word he said nothing but; "No. I'm sorry" over and over again. Seeing some baskets there, they asked Abraham his disciple how they disposed of them, and he replied, "We send them out sometimes locally, sometimes elsewhere." Sisois overheard this and said, "And I gather in sometimes locally, sometimes from elsewhere." Hearing this they were greatly edified by his humility and went away satisfied.

V.xv. 47. A brother said to abba Sisois, "It seems to me that my memory is totally fixed on God." And the old man said, "To have your mind fixed on God is not such a great thing as to see yourself below every other creature. It is physical work which encourages this and leads you to humility."

V.xv. 48. Amma Syncletica of blessed memory said, "Just as you can't build a ship without nails, so it is impossible for human beings to be saved without humility."

V.xv. 49. Abba Hyperichius said, "The Tree of Life is in the heavens, and the humility of the monk reaches up to it."

V.xv. 50. He also said, "Imitate the publican lest you be condemned like the Pharisee. And cultivate the gentleness of Moyses, purging the pride in your

heart and turning to the fountains of living waters."

V.xv. 51. Abba Orsisius said, "If you put a broken bit of unbaked tile into your foundations near a river it won't last a single day, but once it is baked it becomes like stone. Someone with any amount of worldly knowledge is like this until baked in the fire of temptation, and it is a good thing for anyone who knows his limitations, and at first sinks under the weight of them, to stand steadfast in the faith, like Joseph, as the word of God explains. Joseph was greatly tempted in the midst of the people where he lived, and if you want to praise him think of how he was an alien, greatly tempted, in a distant land where there were no visible signs of the worship of God. But the god of his fathers was with him, who brought him through all his troubles, and is now with his fathers in the kingdom of heaven. We too, aware of our limitations, can be quite sure that we can never flee from the righteousness of God."

V.xv. 52. There was a solitary old man living in the desert with no obligations to anyone, who thought within himself that he had developed his virtues to near perfection. And he prayed to God, "Show what to do in order to prove my virtues, and I will do it." Wishing to humiliate him in his thinking, God said to him, "Go to the archimandrite and do whatever he tells you." In the meantime, before he got there, God warned the archimandrite, saying, "See, there is this solitary coming to you. Tell him to take a stick and go and feed the pigs." The old man went to the archimandrite, knocked at his door and went in. After their greetings, they sat down and the old man said, "Tell me what I must do in order to continue on the path of salvation." "Will you do whatever I tell you?" said the archimandrite. "Yes, I will," he replied. "Take a stick and go and feed the pigs," said the archimandrite. People who knew him or had heard of him saw him feeding the pigs and said, "Have you seen this famous solitary we have heard so much about? He's gone off his head, tormented by demons, feeding the pigs." And God saw his humility and how patiently he bore people's insults, and allowed him to go back to his own place.

V.xv. 53. A certain old solitary monk was struck on the cheek by someone possessed of a demon and foaming at the mouth. But he immediately turned the other cheek, and the demon, unable to bear his humility, departed from him.

V.xv. 54. And old man said, "When thoughts of pride and exaltation come into your mind, examine your conscience as to whether you have kept the commandments, loved your enemies, rejoiced when your enemy succeeds, mourned when he is brought low, accepted yourself as an unprofitable servant

and worse than all other sinners. If you have accepted these things about yourself, then you have made amends for everything else, knowing that thoughts of this kind are a universal remedy."

V.xv. 55. An old man said, "Do not set yourself up against your brother, claiming that you are more abstinent or reliable or intelligent than he. Be subject to the grace of God in the spirit of poverty and unfeigned charity, lest puffed up by the spirit of pride you lose all the fruit of your previous labours. Stay in Christ, preserved in spiritual salt."

V.xv. 56. An old man said, "Anyone who is praised or honoured above what he is worth runs a greater risk of being brought low, but he who has no reputation at all among men will in the end be lifted up."

V.xv. 57. A brother asked an old man, "Is it a good thing to be eager to do penance?" And the old man said, "We have been told that it was when Joshua the son of Nun was prostrate on his face that God appeared to him."

V.xv. 58. An old man was asked why it is that we are plagued with demons and he replied that it is because we have thrown away our armour of accepting insults with humility and poverty and patience.

V.xv. 59. A brother asked an old man, "If a brother from outside comes to me wanting to tell me his thoughts, should I tell him not to do so?" "Yes," said the old man, "for you are not your brother's keeper, and furthermore if you were to tell him not to do something, you never know but what you might find yourself falling into the same fault. It should be sufficient for him that you wish to preserve your silence."

V.xv. 60. An old man was asked to define humility and he said it consisted in forgiving your brother from your heart, even before he had apologised.

V.xv. 61. And old man said, "In every trial don't blame your brother but only yourself, saying, 'It is because of my own sins that this trial has come upon us.'"

V.xv. 62. An old man said, "I have never been ambitious to seek a higher place, nor have I been upset if I have been put down. I have set my whole mind on praying to God that he would kill the old man in me."

V.xv. 63. A brother asked an old man, "How do you define humility?" and the old man replied, "Blessing those who persecute you." "But what if you can't rise to those heights?" the brother asked. "Just walk away and choose to say nothing," he replied.

V.xv. 64. A brother asked an old man how a pilgrim should behave, and the old man said, "I know a pilgrim brother who went into a church where it so

happened that they were having an agape and he sat down at a table to eat with the brothers. Some of those present said, 'Who invited you in? Get up and get out.' So he got up and went. Others were angry because he was sent out, and they went out after him and called him back. Later on he was asked how he had felt when first of all he was driven out and then called back in again, and he replied, 'I simply thought of myself to a pet dog who goes out when it is told and comes back when it is told.'

V.xv. 65. Some people once came to an old man in Thebes, bringing with them someone possessed by a devil for the old man to cure. The old man wrestled with the demon for some time, and then said, "Depart as God commands." "I will go," said the demon, "but first give me the answer to this question. Who are the sheep and who are the goats?" And the old man said, "The goats are people like me, but as to who the sheep are, only God knows that." Hearing this, the demon cried with a loud voice, "It's your humility which drives me out." And he departed in the self-same hour.

V.xv. 66. There was a certain monk from Egypt who was staying in the outskirts of Constantinople, when the emperor Theodosius the younger came by that way, and he left all those in his retinue and went and knocked on the monk's door. The monk opened the door, didn't recognise him as the Emperor, but asked him in thinking that he was an army officer. They prayed together and sat down. The Emperor then began to ask him about the monks in Egypt, and the old man said, "They all pray for your wellbeing." Looking about the cell to see what was in it, the Emperor could see nothing but a small basket of bread and a jug of water. But the monk said to him, "Come, let us have some refreshment." And he put out some bread with some oil and salt for him to eat and some water to drink. The Emperor then said to him, "Do you know who I am?" and the old man said; "No, but the Lord does." "I am the Emperor Theodosius," he said. At once the old man humbly bowed before him, and the Emperor said, "Blessed are you, for your life is secure, and you have no dealings with the world. I tell you truly, born though I am to the imperial throne, I have never enjoyed food and drink as much as I have this day. I have had enough and more than enough." And he tried after that to bestow some honour on the old man, but he went back to Egypt.

V.xv. 67. The old men used to say, "The more we are tempted, the more we are humiliated, but God seeing our weakness protect us. If we get conceited, however, he takes away his protection from us and we perish."

V.xv. 68. The devil once appeared to a brother in the guise of an angel of light

and said to him, "I am the angel Gabriel and I have been sent to you." But he said, "Just check whether it isn't somebody else that you have been sent to, for I am not worthy to have an angel sent to me." And the devil immediately disappeared.

V.xv. 69. And they also said, "If it really is an angel who appears to you, don't believe it too readily, but humble yourself and say, "Because of my sins I am not worthy see angels."

V.xv. 70. It was said of another old man that being tempted of demons while sitting in his cell, they openly appeared to him, but he spurned them. When the devil saw that he had been beaten he appeared again saying, "I am Christ." When the old man saw him he shut his eyes. "I am Christ, so why do you shut your eyes?" the devil said. And the old man replied, "It is in the next life that I hope to see Christ, not this." And hearing this the devil disappeared.

V.xv. 71. The demons said to another old man they wanted to lead astray, "Would you like to see Christ?" But he said, "To hell with you and what you say. For I believe what Christ has already said, 'If anyone should say to you, Lo here is Christ, or Lo there, believe him not (Matthew 24.23).'" And the devil immediately disappeared.

V.xv. 72. It was said of another old man that he fasted for seventy weeks, eating only once a week, asking God to reveal to him the meaning of a certain section of the Holy Scriptures, but when God revealed nothing to him he said to himself, "I have taken all this labour upon myself and gained nothing. I'll go to my brother and ask him about it." As soon as he had gone out and shut the door behind him an angel was sent to him who said, "The seventy weeks you have fasted have not brought you a scrap nearer God. But now that you have humbled yourself to go off and ask your brother I have been sent to tell you the meaning." And having explained to him what he was asking about, he disappeared.

V.xv. 73. An old man said, "If with humility and in the fear of God you enjoin your brother to do anything it will be as a word coming from God and will make your brother willing to do what you have asked. But if you think you can order your brother about, not in the fear of God but on your own authority, wishing to exercise power, God who sees the secrets of every heart will not help the brother to hear what is asked of him or to do it. It is easy to tell what is enjoined according to the will of God and what springs merely from self-will or the exercise of power. For what comes from God is asked in humility and with prayer; what comes from the exercise of power comes with anger

and turmoil, as is natural when it comes from the devil.

V.xv. 74. I would rather be conquered in a spirit of humility than to prevail in a spirit of pride.

V.xv. 75. An old man said, "Don't look down on your companion, for you don't really know who it is who has the Spirit, he or you. By 'companion' I mean your 'servant'."

V.xv. 76. A brother asked an old man whether it would be right to say anything if he found that the behaviour of some of the brothers among whom he lived was unacceptable. And the old man said, "If they are older than you, or of the same age, you will find that silence will bring you greater peace, in that by making yourself smaller than they you will be on firmer ground." "But I am very upset inside, father," said the brother. "So what should I do?" "If you feel you must do something about it," said the old man, "offer a humble rebuke once. But if they won't listen, hand the matter over into the hand of God; he will bring you consolation. In doing this, God's workman is brought closer to God through the denial of his own will. But take care that your concern is really in accordance with the will of God. And in any case as far as I can see, it is always good to keep silence. Silence brings you humility."

V.xv. 77. A brother asked an old man what was the way for a person to make progress. And the old man replied, "You can only make progress through humility. The more you bend down in humility, the more you are raised up in progress."

V.xv. 78. And old man said, "Whenever anyone humbles himself and apologises, the devil of temptation burn."

V.xv. 79. If you have the gift of silence you won't take credit for possessing any of the virtues even if you do have them, for you will say, 'I am not qualified to speak about that!'

V.xv. 80. An old man said, "If the miller does not blindfold the animal turning his millstone round, the animal will turn and eat all the fruits of his labours. Similarly we should not contemplate all the good things we have done by the dispensation of God, lest we think we are saints and lose our reward. When we observe such thoughts we should condemn ourselves as we justly deserve, and it is that thought which will serve as a blindfold in respect of our few good works. When you accuse yourself you are in no danger of losing your reward."

Humility (continued), Book V

(Patience begins further down page, and Charity further down still)

V.xv. 81. An old man said, "I would rather be taught than teach. Don't teach before you are ready, otherwise the whole tenor of your life will be diminished intellectually."

V.xv. 82. One old man when asked about humility said that this great and godlike work consisted in undertaking bodily labour, remembering that you are a sinner, and considering yourself to be the least of people, in that you pay no attention to the sins of others, but be aware of your own and pray to God without ceasing."

V.xv. 83. A brother asked an old man if he could be given one precept which he could keep and live by. And the old man said, "It is a great thing above all if you can put up with suffering insults."

V.xv. 84. An old man said, "He who can put up with contempt and insults and condemnation is on the way to salvation."

V.xv. 85. An old man said, "Don't draw the abbot's attention to yourself, or have too much to do with him, lest you get presumptuous and begin wishing that you held that position."

V.xv. 86. There was a certain brother in the community who took upon himself all the burdens which threatened the well being of the others, even going so far as to accuse himself of sexual sins. Unaware of why he did this the other brothers began to murmur about him, saying, "Look at all the things he does wrong and doesn't seem to do anything about it." The abbot however understood what was going on and said to the brothers, "I would rather have one wretch who is humble than all the rest who are proud." And in order to demonstrate by a judgment of God what this brother was like he took some of each one's work, together with the mat of the one they were complaining about, and threw them all in the fire. The works of the others were consumed but the brother's mat came through unharmed. When they saw this, the brothers were awed, and apologised, and from then onwards held him in the same esteem as the abbot.

V.xv. 87. An old man was asked how it was that some people could say that they gazed at the faces of the angels, and the old man said that it was better to look at your own sins.

V.xv. 88. A certain brother who heard that another brother was angry with him went to see him to try and explain, but he found the brother's door was closed to him. So he went to one of the old men, who said to him, "You should

realise that however justified your complaint may be, in blaming him and condemning him you are thereby justifying yourself, and because of that his heart is not moved by God to open his door to you. What I am telling you is true, that even if he has sinned against you, bear in mind that you may have sinned against him. Make excuses for him, and then perhaps God will put it into his heart to be friendly to you." And by way of an example he told them this story - (Here follows a long story about three monks who "castrated themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" but were condemned by their Archbishop for so doing. So they went to three other bishops to try and get them on their side, including the "highest Archbishop, the Patriarch of the city of Rome" who also condemned them. Concluding that they were all simply just "sticking together" they decided to go to a solitary who had a reputation for prophecy, who also condemned them. He was able to convince them they were wrong, and so they went back to their Bishop and confessed their sins, who then received them back into communion.) Hearing this, he went back and knocked at his brother's door again, who opened up as soon as he heard him, before he had even had time to apologise, and they embraced each other whole-heartedly, and made a lasting peace with each other.

V.xv. 89. There were two monks living together who were brothers according to the flesh, and the devil wanted to separate them. Once when the younger of the two lit the lamp and put it on the lampstand, a demon intervened and knocked it over. The elder brother was angry and struck him, but he apologised and said, "I'm sorry, brother. I'll light it again." And the presence of God came down among them and tormented that demon till morning. When the demon reported to his master what had happened he was overheard by a pagan priest who immediately went out and became a monk. And from the beginning of his conversion he grasped hold of humility, saying, "Humility overcomes all the power of the devil, for I have overheard them saying, 'When we stir up strife among monks and one of them apologises all our power is as naught.'"

Libellus 16 Patience

V.xvi. 1. The brothers told how abba Gelasius possessed a parchment codex worth eighteen shillings (solidi) containing the complete Old and New Testaments, which he put in the church so that any of the brothers who wanted to could read it. Gelasius was visited by a certain pilgrim brother who saw the

codex, coveted it, stole it, and hastily departed. But the old man did not chase after him to get it back even though he knew what had happened. The thief went into the city and after a bit of a search he found a prospective purchaser from whom he asked sixteen shillings. The purchaser wished to compare it with others and asked if he could borrow it first in order to show it to somebody else before giving the price asked for. So the thief gave him the codex, which he then took to abba Gelasius to find out whether it was a good codex and worth the price which was being asked for it. He told the abba the price, and the old man replied; "Buy it. It's a good book and worth the price." So he went back to the vendor and told him a different story from what he had heard from the old man, saying, "I showed this to abba Gelasius and he said you were too dear. It's not worth what you are asking." "Didn't he say anything else to you except that?" asked the thief. "Nothing at all," was the reply. Somewhat shaken, the thief said, "I don't think I want to sell it now", and he went back to Gelasius in a very penitent frame of mind, begging him to take the codex back. The old man demurred, however, so the brother said, "I simply can't feel at ease unless you do take it back." The old man said, "Well if it makes you feel happy I will take it back." And the brother stayed with him for the rest of his life, profiting greatly from the old man's patience (long-suffering).

V.xvi. 2. Abba Evagrius once made a speech at a meeting in the Cells, after which the presbyter of the monastery said to him, "If you were in your native land, abba Evagrius, we are quite sure you would be made a bishop, a leader of many people, but here you are among us as a pilgrim." Rather embarrassed, but quite calm, Evagrius bowed his head, looked at the ground and wrote with his finger, saying, "For all that I made a speech, yet there was nothing in it which added anything to the plain truth of Scripture."

V.xvi. 3. Once when abba John the Dwarf was sitting outside the church surrounded by brothers asking him about their thoughts, one of the old men moved by jealousy said to him, "That's a lot of strange potions you are brewing up out of your storehouse, abba John." "How right you are, father," said abba John. "And you've said that having seen only my outer veneer. Whatever would you have said if you had been able to see inside me!"

V.xvi. 4. It was said of John the Lesser of the Thebaid, the disciple of abba Ammon, that he ministered to the old man for twelve years, caring for him in his illness, and finally not leaving his bedside. The old man felt he was a burden, but however much John had to do, he never once urged him to live a

more free and healthy life, until finally on his deathbed, with the other old men of the place standing round, he took John by the hand and said, "Live well, live well, live well." And he confided him to the care of the old men, saying, "He is not human, this man, he's an angel."

V.xvi. 5. It was said of abba Isodore, the presbyter in Scete, that if there were a brother who was weak, or smallminded, or troublesome whom they wished to expel, he would say, "Bring him to me." And taking him under his wing he would bring healing to that brother's mind by his very patience.

V.xvi. 6. When abba Macarius was in Egypt, there was a man who came with a pack-horse to steal his goods, and Macarius acting as if he were some passer-by helped the thief to load the beast up, and let him go with a completely undisturbed mind, saying, "We brought nothing into this world. The Lord gives. As he wills so is it done. Blessed in all things be the name of the Lord."

V.xvi. 7. Once when there was a meeting of the brothers in Scete, some of the old men decided to test abba Moyses and teased him saying, "What does this Ethiopian think he is doing, coming in to our meeting?" He heard, but said nothing. At the end of the meeting those who had insulted him asked, "Weren't you upset?" And he said, "I was upset, but I said nothing."

V.xvi. 8. Abba Pastor's brother Paysius became friendly with a monk from another cell much against abba Pastor's will. Abba Pastor went to abba Ammoun and said, "My brother Paysius has become friendly with someone, and I find that difficult to put up with." Abba Ammon said to him, "Abba Pastor, are you still alive? Go back to your cell and think that in a year you may be in the grave."

V.xvi. 9. Abba Pastor said, "Whatever troubles you may have, they can all be overcome by silence."

V.xvi. 10. A certain brother with a grievance against another said to abba Sisois of Thebes, "This brother has really done me a great deal of harm and I am determined to get my own back on him." The old man begged him not to think like that and leave vengeance to the Lord, but he said, "I won't get any peace till I have paid him back." "Let's pray, brother," said the old man. And rising up he said, "O God we don't need you to think about us any more, since we are now doing all the retaliation ourselves." At this, the brother fell at the old man's feet and said, "Pray for me, please. I won't strive with my brother any more."

V.xvi. 11. Someone who saw a devout person carrying a corpse in a stretcher said, "Carrying the dead are you? You should rather be carrying the living."

[VII.ix.1 adds: For the peacemakers shall be called the sons of God]

V.xvi. 12.It was said of a certain monk that the more anyone annoyed him and attacked him with insults, the more he sought his company. For he said, "People like that form a most useful corrective for anyone trying to live a converted life. It is the ones who praise you who lead you astray. As Scripture says, 'Those who call you blessed cause you to err.'" (Isaiah 3.12)

V.xvi. 13.Some robbers came to the cell of an old man and said, "We are going to take everything you've got in your cell." And he replied, "You're welcome, my sons, to what you can see." So they packed up all they could find in his cell and departed. But they had overlooked a little sacred object which had been hidden in the cell, and he picked it up and ran after them shouting out and saying, "Take this also, my sons. You overlooked it in the cell." They were overwhelmed by the old man's patience, and restored everything into his cell with deepest penitence, saying to each other, "Truly, this is a man of God."

V.xvi. 14.Some brothers came to a holy old man in the desert and outside the monastery they met up with a servant feeding the cattle and using some very unbecoming language. After they had seen the old man and opened their hearts to him and been helped by his replies, they asked him how he could put up with having such servants around him and not teach them not to swear. And he replied, "Believe me, brothers, there was a time when I would have done so but I thought to myself, 'If you can't put up with a little thing like that how will you be able to bear any really severe test which the Lord might permit you to undergo?' So I said nothing to them, to get me used to whatever might come."

V.xvi. 15.The story was told of an old man who had a young boy as a disciple in his cell, and when he was misbehaving on one occasion, the old man rebuked him once with the words; "Don't do that." But the boy was not obedient to him. When he saw that, the old man stopped taking pains with him and left him to his own devices. Then for three days, the boy locked the door of the cell where the bread was and left the old man fasting. But he said not so much as, "Where are you and what are you doing outside?" He had a neighbour, however, who when he saw that the boy had been absent for such a long time, cooked a few lentils and offered them to him over the wall, and said, "How is it that your boy is so long in coming back?" And the old man said, "He'll come back when he is ready."

V.xvi. 16.It was said that some philosophers once wanted to put the monks to the test. They saw a monk passing by who was very well dressed and they

called to him, "Hey, you, come here." The monk took exception, replied rudely, and went on his way. Another monk came along who was obviously a peasant and they said to him, "Hey, you miserable old monk, come here." And he came. And they began to give him a few blows, and he turned the other cheek, until at last the philosophers changed their tune and gave him due respect, saying, "This is indeed a true monk." They sat him down in the midst of them, and began to question him. "What do you do in your solitude that we don't do? You fast, so do we. You keep your body in subjection, so do we. Whatever you do, we do exactly the same. So how does sitting in the desert make you more diligent than us?" The old man said, "We trust in the grace of God, and keep guard over our thoughts." "Now that is something we don't know how to do," they said. And they left him, greatly edified.

V.xvi. 17. An old man who had a well tried and experienced disciple once got angry with him and drove him out. But the disciple patiently sat outside waiting. When the old man opened the door and found him there he was smitten with contrition, and said, "You are a father to me, for your patience and humility have overcome my own mean-mindedness. Come back in and from now on you be my father and senior, I will be the youth and the disciple, since by what you have done you have superseded the authority due to me because of my age."

V.xvi. 18. Some of the elders used to say that they had heard of holy men who had claimed that young men could sometimes give a lead to their elders in this life, and they told the following story. There was once an old man who was an alcoholic, and having made a mat in one day would go to the neighbouring village and spend the price of it on wine. After some time a disciple came and stayed with him who also made a mat a day and the old man spent the price of both mats on wine, while giving to his disciple only a meagre ration of bread. He bore this for three years but made no complaint, until at last he said to himself, "My clothes are threadbare, I am forever hungry, I will get up and leave this place." But again he answered himself, "Where have I to go to? I'll stay here. After all it is for God's sake that I persevere in this common life." And at once an angel of God appeared to him, saying, "Don't go away from here. Tomorrow we shall be coming for you." And that same day, the brother begged the old man not to go out anywhere for the angels were coming to take him. But when the time came at which the old man was accustomed to go to the village, he said to the brother, "They won't come today, brother. It's already getting quite late." The brother insisted that at all

events they would come, and as he was speaking he peacefully fell asleep. The old man wept. "Alas, my son," he said, "these many years I have living in neglect of my salvation because of wine. You have found salvation in a short time because of your patience." And from that day on he was sober and serious (probatus).

V.xvi. 19. It was said of a certain brother who lived near to a greatly respected old man that he would go in to the old man's cell and steal whatever was there. The old man saw him and nursed no resentment against him but pushed himself to work harder than usual, saying, "I expect that brother needed what he took." Forcing himself to produce more than usual, he yet curbed his appetite and ate hardly any food. When he came to be on his death bed, with the brothers standing around, he looked at the thief and said to him, "Come close to me here." And he took his hands and kissed them, saying, "I give thanks for these hands of yours, brother, for because of them I am about to enter the kingdom of heaven." Cut to the quick and deeply repentant that brother became an exemplary monk, his life changed because of what that old man had done.

Libellus 17 Charity

V.xvii. 1. Abba Antony said, "I no longer fear God, I love him, for love has driven out fear."

V.xvii. 2. He also said, "Your life and death come to you from your neighbour. For if you win the respect of your neighbour you win the respect of God, and if you scandalise your neighbour you scandalise God."

V.xvii. 3. Abba Ammon from Nitria came to abba Antony and asked, "It seems to me that I work harder than you do, so why do you have a greater reputation among people than I have?" And abba Antony said to him, "Perhaps I love God more than you do."

V.xvii. 4. Abba Hilarion once came from Palestine to Antony in his mountain, and abba Antony greeted him, "Welcome! You are like the sun bringing light every morning." And abba Hilarion said, "Peace be with you! You are like a pillar of fire giving strength to the world."

V.xvii. 5. Abba Marcus said to abba Arsenius, "Why do you shun us?" And abba Arsenius said, "God knows I love you, but I can't be both with God and with people. Thousands upon thousands of the heavenly hosts are all driven by one single purpose, among people there are multifarious purposes. No, I can't leave God to be among people."

V.xvii. 6. Abba Agathon said, "I've never willingly gone to sleep bearing a grudge against anyone, nor allowed anyone else to go to sleep holding anything against me."

V.xvii. 7. Once when abba John was going up from Scete with some brothers, the leader of the party lost his way, and night began to come on. And the brothers said to abba John, "What shall we do, father? Now that this brother has lost us we are liable to die wandering about." And the old man said, "If we say anything to him, he will be ashamed. So, look, I'll say that I am tired and can't walk any further and want to stay here till morning." Which is what they did, for the others said, "We won't go on either but we'll stay here with you." So they stopped until morning, all to avoid upsetting the brother.

V.xvii. 8. There was an old man in Egypt long before abba Pastor went there, a man of great reputation and held in high esteem among people. When abba Pastor arrived with his company, people began to leave the old man and go to abba Pastor. The old man was jealous and took to speaking evil of abba Pastor. When abba Pastor got to hear of this he was sorry and said to his brothers, "What shall we do about this fine old man? All those people leaving him and coming to me, a mere nothing, are causing me a great deal of worry. What can we do to make it up to him?" And they said to him, "Let's get together something to eat and some wine and go to him and have a meal together. Perhaps that will suffice to propitiate him." So they prepared food and went to visit him, and when they knocked at his door his disciple came out asking who they were, to whom they said, "Tell your abba that it is Pastor and he wants your blessing." When the disciple told him this he replied, "Tell them to go. I haven't got time." But they persevered outside in the heat, saying, "We won't go till we have earned a blessing from the old man." The old man was at last conquered by their perseverance and humility, and they went in and ate with him. While they were eating the old man said, "Truly I haven't heard the half of what you are like. You are a hundred times greater from what I can see." Thus he was a friend from that day on.

V.xvii. 9. Abba Pastor said, "Try as far as you are able to do no evil to anybody, and keep your heart single in the sight of all people. (lit. preserve your heart chaste for every human)

V.xvii. 10. Again he said, "Greater love hath no one than to lay down his life for his friend' (John 15.13). If you are subjected to harsh words and as far as you can, you struggle to bear with them, without being harsh in return, or even if you suffer injury in any matter and bear it patiently, without seeking

retribution from those who humiliate you or injure you, then in this way you are laying down your life for your friend."

V.xvii. 11. It happened once that abba Pambo went on a journey into Egypt with some brothers, and on the way they met up with some seculars sitting down, to whom he said, "Get up and greet us, and embrace these monks that you may be blessed. For they speak often with God and their mouths are holy."

V.xvii. 12. It was said of abba Paphnutius that he did not readily drink wine. Once as he was walking on a journey he came upon a band of robbers, drinking. The leader recognised him and knew that he did not drink wine, but seeing that he was tired after a long walk he filled a cup with wine and offered it to him with a drawn sword in his other hand. He said to the old man, "Drink, or I'll kill you." The old man knew that the robber really wanted to follow God, so wishing to win him over he accepted the wine and drank. The robber then felt ashamed, and said, "I'm sorry, abba, I've put you out." And the old man said, "I do believe that by this cup God will have mercy on you now in this life and in the world to come." And the robber leader replied, "I too believe in God, and from now on I will do no harm to anyone." And the old man won over the whole band of robbers, simply because for God's sake he had abandoned his own will.

V.xvii. 13. Abba Hyperichius said, "Rescue your brother from his sins, as far as you prudently can, for God does not reject those who turn to him. And don't harbour evil and malicious thoughts in your heart against your brother, that you may be able to say, 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.'"

V.xvii. 14. There were two brothers in the Cells, and the elder of the two said to the younger, "I hope we can always stay together, brother." And the younger said, "I'm such a sinner, I don't know whether I can, father." "Yes, we can," the old man begged him. Now the old man was pure in heart and did not want to hear that a monk could have thoughts of fornication. So the brother said to him, "Leave it for a week and we'll talk about it again." When the old man came back, the brother, wishing to put him to the test, said, "I have fallen into great temptation during this week, for when I had to go in to the village on some errand I went with a woman." And the old man said, "Do you repent of that?" "Yes, I do," said the brother. And the old man said, "I carry the burden of that sin with you." Then said the brother, "Now I know that we can live together," and they stayed together till death.

V.xvii. 15. One of the fathers said, "If someone asks a favour of you and you feel indignant about it, turn your mind towards giving, as it is written, 'If someone compels you to go one mile, go with him two.' What this means is that when anyone asks anything of you, give it with all your heart and soul."

Charity (continued), Book V
(Second Sight begins further down page)

V.xvii. 16. The story is told of a brother who had made some baskets and put handles on them when he heard his neighbour monk saying, "What shall I do? It's nearly time for the market and I have run out of handles to put on my baskets." So the brother who heard this undid the handles which he had put on his baskets and gave them to his brother next door, saying, "Look, I've got these to spare. Use them for your baskets." Thus he supplied what was necessary for his brother to complete his work, while leaving his own work unfinished.

V.xvii. 17. The story is told of an old man in Scete who fell ill, and longed to have some fresh bread to eat. Hearing this one of the more experienced brothers put some dry bread into his cloak and went to Egypt where he changed it for some fresh bread and brought it to the old man. When the other brothers saw the fresh bread they were surprised, but the old man was unwilling to eat it, "for," he said, "it represents my brother's life blood." But the old men begged him for God's sake to eat, "lest," they said, "your brother's sacrifice is all in vain." When it was put like this, he ate.

V.xvii. 18. A brother questioned an old man, saying, "There were two brothers. One of them stayed in his cell fasting for six days and undergoing many labours, the other went out to tend the sick. Which is the more acceptable work in God's sight?" And the old man replied, "Even if that brother fasting for six days were to hang himself up by the nose he could not equal that brother going out to tend the sick."

V.xvii. 19. Someone asked one of the old men, "How is it that those who walk in this way of life today are not as full of grace as they were of old?" And the old man said, "In those days there was love, and each one reckoned his brother to be the greater. Nowadays love has grown cold, and each one drags his neighbour down. It is because of this that we do not deserve to receive grace."

V.xvii. 20. There were three brothers who once went harvesting and agreed to

reap sixty measures of corn. On the first day, however, one of them fell ill and went back to his cell. One of the two that remained said to the other, "Now that our brother has gone off sick let us each concentrate our minds and believe in God that with the help of our brother's prayers we shall be able to reap not only our own share but his as well." When they had finished the reaping of the whole area to which they had agreed they went to get paid and said to the other brother, "Brother, come and get your pay." But he said, "How can I be paid when I haven't reaped?" And they replied, "It's only because of your prayers that the reaping got done. Come on, take your pay." And there arose a great contention among them, the one brother saying he couldn't accept and the others insisting that he had his share, until they decided to submit the matter to the judgment of one of the seniors. (The brothers repeat the story to the old man) And the old man when he heard the story marvelled and said to one of his monks, "Sound a clapper outside these brothers' cell to summon all the brethren together." When they had all gathered he said to them, "Come brothers and hear today a just judgment." After laying the whole matter before them, he gave judgment that the brother ought to accept his pay to do with as he willed. And that brother went away weeping in great distress as if the judgment had gone against him.

V.xvii. 21. An old man said that the fathers' custom was to visit the cells of new brothers wanting to become solitaries, to make sure that none of them should suffer mental damage (lit. be injured in their cogitations) because of the temptation of demons. Anyone who was in trouble they would take to the church and filling a basin with water they would pray for him. All the brethren would wash their hands in the basin and then pour the water over the brother who was being tempted. In this way the brother was immediately delivered (purgabatur).

V.xvii. 22. There were two old men who had lived together for many years without quarrelling. And one of them said to the other, "You know, we really ought to have a quarrel, such as other men have." And the other replied, "I don't know how to have a quarrel." The first one said, "Look, I put a brick in between us and say, 'This is mine,' and then you say, 'No it isn't, it's mine,' and that's how you start a quarrel." So they put a bit of broken tile in between them and the first one said, 'This is mine,' and the other one said, 'No it isn't, it's mine,' and the first one said, "Oh, all right, it's yours. Keep it, quick!" And they went their ways, totally unable to be at odds with each other.

V.xvii. 23. A brother said to an old man, "If I should know about a brother who

had a bad reputation, I couldn't bring myself to have him in to my cell, but I would gladly have a good one." And the old man said, "If you wish to benefit a brother who is already a good man do it sparingly, but give a double measure to the other for he is the one who is sick."

V.xvii. 24. An old man said, "I have never wanted to do anything which while profiting me would be to my brother's loss, for I cling to the hope that my brother's gain is a source of blessing (or 'will bear fruit') for me."

V.xvii. 25. There was a brother who was ministering to an old man who had sores on his body which exuded foul-smelling pus. His thoughts began to say to him, "Why don't you stop doing this? How can you put up with the stink of this stuff?" But this brother, in order to counteract these thoughts, took a basin and washed the old man's sores, saved the water in the basin and used it for drinking water. His thoughts again began to bother him, saying, "If you don't choose to leave, at least stop drinking the stuff." But he kept on with this work, putting up with it freely, and drinking the water in which he washed the old man's sores. And by means of this unseen medicine, the old man gradually got better.

Libellus 18 Second Sight (Praevidentia) or Contemplation

V.xviii. 1. A brother went to the cell of abba Arsenius in Scete and looking through the window saw the old man as if he were totally enveloped in flame. The brother was the sort of person who was well qualified to see such things. When he knocked at the door the old man came out and seeing the look of astonishment on the brother's face he said, "How long have you been here? Did you see anything?" "No, nothing," he replied. And after some conversation they parted.

V.xviii. 2. Abba Daniel, the disciple of abba Arsenius, described how Arsenius told the following story as if it had happened to somebody else, though Daniel was convinced Arsenius was actually talking of himself. A certain old man was sitting in his cell when a voice came to him, saying, "Come with me and I will show you the things people do." And he got up and was led to a place where he was shown an Ethiopian cutting wood, and making a big pile of it, and trying to carry it away but being unable to. And instead of taking some wood out of the pile, he kept on cutting more and making the pile even bigger. And he went on doing this for a long time. Going on a little further he was shown a man standing by a lake, filling a jug with water and pouring it into a leaky

cistern from which the water flowed back into the lake. "Come, I will show you something else," said the voice, and suddenly he saw a temple with two men on horseback outside it, each carrying one end of a long piece of timber. They were trying to get through the door of the temple but they couldn't because they were carrying the timber crosswise, instead of going one behind the other so that the timber would go lengthways, and thus they remained outside the door of that temple. Asking who these men were, he was told that they were those who carried burdens such as pride or unfair dealings and because they were unwilling to humble themselves and amend their ways by walking humbly in the way of Christ, they remained outside the kingdom of God. The one cutting the wood was someone who had committed many sins and instead of repenting and lessening the burden went on adding iniquity to iniquity. The one filling the cistern with water was someone who although he did some good things always had a lot of evil things mixed in with it, and so lost the benefit of even the good things which he did. Wherefore it behoves all people to think seriously about the way they act, lest they be seen to labour in vain.

V.xviii. 3. Again abba Daniel passed on to us a story which our father abba Arsenius told, about a certain old man of simple faith who had a great reputation because of his way of life, but who in his simplicity had strayed from the truth by saying that the bread which we took was not the natural body of Christ but only a sign of it. There were two old men who heard he had said this, but knowing the quality of his life they realised that he had said it in all innocence and simplicity, so they came to him and said, "Abba, we have heard that some infidel has been saying that the bread which we take is not the natural body of Christ but only a sign of it." And the old man said, "I'm the one who said that." And they begged him not to hold to that view, but to embrace the teaching of the Catholic Church. "For we believe," they said, "that the bread is the true body of Christ and the chalice the true blood of Christ, and not just a sign of it. In the beginning he took the dust of the earth and fashioned it into a human being 'after his own image', so although we can't understand how this can be, nevertheless we can't deny that this is the image of God. In the same way, we believe that the bread over which he said, 'This is my body,' really is the body of Christ." And he replied, "Unless I can see this thing for myself, I can't really be satisfied with what you say." So they said to him, "Let's all pray to God about this mystery for the rest of the week, believing that God will show us the truth." The old man gladly accepted this

suggestion and prayed to God saying, "Lord, you know there is no malice in my being dubious about this matter. If I am wrong through simple ignorance, please enlighten me, O Lord Jesus Christ, you who are Truth itself."

The old men went back to their cells and also prayed, saying; "O Lord Jesus Christ, reveal the mystery to this old man, that he may believe and not lose the reward of his labours." God heard the prayers of them all, and at the end of the week the three of them went to church on the Lord's Day and sat on their seats of rushes tied into bundles, the old man in the middle. And the intellectual eyes (*oculi intellectuales*) of them all were opened and when the bread was put on the altar it seemed to all three of them that there was a small child lying there. When the presbyter stretched out his hands to break the bread an angel of the Lord came down from heaven with a knife in his hand and having pierced the small child poured his blood into the chalice. As the presbyter broke the bread into small pieces so the angel cut the child's limbs into several parts. When the old man went up to receive Communion he alone was given flesh stained with blood. Seeing this he was afraid, and cried out saying, "I do believe, Lord, that the bread placed on the altar is your body and the chalice is your blood." And at once the portion put into his hand turned to bread again, according to the mystery, which he put in his mouth giving thanks to God. The other old men said to him, "God knows that it is not in human nature to eat raw flesh, therefore he changes his body into bread and his blood into wine for those who take it in faith." And they gave thanks to God for this old man, for God had not allowed him to lose the fruit of his labours, and they went back to their cells with joy.

V.xviii. 4. Again, abba Daniel told a story of another renowned old man in Lower Egypt who in his simplicity had said that Melchisedech was the son of God. This was brought to the notice of Cyril of holy memory, archbishop of Alexandria, who sent for him. He knew that this old man was a man of signs and wonders, and that whatever he prayed to God about was revealed to him, and that what he said was merely due to his simplicity, so he spoke to him in the following way, "Abba, I am seeking your advice because in my thoughts sometimes it seems to me that Melchisedech was the son of God, and at others it seems that he wasn't that but just a human being and a priest of God most high. Wondering about this I have sent for you that you might pray to God about it, so that he might reveal to you which is true." Confident in his own way of life, the old man said with assurance, "Give me three days grace, and I will pray to God and come to you again to tell you what has been revealed."

He went to his cell and prayed to God about what the archbishop had said and after three days came back to Cyril of blessed memory and said, "Melchisedech was human." "How did you come to that conclusion, abba?" asked the archbishop. "God showed me all the patriarchs," he said, "each one of them passing before me from Adam down to Melchisedech, and the angel with me said, 'See, this is Melchisedech.' So, Archbishop, you can be quite sure that this is the way it is." The old man went away and of his own accord preached that Melchisedech was human. And Cyril of blessed memory rejoiced greatly.

V.xviii. 5. While Ephraem of blessed memory was still a boy, he had a dream or revelation in which he saw a vine growing out of his mouth, and it increased till it filled the whole earth, bearing a great deal of fruit, and all the flying creatures in the heavens came to feed on the fruit, and the more they ate the more it bore.

V.xviii. 6. One of the holy people saw in a dream the whole angelic order descending from heaven in obedience to God's command, having a book in their hands written within and without, and they said one to another, "Who is worthy to be entrusted with this book?" And some said one person and others another, but they all agreed in saying, "Though these you mention may be holy and righteous, yet the book cannot be entrusted to them." Many other names of holy people they mentioned, till at last they said, "Nobody can be entrusted with this book but Ephraem." And the old man saw in his dream that Ephraem was given that book. Next morning he arose and heard Ephraem preaching and it was like a fountain of living water coming out of his mouth. And the old man who had dreamed knew that what came from the mouth of Ephraem was the work of the Holy Spirit.

V.xviii. 7. The story is told of abba Zenonis that when he was living in Scete he got up one night to answer a call of nature (lit. go to the marsh, pond or bog) and for three days and nights he kept on walking until he fell down half dead with his exertions, when suddenly there was a young person standing before him with bread and a jug of water who said to him, "Arise and eat." Fearful lest this might be a ghost he began to pray, whereat the young person said, "Well done." He prayed again, a second and third time, and again came the answer, "Well done." Only then did he arise and take and eat. The young person then said, "All the time that you have been walking you have got further and further away from your cell, but come, follow me." And immediately he found himself back at his cell, and he said to the young

person, "Come inside, and say prayers for us." But when he got inside the other suddenly disappeared.

V.xviii. 8. Abba John said, "An old man once saw in a trance (in excessu mentis) three monks standing by the sea side and a voice came from the other shore saying, 'Take wings of fire and come to me.' Two of them did take wings and flew across to where the voice was coming from. The third one stayed where he was, shouting and weeping loudly. He later got wings for himself, but they lacked fire. They were unsteady and fragile, and it was with great difficulty that he crossed over, constantly falling into the water and making a great effort to struggle out again. So it is with this generation - If they get wings at all they are not of the fiery sort. Unsteady and fragile ones are all they can manage.

V.xviii. 9. Abba Macarius lived in a very deserted place; he was alone in his solitude. There was another lonely place lower down where several of the brothers lived, and one day Macarius looked out and saw Satan in human shape passing by along the road, wearing an old linen tunic with many gashes, and from every gash hung a small bottle. "Hey, my friend, where are you off to?" asked Macarius. "I'm going to meet ('commemorare', lit. call to mind, remember) the brothers," he replied. "What are all those little bottles for?" asked the old man. "Little samples for the brothers to taste," he said. "You seem to have tastes of everything there is," said the old man. "You're absolutely right," he said. "If someone doesn't like one I offer him another, and if that's no good I offer a third, and so on through them all until if he hasn't taken the whole lot at least there will be one that takes his fancy." And having said that he passed on. The old man kept an eye on the road until he reappeared, and when he saw him coming he said, "I hope all has gone well with you." "What do I know about 'well'?" he said. "Oh, how's that?" he asked. "Because they've all got so holy that no one would listen to me," he said. "So you've got no friends at all down there, then?" he asked. "I got only one of the brothers," he said. "He was the only one to listen, though I must say that he came rushing towards me like the wind as soon as he saw me." "What was his name, I wonder," asked the old man. "Theoctitus," he said as he went on his way. Abba Macarius straight away got up and went off to the lower desert, and when they saw him coming, the brothers got palm branches and ran to meet him, and each one tidied up his cell in case Macarius should choose to stay there. But the old man asked which one among them in that place was called Theoctitus, and when he had found out, it was his cell he went to. Theoctitus

welcomed him joyfully. Once they were able to converse privately abba Macarius asked him, "How's things with you, brother?" And he replied, "Oh, fine, thanks to your prayers." And the old man said, "You don't have any troublesome thoughts?" "No, I'm fine at present," he said. But he blushed as he said it, and the old man said, "Well I don't know how many years I've spent in this sort of life here, and everyone respects me, and yet even in my old age I still get bothered by sexual temptations." And Theoctitus replied, "Can you believe it, father, so do I." And the old man pretended to be the victim of lots of other evil thoughts, in order to get him to confess. Finally he said, "How long do you fast today?" "Until the ninth hour," he replied. "Fast until later," said the old man, "and be abstinent, read the Scriptures, learn them by heart, let the furthest recesses of your mind meditate on the Scriptures, and if any evil thought comes to your mind, don't lie down under it but rise above it, and God will come immediately to your aid." Having given this help to the brother he went back to his solitude. Once more he saw the devil and asked him where he was going, and the devil replied that he was going to the brothers. And when he came back, the old man asked, "How are the brothers getting on, then?" "Terrible", said the devil. "How's that?" asked the old man. "They have all become totally holy," he replied, "and what's worse that one friend I had who would listen to me has also been subverted, I don't know how. It's not just that he won't listen to me; he's now become holier than all the others. So I've sworn not to wear out my shoe leather again for a very long time." He left the old man and went on his way, while the saintly old man himself went into his cell worshipping and giving thanks to God his Saviour.

V.xviii. 10. In order to strengthen the brothers abba Macarius told them how a woman once came there with her son who was vexed by a demon. The son said to his mother. "Let's get out of here." But she said, "I can't. My feet won't let me." "Well, I'll carry you, then," replied the son. And Macarius was astonished at the sharpness of the devil in wanting to get away from that place.

V.xviii. 11. On the subject of the desolation of Scete he said, "When you see a cell being built next to the pond, know that the desolation of Scete is not far off, when you see trees it is already at the door. When you see young boys gather your cloak about you and go."

V.xviii. 12. Abba Moyses was once fiercely attacked by sexual temptations when living in Petra, and when he found it quite impossible to stay in his cell any longer he went to abba Isidore and told him all about it. The old man

begged him to return to his cell but he protested that he couldn't. So he took him in and gave him what comfort he could. "Look to the west," he said. And as he looked he saw a great multitude of demons in a confused mass, milling around in battle array. Abba Isidore then said, "Look to the east." And he saw a countless company of angels in glory. "Just look at all those who are sent to help us," said abba Isidore. "Those in the west are those who fight against us. But those who are for us are more than those who are against us." And giving thanks to God, abba Moyses took courage and went back to his cell.

V.xviii. 13. Abba Moyses said in Scete, "If we observe the commandments of our fathers I promise you, trusting in God, that the barbarians will not come here. But if we don't, this place will be despoiled.

V.xviii. 14. With his brothers sitting around him abba Moyses said, "You see now the barbarians are invading Scete. You should get up and flee." But they said to him, "Are you not going to flee, abba?" To which he replied, "I have been expecting this day for years, in fulfilment of what our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'All those who live by the sword will die by the sword.'" (Matthew 26.52) "We are not going to run away," they said. "We will die with you." Moyses said, "It is not for me to argue that one way or the other. Each one of you must look to his own position." There were seven brothers with him and they said to him, "The barbarians even now are at the door." And when the barbarians came they killed them all, except one who, petrified with base fear, (timore carnali) ran and hid under some palm leaves, where he had a vision of seven crowns descending on the heads of Moyses and the six brothers who were killed with him.

V.xviii. 15. It was said of abba Silvanus that when he had made up his mind to go to Syria, his disciple Mark said to him, "Father, don't go. I can't let you go yet, abba. Wait here for three days more." The abba waited, and on the third day Mark his disciple peacefully fell asleep.

V.xviii. 16. Abba John who was exiled under Marcian said that when he and his companions went from Syria to abba Pastor, they wanted to ask his opinion about hardness of heart. Pastor however knew no Greek, nor was there an interpreter available, but when he saw their difficulty, he immediately began to speak in Greek. He said that water was by nature soft, but stone was hard. But if you hang a container of water over a stone in such a way that the water falls drop by drop it will wear the stone away. So also the word of God is gentle, our hearts are hard. But when anyone frequently hears the divine word, the heart is opened to the fear of God.

V.xviii. 17. Abba Pastor said, "'Like as the hart desireth the water brooks even so my soul longeth after thee, O God.' (Psalm 42.1) Harts in the wilderness gorge themselves on serpents, and when they burn with the poison they long to find the water brooks. In the same way monks in solitude burn with the poison of evil demons and therefore on the Lord's day they long to come to the fountains of water, that is the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they may be cleansed of all the bitterness of the evil demons.

V.xviii. 18. Someone asked abba Pastor how he interpreted the Scripture "Return not evil for evil." (1 Thess. 5.15) Abba Pastor said, "The passion of evil has four stages, first in the heart, second in facial expression, third in speech, finally in the act of returning evil for evil. If you can purge your heart, evil won't show in your face. Guard your speech, but if perchance you have spoken act quickly to prevent yourself actually doing any evil."

Second Sight (continued), Book V

V.xviii. 19. Holy Bishop Basil told the story of a virgin living in a monastery who pretended to be an idiot possessed of a demon, and was considered by everybody to be so misguided that no-one would even eat with her. Her chosen way of life was to be found always in the kitchen, where she carried out all the duties of a servant. She was everybody's doormat, as the saying goes. By her actions she fulfilled in herself what we read in Scripture, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." (Cor. 5.18) She wore a piece of old rag on her head, performing all her duties dressed like this, whereas the other virgins shaved their heads and wore cowls. None of the forty virgins ever saw her eating; never in her whole life did she sit down at table with them. Nobody gave her anything except a small portion of bread, but she picked up the crumbs from the tables and cleaned out the leavings in the food jars, and with this pittance she lived content. She harmed no one, no one ever heard her grumbling, she never had either too much or too little to say to anybody. She was lower than anyone else, she lived despised by everyone, she was the butt of all their hard words. Then one day the angel of the Lord appeared to a desert dweller called Pyoterius, known to all as a holy and respected man, living in a place called Porphyrites, and the angel said, "Why should you think you are somebody, a holy person, living here? Would you like to see a woman holier than you are? Go to the monastery of women in Tabennisi and you will find one there

wearing a crown; know that she is greater than you. She alone battles day and night against many foes, her heart never departing from God, whereas you, even though you stay in one place, are constantly wandering in mind and spirit through all the cities of the world." He straightway went to the aforesaid monastery, and asked the master of the brothers if he might visit the women's quarters. It wasn't long before he was confidently introduced there as not only a man of exemplary life but also of respected years. When he went in, he asked to see all the sisters, but he could not see among them the one on whose account he had come. To the last one he saw, he said, "Bring them all; there is still someone lacking." "There is only one more, the half-wit in the kitchen," they said. "She is known as being one of those who are vexed with demons." "Bring her to me as well for me to see," he said. So they began to call her. She was very unwilling to listen, sensing that something was up, or perhaps knowing by divine revelation. But they said to her, "Holy Pyoterius wants to see you," for he was someone well known and of a great reputation. When she came in and he saw her with the old piece of rag on her head he threw himself on the floor before her and said, "Give me your blessing." But she then fell at his feet and said, "No, you bless me, father." All the sisters were shocked at this and said, "Don't let her treat you like this, father. She's stupid, as you can see." And holy Pyoterius said to them all, "You are the stupid ones. She is my Amma and yours." (For so they called spiritual women.) "I pray God that in the day of judgment I may be found as worthy as her." At this, they too all fell at her feet and began to confess all the sins they had committed against her. One said she had poured the dirty washing up water over her, another remembered that she had often given her a box on the ear, another that she had tweaked her nose, others spoke of various kinds of injuries they had done her. The holy man poured out prayers to God for all these things and departed. The idiot, finding that she could not bear all this glory, and unwilling to be weighed down by the honour given to her by the sisters, but rather feeling that she was being hardly done by since all were asking her forgiveness, after a few days fled from the monastery secretly, and where she went, where she settled down, or how she died, nobody has ever been able to find out.

V.xviii. 20. Paul the Simple of blessed memory told the following story to the fathers: He once went to a monastery as a visitor in order to teach the brothers, and after they had mutually encouraged each other, they went as usual to church for Mass. As Blessed Paul looked at each person going in to the church, he was able to see what they were like inside, for God had given him

the gift of being able to read souls as clearly as we can read each others' faces. He was also able to see the guardian angel of each one. Among those who were going in with open faces and shining eyes he saw one who was all black and disfigured in his whole body, with demons holding him and dragging him towards them by means of halters they had put through his nose, and a very sad looking holy angel following him a long way off. Paul sat down in front of the church weeping and beating his breast, in deep mourning for the one who appeared to him like that. Those who saw his weeping and crying, and how suddenly this change had come on, implored him to tell them what he could see, fearing that some blame must attach to them all to make him act like this. They begged him to go in to Mass with them but he would not. He turned his back on them and stayed prone outside weeping constantly for him whom he had seen. Later when they came out of church, Paul again watched them comparing how they looked now as against how they looked when they went in, and the one whom he had seen all black and disfigured in his whole body he now saw coming out of church with an open face and a purified body. The demons who earlier held him now followed afar off, and the holy angel was walking beside him, joyful and eager, giving great thanks for him. Paul began to jump for joy, and blessed God, shouting, "O the ineffable mercy and goodness of God! O divine acts of pity and countless blessings!" He ran up to the top step and cried with a loud voice, "Come and see him who wishes all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim.2.4). Come let us worship and fall down before him saying, 'You alone can take away our sin.'" Every one came in answer to his cry, eager to hear what he had to say, and when all were gathered together Paul told them what he had seen as they were all going in to church and what he had seen after. And he begged the person concerned to tell what had happened that God should have given him caused such a transformation. When Paul had pointed him out, he began quite openly to tell his story in the presence of all who were standing around. "I am a sinner," he said, "And up till now I have been committing sexual sins, but in the holy church of God I have just now heard the words of Isaiah the prophet being read, or rather the voice of God speaking through him, where he says, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your thoughts before my eyes, learn to do well...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...if ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat of the good of the land.' (Isaiah 1.16-19) I, a sinner, was cut to the quick by these words, and groaning inwardly I said to God, 'You came into the world to save sinners, O God.

Fulfil in word and deed what you have promised through these readings from the prophet, even in me an unworthy sinner. From now on I promise you, I give my word, I confess in my heart, that I will cease to do evil. I will renounce all wrong-doing, and from now on I will serve you with a clean heart. Today, O Lord, at this very hour, accept my sorrow as I call upon you and renounce all sin.' Having made these promises I came out of church determined in my mind to do no more evil in the sight of the Lord." Having heard this, they all cried to God with a loud voice, saying, "O Lord how marvellous are thy works. In wisdom hast thou made them all." (Psalm 104.24) Wherefore Christians who learn from the holy Scriptures and divine revelation how great is the good that God wills for those who turn to him and amend their former sins by penitence, not only do not have to suffer punishment for those sins done aforetime, but also enjoy the promised rewards. Let us then never despair of our salvation, for as it is promised us in Isaiah the prophet, let whoever is bound by sin be washed clean and be white as wool or snow, and enjoy the heaven of the just which is Jerusalem the heavenly city, as Ezechiel also promises, "As I live says the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live."

End of Book V

De Vitis Patrum, Book VI

Libellus 1, Second Sight (Praevidentia) or Contemplation
(Old men who did signs near bottom of this page)

VI.i.1. Once when Zacharias visited his abbot Silvanus he found him in a trance with his hands stretched out towards heaven. Seeing him like this he went out, shutting the door behind him. At the sixth hour and the ninth hour he went back again, only to find him in the same state, until at last at about the tenth hour he went in to find him in a normal state of mind.

"How have you been today, father?" he asked.

"Somewhat out of action, my son," he replied.

Zacharias then seized his feet and said, "I shan't let you go till you tell me what you have seen."

The old man replied, "I have been caught up into the heavens, where I saw the

glory of God, and there I have stayed right up to this minute when I have been sent back here."

VI.i.2.Holy Syncletica said, "Let us be wise as serpents and as harmless as doves in order to understand the snares of the devil. For we are told to be wise as serpents that we might not underestimate the devil and all his tricks. Moreover, like is overcome by like, and therefore the harmlessness of the dove is needed."

VI.i.3. One of the fathers said, "Once when some of the seniors were gathered together and talking about serious matters, one of them who was a seer was aware of angels stretching out their hands to anoint them. But when the talk went on to aimless worldly matters the angels departed and foul-smelling swine cavorted about polluting them. When the talk returned again to wholesome subjects the angels returned and anointed them."

VI.i.4.An old man said, "It is written in Scripture 'From two transgressions of Tyre or from three I shall avert my gaze, but the fourth I will not overlook'. (Amos 1.9) To have an evil thought, to consent to it and even to speak it are the three, but the fourth is to carry the evil thought into action, and from this the anger of the Lord will not be turned away".

VI.i.5.It was said of a certain great old man in Scete that whenever the brothers were building a new cell he would go out with great joy, help with the foundations and stay until it was finished. But on one occasion when he went out to build a cell he looked very troubled.

The brothers asked him, "What are you so sad about, abba?"

And he replied, "This place will be laid waste. For I saw as it were a fire lit in Scete which the brothers extinguished with cut branches of palm, and again the fire was lit and again the brothers extinguished it with cut branches of palm, but it was lit a third time engulfing the whole of Scete and could not be put out. No wonder I am sad and troubled."

VI.i.6.A certain old man said, "It is written in Scripture 'the righteous shall flourish as the palm tree' (Psalms 92.12). This saying refers to the high justice and beauty of good deeds. In the palm tree, there is a single core which governs its whole clean growth. It is the same with the righteous; his heart is single and pure, looking always towards God, shining bright, lit up by faith; everything he does comes from the heart. The goal which spurs him on is to be a bulwark against the devil."

VI.i.7. Another old man once said, "The Shunamite woman could welcome Elisha because of her detachment from any man (2 Kings 4.10). The

Shunamite is said to represent the soul and Elisha the Holy Spirit. So it is that whenever the soul withdraws from the confusion and worry of the world, the Holy Spirit will come and make her sterility fruitful."

VI.i.8. Another of the fathers said, "The eyes of the pig are so placed that of necessity they always look down, and can never look up into heaven. So it is with the soul that delights in sweet pleasures - once it has fallen into luxurious eating habits it can no longer see God or savour the things of God."

VI.i.9. A certain well known visionary said that he saw the same glory shining around the clothing of a monk receiving the habit as he had seen shining over Baptism.

VI.i.10. A certain old man to whom had been given the gift of discernment said that he saw a brother meditating in his cell and a demon who had approached was standing outside. As long as the brother was meditating the demon was not able to enter, but as soon as the brother stopped meditating, the demon got in.

VI.i.11. It is said of a certain old man that he prayed to God to let him see the demons. And the answer came, "You have no need to see them." But he asked again, saying "You, Lord will protect me from them by your grace." And the Lord did indeed open his eyes and he saw them swarming around people buzzing like bees. But the angels of the Lord were likewise arrayed against them.

VI.i.12. An old man said, "There were two brothers who were neighbours, one went on pilgrimage but the other stayed at home. The pilgrim brother was not very strict in his way of life, but the other was very strict indeed. Now it so happened that the pilgrim died, and a neighbour who was a visionary saw a host of angels carrying away his soul. When he got to the gate of heaven and sought to enter, enquiry was made about him and a voice came from above saying, "He was obviously not very strict, but because of his pilgrimage let him come in."

After a time the stay-at-home brother died and all his family came to meet him. The visionary neighbour was astonished that the angels did not come for him, and falling on his face before God he said, "Why was that rather lax pilgrim taken into glory while the strict one merited nothing of the sort?"

And a voice came from heaven saying, "After this strict one died, he opened his eyes and saw his weeping parents, and he was consoled. But the pilgrim, although he was somewhat lax, saw none of his family. And he wept, and was consoled by God."

VI.i.13. Another of the fathers told of a solitary in the desert near Nilopolis, who was cared for by a certain citizen, one of the faithful. And there was in that city a certain rich man of quite ungodly life, who when he died was carried to the grave by the whole city, led by a bishop with torches. And when the citizen who cared for the solitary went out as usual to take him bread he found that he had been eaten by wild beasts. And he fell on his face before the Lord and said, "I shall not move from here till you have show me what this means. For that ungodly man was buried with great pomp and ceremony, but this man who served you night and day was given nothing like that at all." And an angel of the Lord came to him and said, "That ungodly man did few good works in this life and for reward has found little rest in the next. But this solitary, a man adorned with every virtue and guilty of hardly any fault, has for his reward that he is found to be pure in the sight of God." And he was consoled by these words and went on his way glorifying God who is true in all his judgments.

VI.i.14. Some of the holy fathers of Scete while making predictions about future generations began by asking, "What exactly have we done?"

Someone called Cyrion, a man of great repute, replied, "We have not kept the commandments of God."

The others asked, "What about those who shall come after us? How shall they do?"

And he replied, "They shall only achieve half of what we have done."

They asked, "What about those who will come after them? How shall they do?"

He replied, "That last generation shall do nothing of what we have done. But I foresee great temptations for them, and those who are able to persevere in that time will be much greater than either us or our fathers."

VI.i.15. An old man told the story of a virgin well advanced in age who had walked in the fear of God. He had asked her what had prompted her to follow this way of life, and she sighed and said, "When I was a little girl, my friend, I had a father who was gentle and kind but who suffered from very poor health. He was always so busy with his own affairs that he was hardly ever seen by the people among whom he lived. He busied himself on his own land - that was his whole life. For so long as he was in good health he brought home the fruits of his own labour, but more often than not he was confined to bed in a state of great weakness. He had so little to say for himself that if you didn't know him, you would have thought he was dumb. But my mother, by way of

contrast, was meddlesome above measure, with a worse reputation than anyone else in the neighbourhood. Her tongue constantly clacked away on every possible subject so that you might have thought that her body was all one large tongue, always picking quarrels with someone, often drunk, keeping company with all kinds of disreputable men. My father had entrusted the care of the household to her but she managed it worse than the most dissolute whore, she indulged herself so disgracefully that there were few people in the neighbourhood who were untouched by her excesses. But she never had a day's illness, never felt a moment's unease, but from birth up to her very last day enjoyed full possession of all her faculties.

"While she was still living, it happened that my father died, weakened by a long spell of sickness. For three days and nights he lay on his bed, for we were unable to bury him because of unceasing storms with rain and thunder and lightning. People in the neighbourhood shook their heads and muttered that he must have been covering up all sorts of wickednesses because if the earth was unwilling to receive him he must have been an enemy of God. But it was getting to the point where his body was decaying so badly that we would not have been able to live in the house for much longer, so although the rain and storm were still raging we made shift to bury him somehow. From then on, my mother became more and more uninhibited, indulging herself in every possible pleasure. She turned our house into a brothel, and her life into one riotous party. I was still a girl when she died, seemingly without showing any remorse, but although our wealth was greatly diminished, she was given a splendid funeral, even the weather smiled upon the proceedings.

"After her death, as I emerged from girlhood and began to feel the urges of puberty, I began as usual one evening to think and worry about whose example it was that I should follow. Should it be my father, with his kind and gentle, sober life? I thought of how nothing good had ever happened to him in his lifetime, he had always been borne down by trouble and illness, and at the end of his life even the earth did not want to accept him. If this kind of life was so good in the eyes of God, why was it that my father who had chosen to live like this had been so dogged by ill fortune? It would be better, I thought, to live like my mother and indulge every pleasurable whim and fancy of my body. Nothing evil ever happened to her. She spent her life safely and happily in an alcoholic haze right up to the end. What then? It would be best to live like my mother. Better to put your trust in things which you can see with your own eyes and try everything.

"By the time I had decided to throw myself into this miserable sort of life it was night time, and I fell into a deep sleep. Arising out of my thoughts there came before me an enormous figure of horrible appearance who quite terrified me by the way he looked at me. He began to interrogate me with an angry expression and a harsh voice.

"Tell me' he said 'what you have been thinking.'

"But I was so petrified by his appearance and manner that I didn't even dare to look up at him. In a louder voice still, he again demanded that I should tell him my decisions. Paralysed with fear, my mind a complete blank, I said there was nothing important. He told me I lied, and reminded me of all the things that I had been thinking of. I had to admit he was correct, and began to ask for pardon, explaining why it was that I had been thinking like this.

"He said to me, 'Come and see them both, your father and your mother, and then choose what sort of life you want to live.'

"And he took my hand and led me off to a vast plain, containing many gardens, all kinds of fruit and a variety of trees, all of unspeakable beauty. He took me into the midst of it, and my father came to meet me, embracing and kissing me, recognising me as his daughter. I gave him a hug and asked if I could stay with him.

"No,' he said, 'you can't stay here. But if you wish to follow in my footsteps, you will come here. It won't be all that long.'

"While I was still asking to be allowed to stay, my guide pulled me away again as he said, 'Come and I will show you your mother as well, tormented by fire, so that you can learn which of them to model your life after.'

"He put me into the middle of a dark and gloomy place, full of noise and turbulence, and showed me a furnace burning fiercely with flaming pitch, and some horrible looking creatures standing on top of the furnace. And as I looked down I saw my mother immersed in the furnace up to her neck, gnashing her teeth, burning in the fire and tormented by a multitude of worms. When she saw me she recognised me as her daughter and cried out with loud shrieks, 'Alas, my daughter, you see how I am suffering through my own fault. Everything to do with sobriety I judged to be madness; pornography and adultery I found to be very pleasant, drunkenness and lustfulness were no hardship, and see how I now suffer the pains of hell in exchange for all those trifling pleasures. Look at my torments now in exchange for all those delicate delights, see what reward I reap for being contemptuous of God. Every irrevocable evil has finally caught up with me. And now I need help, my

daughter. Remember how I have provided for you, now is the time to pay back whatever good I have done you. Have pity on me as I burn in this consuming fire, have pity! I'm totally exhausted by this excruciating punishment, have pity, my daughter, and reach out your hand to drag me out of this place.'

"But I couldn't do this because of those standing in front of her, and she cried and shouted again, 'Help me, my daughter, don't despise the tears of your own mother. Remember how I suffered for you in the day of your birth, don't abandon me now as I perish in the flames of hell.'

"Moved to tears by her crying, I was overcome by compassion and began to weep and cry out in sympathy with her, so that those with me in the house were awoken and brought lamps, asking me why I was moaning so piteously. I told them what I had seen. And so it was that I decided on one thing, to follow in the footsteps of my father. By the unbelievable mercy of God I had been convinced of what punishments are laid up in store for those who live an evil life."

So this woman happily learned from her vision what reward would be given to good works, and set her face against the terrible punishments which would follow the evil acts of a vicious life. We were blessed by the profit we gained from her good counsel.

VI.i.16. In order to strengthen our faithfulness and encourage us to be diligent in our path towards salvation the same old man told us this story about a certain bishop. This bishop used to live among us, and according to what he himself told us, some people reported to him that there were two women in the congregation whose lives were not above reproach. Moved by the people who told him these things, and suspecting that there might be others like that, he earnestly begged God to show him clearly their true state.

After this solemn and terrifying request, he was able to see in the faces of those who came to the holy mysteries the state of their souls and the sins which had control over each one of them. The faces of those men who were sinful appeared to be black, some of them appearing as if burned out by fire, their eyes red and bloodshot, others were fair of face, clothed in white. When they received the body of the Lord some seemed to become enveloped in destroying fire, for others it was as if a light was lit in them which entered their mouth and illuminated their whole body. Among them were some who lived a solitary life and some who were married, but all were laid open in this way.

When he turned to the women and began to communicate them, he learned

what the state of their souls was like also. For some of their faces too were black, some red and bloodshot, some white. Among them came those two women who had been denounced to the bishop, and because of whom he had been given this visionary state of prayer. As they approached the sacred mysteries, he saw them as if clothed in white garments, their faces pure and innocent. After receiving the mystery of Christ they shone with a brilliant light.

The bishop later in solitary prayer begged to be shown the meaning of the revelations which he had been given. An angel of the Lord appeared to him whom he began to question in detail. The holy bishop first enquired whether the accusation against these women was true or false. The angel said that everything that had been said about them was true. He then asked the angel how it was that in the presence of the body of Christ their faces were so wonderful, their garments so white, with such a brilliant light shining from them. The angel replied, "In so far as they have repented of their sins, turning away from them with tears and sighs, and have given alms to the poor, they have become worthy by their confessions of being numbered among the righteous, for they have also promised never to walk in those sinful ways again as a condition of being found worthy to receive pardon for their past sins. This is why their lives have been changed by God. Cleansed from their sins they have since then lived soberly, devoutly and properly".

The bishop however was surprised not so much by the change in their lives (for that, after all, happens to many) but by the generosity of God who had not merely delivered them from punishment but had endowed them with grace in such overflowing measure.

The angel said to him, "You are astonished because you are human, but the Lord, your God and mine, is in his nature good and merciful to those who depart from their evil ways and turn to him in confession. Not only does he save them from hell, but he turns away his wrath from them and counts them worthy of honour, for God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son for them. While we were yet sinners he chose to die for us. Should he not therefore absolve from sin and welcome into his household those who repent of what they have done? He offers good things to be enjoyed by those whom he has prepared like this. You must realise that no human sin is greater than the mercy of God, as long as penitence results in good acts to wash away those evil acts of the past. Such is the mercy of God that he knows our infirmity and the strength of our passions and the cunning and power of the

devil, so that when we fall into sin he humours us as children, patiently looking to us for amendment. On those who turn and cast themselves on his mercy he has compassion as on those who are ill. He looses them from their torments and gives them the good things prepared for the just."

The bishop then said to the angel, "May I ask you to enlighten me as to how the particular sin of each person was shown in the differing appearance of their faces, so that I may be conversant with these and ignorant no longer?"

The Angel replied, "Those with shining happy faces are those who live in sobriety, chastity and justice and who are humble, compassionate and merciful. Those with the black faces are given to fornication, unbridled lusts and all other crimes and sins of omission. Those who are red and bloodstained live in bitterness and injustice, scandalmongers, blasphemers, deceivers and murderers."

Again the angel said to him, "If you wish for them to be saved you must help them. It is for this reason that your questions have been answered, so that by what you have seen you may learn about the sins of your disciples. Through your prayers and warnings their repentance will make them more acceptable to him who died and rose again for them: Jesus Christ our Lord. Use whatever power and zeal you have, and love for the Lord Christ, to watch over them that they may be converted to God from their sins, plainly teaching them not to despair of their salvation whatever the sins they may have been dominated by. For those who repent and turn to God, there will be salvation and the future reward of a sumptuous banquet. But the greatest reward will be yours, for imitating the Lord who came down from heaven and dwelt on earth for the salvation of humankind."

VI.i.17. One of the fathers declared that there are three worthwhile aims for monks to pursue with fear and trembling and spiritual joy, sharing in the holy Sacraments, breaking bread with the brethren, and washing the brethren's feet. He told the following story as an illustration:

There was a certain old man who was a seer, and it happened that he was sharing a meal with some of the brothers. And as they were eating, this old man saw in the spirit that some of those at the table were eating honey, others bread, and others filth. And he marvelled and prayed to God, saying, "Lord, reveal this mystery to me, that whereas the same food is put before all of them on the table, yet as they eat it seems to be changed, and one eats honey, another bread, and yet another filth."

And a voice from above came to him, saying, "Those eating honey are those

who eat at the table with fear and trembling and thanksgiving, and pray without ceasing. And their prayer rises up before God as the incense. And so they eat honey. Those who eat bread are those who simply perceive the gifts of God and give thanks for them. But those eating filth are those who pick and choose, saying 'This is all right but I don't like that'. They ought not to think like that but rather glorify God and offer him praise, so that there may be fulfilled in us that which is written, 'Whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whatever you may be doing, do all things to the glory of God.'

Libellus 2: Old men who did signs

VI.ii.1. Abba Dulas, the disciple of Abba Besarion, told this story: We were walking one day by the seashore when I said to Abba Besarion that I was very thirsty. The old man prayed and then said, "Drink from the sea".

So I drank and the water was perfectly sweet. I put some of the water into a bottle lest I should feel thirsty later on, but when he saw it he said, "Why are you filling that bottle with water?"

I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but I might be thirsty again later on."

And the old man said, "God will still be here then, just as he is now."

VI.ii.2. On another occasion, when he needed to, he walked across the river Chrysoroan. I was amazed, and said, "Forgive me for asking, but what did your feet feel like when you walked across the water?"

And the old man said, "It felt like water around my toenails, but the rest was solid under my feet."

Old men who did signs (continued), Book VI (Superlative Observance further down page)

VI ii.3. Another time when we were going to visit another old man it was drawing towards sunset. And the old man prayed, "I pray you Lord that the sun may stand still till we reach your servant." And so it happened.

VI ii.4. Once a brother infested by a demon in Scete came along and prayers were said for him in church, but the demon persisted and would not go out of him. The clergy of that place said to each other, "What shall we do about this demon? Nobody will be able to cast it out except Abba Besarion, but if we go and ask him about it he will be sure to stay away from church. So then let's do this: Tomorrow he will be in church with everyone else. Let's put the brother

with the demon in Besarion's place, and when he comes in, we will stand up to pray and say to him, 'Stir that brother up, abba.'"

And that is what they did. When the old man came in next morning they stood up to pray and said to him, "Stir that brother up, abba." And the old man said to the afflicted brother, "Get up, go out." And immediately the demon came out of him and he was made whole from that hour.

VI.ii.5. The old men once in conversation with Abba Elias said that Abba Agathon was a good man.

And the old man said, "Yes, according to today's standards he is a good man."

"And what about the standards of old, then?" they asked.

And he replied, "I told you he was a good man by today's standards, but in comparison with the standards of old, I don't mind telling you, I have seen a man in Scete who could make the sun stand still in the sky, like Joshua the son of Nun" (Joshua 10.13)

And his audience was silenced and gave glory to God.

VI.ii.6. The story is told of Abba Macarius the Greater that as he was coming up out of Scete carrying his wicker baskets he sat down overcome with exhaustion and prayed, "Lord, as you can see, I can't go on." And straight away he was lifted up and found himself on the other side of the river.

VI.ii.7. A certain man in Egypt had a paralysed son whom he took to the cell of blessed Abba Macarius. Ignoring his tears he put him down outside the door, and departed. When the old man looked out and saw him weeping he said, "Who brought you here?"

He replied, "My father carried me here and then went away."

The old man said, "Get up and go after him." And he was healed immediately and went after his father and returned to his own home.

VI.ii.8. Abbot Sisois said, "When I was in Scete with Abba Macarius we went out together reaping. And there was a widow woman picking up the ears after us who never stopped weeping, so the old man called to the owner of the field and asked what was the matter with that old woman who never stopped weeping. He replied that the woman's husband had died without telling her where a certain sum of money was hidden, and the person to whom the money was owed wanted to bring her and her children into slavery. And the old man told him to tell the woman to come and see him during siesta. And when she had come, the old man asked her why she was weeping. She replied that her husband had died without telling her where he had put some money which he had been given to look after.

"The old man said, 'Come and show me where your husband is buried'. And taking some brothers with him he went with her to that place. 'You go back inside your house,' he said, and as the brothers offered up prayers he cried out to the dead man, 'Where have you hidden that pledged money?'

"And there came the reply, 'It is hidden in my house under the foot of the bed.'

"And the old man said, 'Sleep now in peace until the day of Resurrection.'

"When the brothers saw this, they fell down at his feet, but he said to them, 'This has not happened because of me - I am nothing. But God has done this for the sake of this widow and her children. This is the great thing, that God wills everyone to be without sin, and if anyone asks for this, he will receive it.' Then he came and told the widow where the money was hidden, which she took and gave to the creditor and so saved her children from slavery."

And all who heard this story were amazed.

VI.ii.9. Abba Emilis was once passing through a certain place where a monk was being held in custody accused of murder. The old man went and questioned him, and having found out who had accused him, he said to the guards, "Where is the dead body?"

They showed him where, and the old man went up to it, asking all those around to start praying. As he lifted up his hands to God in prayer, the dead man came to life.

In the presence of all he asked, "Tell us, who was it that killed you?"

He replied, "I went in to the church to ask the priest to look after some money of mine. He it was who got up and killed me, and then carried me off and threw me into the cell of this abba. I beg you, please get the money from him and give it to my children."

The old man said to him, "Go, sleep in peace, till the Lord brings resurrection." And once more he fell asleep.

VI.ii.10. Abba Pastor was being visited by a number of the brothers when a kinsman of his approached, bringing with him his son who had been facially disfigured by the action of the devil. When he saw that crowd of monks he picked up his son and sat down outside weeping. "I am a relative of Abba Pastor, and I have with me this son of mine, disfigured as you can see. I wanted to bring him to the old man to ask him to cure him, but I am afraid he won't want to see me. If he knows I am here, he will not be pleased and will drive me away. But seeing your gathering here, I have made bold to come. Take pity on me, abba, and do what you can to bring my son inside and pray

for him."

The old man took the boy inside with him and prudently did not take him to Abba Pastor straight away, but went first of all to the most junior of the brothers, asking him to sign the boy with the cross. He got all the brothers in order of seniority to do the same till at last he brought him to Abba Pastor. Abba Pastor, however did not want to touch him, but they all protested saying, "We have all done it, father, so why not you?"

The old man groaned aloud, but he got up and prayed, "God have mercy on this man moulded in your image and let the enemy no longer have dominion over him."

He signed him with the cross, and he was cured, and was given back to his father.

VI.ii.11. One of the fathers spoke of a certain Abba Paul, who lived near the Thebaid in the lower parts of Egypt. This Paul was able to pick up so-called horned asps, serpents and scorpions, and tear them apart with his bare hands. Seeing this, the brothers asked him what he had done to be granted this grace, and he replied, "Forgive me, brothers, but if anyone is completely pure, everything is subject to him, as it was to Adam in Paradise, before he disobeyed the commandment of God."

VI.ii.12. When Julian the Apostate was invading Persia, he sent a demon back westwards to report on what was happening there. But when it arrived at a certain spot where there was a hermit, it stopped short for ten days and was unable to go any further because of the ceaseless prayer which the hermit was offering. It returned to its sender having achieved nothing. Julian asked it why it had stopped and it replied that it had had to stop and turn back having done nothing because it had waited ten days for the monk Publius to stop praying and let him pass.

"He didn't stop," he continued, "and so I couldn't pass and I turned back with nothing done."

In a dreadful rage, Julian cried that he would exact vengeance on him when he returned. But in the providence of God he was slain a few days after, whereupon one of the army commanders with him turned back immediately, sold all that he had, gave it to the poor, and joined that old man to become a monk, and so found his peace in God.

VI.ii.13. A man was journeying once with his son to Abba Sisois in Abba Antony's mountain when the son died on the way. The father did not grieve, however, but with great faith carried his son onwards until they both lay face

down in front of the old man to ask his blessing. The father got up and left his son at the foot of the old man and went outside the cell. The old man thought that the son must have been doing an extra penance, lying there still at his feet, and said to him, "Get up, you can go now."

He did not know that the son was actually dead. The son got up immediately and went out, and when his father saw him he was awestruck, went in to the old man and fell down and worshipped him, explaining what had happened. The old man was upset at hearing this, for it had not come about of his own will. The old man's disciple told the father not to mention this to anyone until after the old man had died.

VI.ii.14. Abraham, the disciple of this same Abba Sisois, was once being tempted by a demon, and when the old man saw how he was being battered, he got up and stretched out his hands towards God, saying, "O God, whether you will or no, I shall not lower my hands until you cure him." And that brother was forthwith cured.

VI.ii.15. An aged solitary near the River Jordan, went into a cave to shelter from the heat and found a lion inside, who began to roar and show his teeth. But the old man said to him, "Why are you trying to crowd me out? There is plenty of room enough for both you and me. But if you don't want that, well, go then." The lion was unable to endure this treatment and went.

VI.ii.16. When a certain old man stopped for a rest as he was on the way to Terenuthin from Scete, some people saw how thirsty he was and brought him some wine. Others who had heard of his reputation brought a man possessed by a demon to him. The demon began to revile him, saying, "You're bringing me to this wine-bibber?" The old man in his humility was unwilling to exorcise him, but nevertheless because of the demon's aggressiveness he cried, "I believe in Christ that before I have finished drinking this wine you shall have gone out of him." As he began to drink the demon cried out, "You are burning me!" and before he had finished drinking, by the grace of Christ the demon fled.

VI.ii.17. One of the fathers sent his disciple to draw water from a well some way off from their cell, but he forgot to take a rope with him. When that brother got near the well and realised that he had forgotten the rope, he said a prayer and then cried, "O well, O well, my abba has told me to fill this vessel with water." And the water began to rise up to the top of the well so that the brother was able to fill his vessel before the water fell back again to its own level.

Libellus 3: The superlative observances of some holy people.

VI.iii.1 Abba Dulas told a story of how he and Abba Besarion when journeying in the desert happened on a certain cave which they went into and found a monk sitting and making mats out of palm leaves who seemed to be unwilling to look at them, or welcome them, or say anything to them at all. Abba Besarion said, "Let's go. This brother seems to want in his soul to keep silence."

They went on their way and paid a visit to Abba John. On their return journey as they passed the cave of that brother, Abba Besarion said, "Let us go in and see whether the Lord has inspired him to speak with us."

They went in and found that he was resting in final peace.

"Come, brother," Abba Besarion said to Abba Dulas, "let us gather up his body. The Lord has sent us here for the very purpose of being able to bury him."

But when they picked him up they found that he was in fact a woman.

And Besarion marvelled, saying, "See how women too can fight against the devil in the desert, putting to shame those of us who live in communities."

And they departed glorifying God who cares for those who love him.

iii.2 Abba Vindemius related how Abba Macarius had told the following story:

When I was in Scete, two young pilgrims came to me, one of whom had just begun to grow a beard while the other was as yet beardless.

"Where is the cell of Abba Macarius?" they asked.

I said to them, "What do you want to see him for?"

They replied, "We heard about him, and have come to Scete in order to see him."

"Well, I am he" I said.

They made a deep reverence and said, "We want to stay with you."

But when I saw how delicate they were, obviously

the elder said, "Well, if we can't stay here, we will go on some where else."

I thought to myself, "What can I do to them to put them off? Perhaps hard physical labour will drive them away from me."

So I said to them, "Come then, build yourself a cell if you can."

They replied, "We will, if you show us how."

So I gave them some tools and a basket full of bread and salt. I showed them a cliff face and said, "Excavate that, gather rushes from the marsh to make a

roof, then go and sit inside."

I thought that they would be put off by this hard work. But they asked me, "What do we do then?"

And gathering some palm leaves from the marsh I showed them how to begin and what to do next. I said to them, "Make baskets and take them to the church stewards, and they will keep you supplied with bread."

Then I left them, and they patiently carried out all that I had told them and did not come back to me for the next three years. I persevered in leaving them alone, but kept on wondering to myself what they were up to, and why it was that they had not come back to me to ask about what was going on inside them. Some people came to me from quite a long way off, but these two who were so close came not at all. Nor did they go to anyone else, except to go to church in silence to receive communion. So I fasted for a week and prayed to God that he would show me their manner of working. After that seven day fast, I went to them to see what they were doing. When I knocked on the door they opened it and greeted me in silence. I said the prayer and sat down. The elder then made a sign to the younger to go out, while he himself sat down to his weaving, saying nothing. At about the ninth hour he knocked [on a board] and the younger came in with a small dish of pulse. At a sign from the elder he brought out a table, laid on it three small loaves and stood there in silence.

So I said; "Come then, let us eat."

So we arose and ate, and he brought a vessel from which we drank. When evening came they said to me; "Will you be leaving us?"

But I said, "No, I would like to sleep here tonight."

So they put out a mat for me on one side and another for themselves in the corner on the other side. They loosened their belts and tunics and lay down to sleep together on their mat opposite me. After they had lain down, I prayed to God to show me their manner of working. And the roof of the cell opened up and a light as bright as day burst in, although they were not aware of that light. When they thought that I was asleep, the elder nudged the younger in the side, and they got up, girded themselves and stretched out their hands to heaven. I could see them, though they could not see me. And I saw demons like flies buzzing round the younger brother. Some came and settled on his mouth, others on his eyes. And I saw an angel of the Lord with a fiery sword flying around them, striking at those demons. But they were not able to come near the elder. Towards morning they went back to bed. I pretended to wake up and they did likewise.

The elder said nothing except "Shall we say the twelve psalms?"

And I said, "Yes, indeed."

The younger sang five psalms and with every word a tongue of fire came out of his mouth and flew up to heaven. Likewise when the elder opened his mouth to sing the psalms a fiery cloud came out of his mouth and reached up to heaven. I too added a little opus dei from my heart, in tune with them.

As I left I said, "Pray for me", and they wordlessly signified that they would. And from all this I understood that the elder had become perfected, while the younger was still battling, even though safe from harm. A few days later the elder died, and the younger followed three days later. And whenever any of the fathers came to visit Macarius after that, he would take them to those brothers' cell, saying, "Come and see the martyrdom of those two young pilgrims."

VI.iii.3. Two of the fathers begged God to show them what level of progress they had arrived at. And a voice came to them, saying, "In a certain village in Egypt there are a lay person and his wife, Eucharistius and Maria - you have not yet got anywhere near them."

The two old men therefore went to the village and found their way to that man's dwelling, where they met his wife.

"Where is your husband?" they asked.

"He is a shepherd," was the reply, "and he is out feeding the sheep."

And she invited them in to the house. Late in the day Eucharistius came back with his sheep, and when he saw the two old men he got the table ready and poured water into a basin to wash their feet. But they said to him, "We shan't taste of any of your food until you have told us about your way of life."

Eucharistius humbly said to them, "I am a shepherd and this is my wife."

They pressed him further, begging him to tell them all, but he would not say any more, until they said to him, "It is the Lord who has sent us to you."

At this word he was overawed, and said, "This flock of sheep was handed on to us from our parents, and whatever profit God gives us from them, we divide into three. One part we give to the poor, one part we keep for the refreshment of pilgrims, and the third part we use ourselves. And although I have taken a wife, I do not have sex with her. She also is a virgin, and we sleep separately from each other. We only wear ordinary clothing during the day - at night we wear sackcloth. Up till now, nobody else has known about this."

When the two fathers heard this they marvelled, and departed glorifying God.

VI.iii.4. Once when Abba Macarius of Egypt came from Scete to the

monastery of Abba Pambo in Mount Nitria on a day when the liturgy was celebrated, the seniors there asked him for a few enlightening words. He replied, "I am not yet a true monk, though I have seen true monks. Some time ago when in my cell in Scete, I was persistently getting thoughts that I should go into the desert and think about what I should see there. For five years I tried to ignore these thoughts lest they should have been inspired by the demons, but when they had persevered such a long time I at last went into the desert and came to a lake with an island in the middle of it. Various desert animals came to drink from it, including two men completely naked. I was frightened - I thought they were spirits! But when they saw me and how frightened I was, they spoke to me, saying,

"Don't be afraid. We are just men like you.'

"So I said to them, 'Where do you come from? And how is it that you have come into the desert?'

"They replied, 'We used to live in a cenobium, but came to an agreement with each other forty years ago to come out here.'

"One of them was an Egyptian and the other an Libyan. And they began to ask me how the world was going and whether the waters of the Nile were still rising at their accustomed time to fill the world with plenty. I assured them that this was so and began to question them also. 'How does one become a monk?' I asked.

"They replied, 'Unless you renounce the whole world you cannot become a monk.'

"I replied that I was not very strong and I could not do as they did, but they answered, 'If you can't do as we do, then just sit in your cell and weep for your sins.'

"I went on to ask them if they didn't feel the cold in the winter and the heat in the summer, but they replied that God had given them the gift of not feeling either winter cold or summer heat. This is the reason that I said to you that I was sorry, brothers, but I have not yet become a monk."

VI.iii.5. Abba Sisois lived alone in Antony's mountain. Having told his servant to leave him alone he had not seen any other human being for ten months.

Walking around the mountain one day he came across a local man hunting wild animals. The old man asked him where he came from and how long he had been there, and he replied, "To tell you the truth, abba, I have been here eleven months and you are the first person I have seen."

Hearing this, the old man went back to his cell and rebuked himself, saying,

"Look at yourself, Sisois; you think you have achieved something and you haven't yet done as much as this man who isn't even a monk!"

VI.iii.6 This same Abba Sisois always sat in his cell keeping his door shut. And it is said that when he was on his death bed with the fathers round about him his face shone like the sun, and he said to them, "Abba Antony is here". And a little while after, he said, "The company of prophets is here." And again his face shone even brighter as he said, "The band of the Apostles is here."

And his face shone twice as much as before as he appeared to be carrying on a conversation with somebody. The old men asked him whom he was talking with, and he replied that he was asking the angels coming to carry him away if he could be spared something of his due punishment.

The seniors said to him; "You don't deserve any punishment, father."

And he replied, "Truly, I don't know whether I have escaped even the beginning of punishment." And everyone realised that he had arrived at a state of perfection.

Superlative Observance of some holy people (continued), Book VI
(Seven sayings of Abba Moses further down page)

And again his face suddenly became like the sun, such that everyone was awestruck, as he said, "Look, the Lord is here, saying, 'Bring me this man who pledged himself to choosing the desert.'" And suddenly he gave up his spirit, and the whole place was filled with a sweet odour.

VI.iii.7. It was said of Abba Hor that he never told a lie, never swore, never cursed anyone and never spoke to anyone unless it was absolutely necessary.

VI.iii.8. The same Abba Hor said to his disciple, "See that you never allow any unseemly speech into your cell."

VI.iii.9. Two well known old men were walking through the desert near Scete when they heard a sort of murmur coming out of the ground, and they saw the entrance to a cave into which they went to find a little old woman lying there, ill.

They said to her, "How long have you been here, old woman? And who is looking after you?" For they could see no one else in the cave except this solitary woman lying there ill.

And she said, "Thirty-eight years I have been in this cave in the desert, trying to serve Christ as well as I can, and have seen no man until today. God has

sent you to bury my body."

As she said this, she came to her rest in peace. The fathers gave glory to God, buried her body and returned to their own place.

VI.iii.10. The story is told of a certain solitary who went into the desert clad only in a shapeless tunic made of flax. When he had wandered about for three days, he climbed up on to a rocky mound and saw below some green grass and an old man feeding on it like an animal. He went quietly down and grabbed hold of him, but since the old man was naked and evidently upset by another human presence, he managed to wriggle out of his hands and run away.

But the brother followed, running after him and shouting, "Wait for me. It is for God's sake that I am following you."

And the old man turned round and cried, "And it is for God's sake that I am running away."

So the brother threw off behind him the tunic that he was wearing and kept on following. When the old man saw that he had cast off his clothing he gave way, and as the brother got near to him he said, "When I saw that you had cast off your last vestige of worldliness then I stopped."

The brother said, "Father, give me a word whereby I may walk safely."

And he replied, "Flee from mankind, keep silence, and you will be safe."

VI.iii.11. When a certain solitary came out of Egypt to Raythum (where the seventy palm trees are in the place where Moses strove with the people), he told the brethren this story:

"It occurred to me once that I should go into the inner desert to see if by chance I could find any servant of the Lord Jesus Christ living further inside the desert than I. After four days and nights I came upon a cave, and when I went in and looked inside, I saw a figure sitting. I knocked according to monastic custom so that he might come out for me to greet him. He didn't move, for he had gone to his rest. Without hesitation I went in and when I laid hold of his scapular it fell to pieces and turned to dust. I looked up and saw his tunic, which also fell to pieces and became as nothing.

"As I was wondering about this, I went out and wandered further into the desert and it wasn't long before I found another cave with traces of human habitation. My curiosity was aroused even more, but when I went up to it and knocked and received no answer I went in and found nobody. I went outside and thought to myself that the servant of God would have to come back here, wherever he might be at the moment. At last as daylight was fading, I saw

some cattle approaching together with a servant of God, who had nothing covering his nakedness but his long hair. When he saw me, he thought I was a spirit and stood still to pray. For he had been greatly troubled by spirits, as he afterwards told me. I had already realised this must be the case so I called out to him, 'Servant of God, I am only a man like you. See my footprints. Touch me. I'm only flesh and blood.'

After he had said the Amen to his prayer, he looked at me and was reassured. He took me into his cave and asked me how it was that I had come thither. I replied, 'I have come into this lonely place hoping to find a servant of God and God has not disappointed me of my desire.'

"I questioned him further about how he had come to be there, and how long he had been there, and what food he ate, and why he was naked, not seeming to feel the need for any clothing.

"He replied, 'I used to be in the cenobium at Thebes where my work was linen weaving, and a thought came into my mind telling me that I should go out and live by myself, and live in quietness, and give hospitality to travellers, and that I should gain greater rewards in that way than in my present work. I consented to this thought and lost no time in acting upon it. I went out and built my own hermitage, to which many people came bringing me work. When I had made a bit of money I gave it to the poor and to passing travellers. But our old adversary, the devil, envious then as always, began scheming to take away from me the future rewards for what I had been hastening to offer God through my labours. For he saw a certain holy virgin casting glances at me, which I capped by returning them, and soon he put it into her head to expect these glances more and more. When this and even greater boldness had become a habit, it eventually got to holding hands, laughter and, eating together, until we fell into the ultimate trap and fell into sin. I stayed in this ruinous state for six months and then thought to myself, "Today, or tomorrow, or many years hence I will still have to die and suffer eternal punishment, for if someone who violates his neighbour's wife is liable to eternal torments how much more worthy of punishment is someone who has defiled a bride of Christ?" So I quietly hurried off to this desert, leaving everything to that woman, and when I got here, I found this cave and a spring of water, and this palm tree which bears twelve-branched clusters of date. Each month it bears one cluster which lasts me for thirty days, by which time another has got ripe. After a time my hair grew very long, and by the time my clothes wore out it was long enough to cover my body.'

"I asked him whether he had found it all very difficult at the beginning and he replied, 'At first I was greatly troubled with pains in my liver so much that I was unable to stand to sing the psalms but lay on the ground crying out to the Most High. When I had got to the stage of being so weak and ill in my cave that I could not go outside, I saw a man come in who stood opposite me and asked me what was the matter. I was rather glad to see him and told him that I was under a curse. When he asked me where the pain was, I showed him and he joined his fingers together and cut me open as if with a sword, took out my liver and showed me where it had been attacked. He scraped off the diseased bits and wrapped them up in a cloth before putting the liver back and closing up the wound. And he said to me, "Now you have been healed, as befits a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ." And from that time on, I have been perfectly well, and have lived here without any further trouble.'

"I begged him to let me stay with him in the desert, but he said to me that I would not be able to withstand the attacks of the demons. I thought about this and asked him to pray for me and let me go with a blessing. So he prayed, and let me go. And all this I tell you that you may be enlightened thereby."

VI.iii.12. Another old man repeated the following story told by the worthy bishop of Oxyrynchus, who in the first place had told it as if it had been someone else:

"It occurred to me," he said, "to go on a visit to the inner desert around Oasis, the territory of the Mazices, to find out if there were anyone there serving God. I began my journey with a few loaves and four days' supply of water. After four days with all my provisions gone, I wondered what I should do, but struggled on in faith nevertheless. I walked on and managed to survive for four more days without food. Travel-weary and famished, I was then no longer able to push my body further and collapsed on to the ground, when someone came and touched my lips with his finger, as if he were a doctor examining my saliva. I was at once strengthened, as if I had not felt hungry or walked any distance at all.

"Feeling my strength coming back to me I got up and kept on walking into the desert. After another four days had passed, I once more felt faint with fatigue. I raised up my hands to heaven, and that same person who had helped me previously came again to moisten my lips and give me strength. Seventeen more days went by until I arrived at a hut in a grove of palms, and a man standing there whose only clothing was the hair of his head, which was totally white with hoary old age. He presented a formidable appearance. When he

saw me, he started to pray, and at my Amen he realised I was human. Taking me by the hand, he asked me why I had come, and how things were in the world, and whether there were persecutions still. I told him that I had come into the desert for the sake of finding him who truly served our Lord Jesus Christ, and that through the power of Christ the persecutions had ceased. And then I asked him how it was that he had come to this place.

"He replied with tears and lamentation, 'I am a bishop and during the persecutions I was tortured so severely that I could bear the torment no longer, and so I sacrificed to the gods. Returning home I realised the depth of my wickedness, and resolved to give myself to the desert until death. For forty-nine years now I have been acknowledging my sins and praying to God that he may forgive me. God has given me these palm trees to sustain my life, but I gained no assurance of forgiveness for the first forty-eight years. But now in this forty-ninth year I am at peace.'

"Having said this he got up and went outside to pray, standing for a long space of time. His prayer completed he came back to me, and as I looked on his face I was awe-struck, for it shone like fire.

But he said to me, 'Don't be afraid, for God has sent you to give me the last rites and bury me.'

"As soon as he had finished speaking he stretched out his arms and legs and gave up his spirit. I tore my tunic in half, kept half for myself, and wrapped his holy body with the other half before burying it. As soon as the body was covered the palm trees withered and the hut collapsed in ruins. I wept profusely, beseeching God to restore the palm trees for me so that I might persevere for the rest of my life in that place. But nothing happened, so I said to myself it was not God's will. I prayed, and began my journey back to the world. I was again visited by the person who moistened my lips. He came to give me strength, and enabled me to return to my brethren to whom I told my story, urging them never to despair but to seek God through penitence."

VI.iii.13 A brother asked an old man, "Which is more important for salvation, who you are or what you do?"

The old man replied; "What you do. I know a brother who was praying once and his prayer was heard. A thought had come into his mind that he would like to see the way in which the souls of both the righteous and the wicked were taken up out of the body. And God satisfied his desire, so that as the brother was sitting in his cell a wolf came in and tugged at his clothing, dragging him outside. With the brother following, the wolf led him towards a city and then

left him. He found himself inside a monastery near the city where there was a renowned solitary who was ill and at the point of death. He saw great quantities of tapers and candles being arranged around that solitary, as if it had all been owing to him that God had kept the inhabitants of that city safe and provided them with food and water, and that if that should come to an end we should all die.

"But at the hour of that solitary's death that brother saw a denizen of hell with a fiery trident descending on to him and heard a voice saying, 'Inasmuch as that soul never ceased to cause me unease in this life, so have no pity on it as you come to pluck it out.' The demon then plunged his trident into the solitary's heart, tormenting him for several hours before plucking out his soul.

"The brother then went into the city and found a pilgrim lying on a sick bed, with no one to look after him, and stayed with him for the whole day. The hour of his death drew nigh, and the brother saw Michael and Gabriel coming down towards his soul. They sat one on each side of him and entreated the soul to come out of him but it would not, as if reluctant to leave the body.

"Gabriel said to Michael, 'Tear out his soul and let us go.'

"But Michael replied, 'We have orders from God that it should depart painlessly, so we cannot tear it out.'

"Michael then cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, what do you want us to do with this soul that will not agree to leave the body'

"And a voice came saying, 'See now, I am sending David with his harp and all the singers of Jerusalem, so that when he hears the psalm they sing he will come out.'

"As they all descended around him singing their hymns the soul came out into the hands of Michael and was taken up with great joy."

VI.iii.14. The same person related how an old man once went into the city to sell some pottery which he had made, and having done that happened to sit down outside the door of a certain rich man who was dying. As he sat there he saw black horses with fearsome black riders, each one with a fiery staff in his hand, arriving at the house. They left their horses outside and rushed in.

When the sick man saw them he cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Lord, help me!"

But they said to him, "You're calling on God now that your sun is setting. Why did you not call upon him this day while the splendour of light was still with you? At this hour now there is no portion of hope or consolation left for you."

VI.iii.15. The fathers said that a certain Macarius was the first to set up a

monastery in Scete. That place is a long way off from Nitria, distant by a journey of about a day and a night. There are many dangers for those who would go there. None but the strong are able to survive in that harsh place; it is totally arid, furnishing nothing of what is necessary for life. This Macarius, a townsman, at one stage joined up with Macarius the Greater, and when they came to cross the Nile, it so chanced that they were able to board a sizeable ship along with two tribunes whose possessions proclaimed their importance. They had a bronze chariot, the horses had golden bridles. A number of soldiers were with them, their slaves had ornamental necklaces, some of them with golden girdles. When these tribunes saw the two old monks sitting in a corner dressed in rags they revered them for their poverty.

One of the tribunes said to them, "Blessed are you, for you have made this world look absurd."

The Macarius who came from the town said, "We have indeed made this world look absurd, but this world makes you look absurd. For you must know that you did not realise the full import of what you have just said, since both of us are called 'Macarius', which does in fact mean 'blessed'." And the tribune was so stirred by his words that he went back home, discarded his expensive clothing and became a monk after giving much alms.

VI.iii.16. The story is also told of this same Macarius the Greater that once when he was walking through the desert, he came across the head of a dead man lying on the ground. When he touched it with the staff which he had in his hand, the head spoke to him. The old man asked him who he was, and the head said, "I am priest of the pagans who used to live here, and you are Abba Macarius who is filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Whenever you take pity on the souls in torment and pray for them they gain a little comfort."

The old man asked, "What sort of comfort?" And the head replied, "As far as the heavens are from the earth, so great is the fire above us and below us. As we stand in the middle we can then no longer see our neighbours face to face." The old man wept and said, "Woe to the day in which a human being was born if that is all the comfort he gets in his punishment. Are there greater torments?"

The head replied, "Those underneath us are punished more severely."

The old man asked, "Who is down there?" The head replied, "We who did not know God do have a little bit of mercy shown to us, but those below us are the ones who knew God but denied him and did not do his will."

The old man then took the head and buried it.

VI.iii.17. As this same Abba Macarius was one day meditating in his cell he heard a voice saying, "Macarius, you have not yet become as perfect as two women who live in the city." The old man got up next morning and taking his staff of palm in his hand set off for the city. When he had found the place where they lived, he knocked on the door. Someone came out and invited him in, and when he had sat down called the two women who came in and sat with him. The old man said to them, "I have gone to a lot of trouble for the sake of meeting you. Tell me now about your way of prayer (operatio), how and what you do."

They said, "It is not as if we are separate from our husbands at night time. What sort of way of prayer do you think we might have?"

But the old man pressed them to satisfy his curiosity and reveal what they did. And at last they said, "By the world's standards we were of no account, so we were pleased to be able to marry two brothers. For fifteen years now we have spent our days in the same house and I don't think either of us has complained about the other or spoken spitefully to each other, but have passed the whole time in peace and concord. We did think we would like to enter a house of virgins, but we asked our husbands and they wouldn't allow it. Since we were not worthy to be given that kind of blessing we made a vow between ourselves and God that we would not allow worldly talk to pass our lips till the day of our death." When Abba Macarius heard that he said, "I declare truly that God sends his Holy Spirit on all, not because they are virgins, nor wives subject to a husband, nor monks, nor seculars, but according as each person is able to receive it."

iii.18. The fathers told of a well known old man that as he was walking in the desert, he saw two angels walking with him, one on the right and one on the left. As they went on they came across a corpse lying in the way. The old man held his nose because of the smell, and the angels did likewise. After a little while the old man said, "So you smelt him too?"

"Not at all," replied the angels. "It was because of you that we held our noses. We can't smell the smells of the world, they don't affect us. What we do smell is the smell in the souls of sinners."

Libellus 4: Seven sayings of Abba Moyses to Abba Poemen. And how those who keep them may avoid punishment.

VI.iv.1. Abba Moses said, "A man ought to be as if dead in his neighbour's

sight. To be dead in this sense is to refrain from passing judgment on him in anything."

VI.iv.2. He also said, "A man ought so to put to death every evil in himself that before he comes to the hour of his death he gives offence to no one."

VI.iv.3. He also said, "If a man does not know in his heart that he is a sinner, God does not hear him."

A brother asked what is meant by knowing in the heart that one is a sinner, and he replied, "When you are aware of your own sins, you don't see those of your neighbour."

VI.iv.4. He also said, "Unless what you do is in agreement with how you pray, your labour is in vain."

A brother asked "How should our acts be in agreement with our prayers?"

And he replied, "We pray for things which we do not yet perform, but when we give up our own will, then we are reconciled to God and God hears our prayers."

The brother asked, "What help do we get in all our human labour?"

And he replied, "God is our helper. For it is written, 'God is our help and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.' (Psalm 46.1)"

VI.iv.5. A brother asked, "What is the purpose of the fasts and vigils which a man undertakes?"

And the old man replied, "These are the means whereby the soul learns humility. For it is written, 'Look upon my lowliness and labour and forgive me all my sins.' (Psalm 25.18). If a soul does these things, the Lord will have mercy on him because of them".

VI.iv.6. A brother asked what he should do in all the temptations which came upon him, and in every thought from the devil.

And the old man said to him, "With the goodness of God before his eyes he ought to weep and ask for help. He will soon find peace if he asks in total awareness, for it is written, 'The Lord is my helper. I shall not fear what men can do to me.' (Psalm 118.6)"

VI.iv.7. Again, a brother asked, "If a man beats his servant because of the things he has done wrong, what should that servant say?"

The old man replied, "If he is a good servant he will say, 'Forgive me, I've done wrong'".

"Nothing else?" asked the brother.

"No," replied the old man, "for in accepting the blame and saying he has done

wrong, the master will forgive him at once. The point in all this is 'Don't condemn your neighbour'. When the hand of the Lord slew the first-born in the land of Egypt there was not a single household without a death" (Exodus 12.29-30).

"What does that text mean?" asked the brother.

Seven Sayings of Abba Moses etc (continued), Book VI

"It means that if we keep our own sins in mind," the old man replied, "we will overlook the sins of our neighbour. It would not make sense for someone with a death in the house to go out and mourn the death of a neighbour. To be as if dead as far as one's neighbour is concerned is to bear the burden of your own sins, and to refrain from passing judgment on everyone as to whether this person is good, this one bad. Do no evil to anyone, don't even think evil of anyone, neither reject the evil doer nor acquiesce in the evil anyone is doing to your neighbour, and all this is to be as if dead as far as one's neighbour is concerned. Don't spread slander about anyone, but say, 'God knows what is in each person', neither listen to anyone spreading slander or collude with him in that slander. And all this is what 'judge not that you be not judged' means (Matthew 7.1). Don't make an enemy of anyone and don't harbour a grudge in your heart. Nor should you feel hatred for anyone who slanders your neighbour, but don't give your assent to his slanders either. Peace of mind is his who does not despise the one who slanders his neighbour, and comfort yourself with these words, 'Short is the time of our labour, eternal the span of our rest', thanks be to the Word of God. Amen."

VI.iv.8. Another old man said, "Our Saviour was born a human being for you; the Son of God came that you might be saved. Without ceasing to be God, he became human; he became a child; he became a 'lector' when he took the book in the synagogue and cried, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and he has anointed me and sent me to preach the good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18) He became a 'subdeacon' when he made a whip of cords to drive the sheep and oxen etcetera out of the temple. He became a 'deacon' when he girded himself with a linen cloth and washed the feet of his disciples, urging them to wash the feet of their brothers. He became a 'presbyter' when he sat in the midst of the elders as he taught them, and he became a 'bishop' as he took bread and blessed it and gave it to his disciples, etcetera. For you he was whipped, for you crucified and killed, and rose the third day and ascended into heaven.

For you he took all these things upon himself, all in accordance with the dispensation of God, all in due order, from which it follows that he has done all things that he might bring us salvation, and will you not therefore bear all things for him? Let us be sober, let us be vigilant, let us give ourselves to prayer, let us do what is pleasing to him that we might attain salvation. Was not Joseph sold into Egypt, a foreign land? Who could take pity on each of the three children taken captive in Babylon? God alone was their protector; he it was who took them up and glorified them because they feared his name. He who has given his whole heart to God does not follow his own will but looks for the guidance of God without anxiety. For if you wish to fulfil your own will without the help of God, your labour is but in vain.

VI.iv.9. A brother asked Abba Pastor the meaning of the Scripture, 'Take no thought for the morrow'.

And the old man replied, "This is aimed at the human condition of being constantly tempted and found wanting, so that we should not be worrying about how much longer this state of affairs is to go on, but rather think daily of what is for today, and accept the future without constraint."

VI.iv.10. A brother asked Abba John, "How is it that whatever their own faults, people are not ashamed to castigate the faults of others?"

The old man replied by way of a parable: "A certain poor man met a woman more beautiful than the wife he already had and married her as well. Neither of them had any clothes. But when a market was about to be held in a certain place they both said to him that they would like to go with him. So he put them both, naked as they were, into a large wine jar, and crossed over the straits in a small boat to the place where the market was held. At noonday the people dispersed and when one of the women noticed how silent it was she jumped quickly out of the jar, found some discarded offcuts of cloth nearby in which she clothed herself and walked about quite boldly.

The other one, sitting naked in the jar said to the husband, "Just look at that tart, walking about with no proper clothes on."

The husband ruefully replied, "Oh, marvellous! She has covered her embarrassing nakedness as best she could. How is it that you who are completely naked can criticise her who at least is partly clothed?" That is what every fault-finder is like. They don't see their own sins, but they will always bring accusations against others.

VI.iv.11. Some brothers said to Abba Antony, "Give us a word of salvation". And the old man said, "Look, you've got the Scriptures. Listen to them. What

more do you need?"

But they said, "We want to hear what you have got to say, father."

The old man replied, "Hear what the Lord says, 'If anyone strikes you on the left cheek offer him the other' (Matthew 5.39).

They said, "We wouldn't be able to do that."

He said, "If you couldn't offer them the other cheek, at least take the first blow patiently."

They replied, "We couldn't do that either."

He said, "If you couldn't do that either, just be more willing to be struck than to strike."

They replied, "Nor that, either."

Then Antony said to his disciple, "Prepare some nourishing soup for these brothers, for they are very weak."

And to them he said, "If you can't do either this or that, what can I do for you? Prayer alone is what you need."

VI.iv.12. Abba John said to some of the brothers, "There were once three friends, philosophers, and when one of them was dying he commended his son into the care of the other. When the young man grew up, he committed adultery with his guardian's wife. When this was discovered, the guardian drove him out, and would not let him back even though he expressed great remorse. He condemned him instead to spending three years with the convicts in the mines before he would consider forgiving him. When the young man came back after three years, the guardian said to him, 'And now you can spend another three years paying for your sin by being constantly humiliated by me.' "And so he lived for another three years like this, after which the guardian said, 'Come now to the city of Athens, where you can learn some philosophy.' "Now at the gate of the city there was an old philosopher who sat there subjecting those who entered to all kinds of humiliations, this young man included. But when insulted, the young man laughed.

"The old man said, 'How is it that when I insult you, you laugh?'

"The young man replied, 'Wouldn't you expect me to laugh, when I've been subjected to insults for the last three years by way of paying for my sins, but now I'm being insulted free of charge! That's why I laughed.'

"And the old man said, 'Go up, and enter the city.'"

When Abba John had finished telling this story, he added, "This is the gate of the Lord, and the fathers entered rejoicingly after many humiliations."

VI.iv.13. Abba John depicted the penitent soul like this: "There was a certain

beautiful prostitute in a certain city who had many lovers. One of the leading men of that city came to her and said, 'If you would promise to be chaste I would take you for my wife.'

"So she promised, and he took her into his house. When her former lovers looked for her and discovered what an influential man it was who had made her his wife, they said, 'If we go to the door of such a powerful man he will know what we want and deal with us accordingly, so let us go round to the back of the house and give our usual whistle. When she hears it, she will come out to us and we shall be safe from blame.'

"But when she heard it, she closed her ears and ran into the central room of the house and shut the door."

By telling this story, the old man represented the prostitute as the soul, her lovers as the vices, the powerful man as Christ the prince, his house the everlasting heavenly mansions, the whistles the malignant demons. If then the soul would be ever faithful and chaste she must run to God.

VI.iv.14. Abba Pastor said, "It is written in Scripture 'If you have a tunic, sell it and buy a sword' (Luke 22.36). What this means is that if you are idle bestir yourself and prepare for battle, that is, the battle against the demons"

VI.iv.15. He also said, "There was a certain old man living in his cell in Egypt being cared for by a brother and a certain virgin. It happened one day that they both came to him at the same time, and it got so late that they were not able to return to their own place, so the old man put a mat down between them for them to sleep on. The brother however was overcome by the desires of the flesh and seduced the poor woman, causing her ruin. But the deed was done and in the morning they departed. The old man knew what had happened but with an eye to the future said nothing. The old man accompanied them a little on their way, appearing to be showing no signs of being upset, and when he turned back they said to each other; 'Do you think he knew about the shameful thing we have done or not?'

"Smitten with repentance they went back and said 'Holy father, were you aware that the enemy had seduced us and laid us low or not?'

"And he said 'I did know, my children.

"" They said 'Where were your thoughts, then at the time of our downfall?'

"He replied ' My thoughts at that time were with the crucified Christ. I was standing and weeping, as much for me as for you. But the Lord foretold me your repentance, so I declare that what you have lost through pride you will with the more diligence pursue, as your wounds are healed.'

"They accepted a penitential discipline from him, and departed each with renewed determination towards achieving the goal of being chosen vessels."

VI.iv.16. A certain philosopher asked holy Antony, "How is it, father, that you can be content with being unable to make use of books?"

He replied, "My books, my philosophic friend, consist in the works of natural creation, and whenever I want to read the word of God they are always there."

VI.iv.17. Someone parched with thirst in the midday heat once asked Abba Macarius for a drink of water and he replied, "Be content with this bit of shade, which is more than many travellers and sailors are able to enjoy at this moment."

VI.iv.18. When I asked that same person for advice about how to exercise moderation, he replied, "Act with confidence, my son. For myself, I have never fully satisfied myself in respect of food, drink or sleep for the last twenty years. I have a set measure of bread, and water accordingly, and I gladly take a little sleep to the extent of leaning up against a wall."

VI.iv.19. A brother asked an old man whether visitors should eat with the brothers. The old man replied, "It is only with women that you don't eat."

VI.iv.20. A brother asked Abba Isidore of Scete about thoughts of sex. He replied, "When thoughts of sex come, filling and disturbing the mind, even when they do not overcome us and spill over into acts, they do nevertheless hinder us in our search for virtue. The serious minded person however will cut them off and take himself to prayer."

VI.iv.21. On the same subject this old man added, "If we did not have thoughts, we would simply be like brute beasts. But just as the enemy seeks out his own, so we ought to fulfil what is incumbent upon us. Stand in prayer and the enemy is put to flight. Spend time in meditating upon God, and you will conquer. Perseverance in good works brings victory. Strive and you will be crowned."

VI.iv.22. An old man said, "Keeping the thought of death in mind will invariably conquer fearfulness".

VI.iv.23. Amma Syncletica said, "Our adversary is more easily overcome by those who possess nothing, for he can't find anything to harm them with. Freed from care about money and other riches, they habitually conquer by being mindful of their dire straits and of temptations which separate from God."

VI.iv.24. Again she said, "There are those who work hard and risk the dangers of the sea in gathering together tangible riches, but the more they have the

more they go on desiring more, and regard their present wealth as nothing.

We, however, for the love of God have renounced possessing anything."

VI.iv.25. An old man said, "Anyone who nourishes malice in his heart is like someone keeping fire in the midst of chaff."

VI.iv.26. An old man said, "If you speak to anyone on the subject of eternal life, let your words be with compunction and tears for the one who is listening. Otherwise don't say anything lest you be found wanting by hurrying to try and save someone with unwelcome words. For God says to the sinner, 'Who are you to talk about my judgments, or to bear witness to me with your mouth?' (Psalm 50.16).

Rather say, "I am a dog, and less than a dog in so far as a dog loves his master and does not sit in judgment upon him."

VI.iv.27. A brother asked an old man, "How is it that the soul is attached to uncleanness?"

The old man replied, "The soul generally wants to give free rein to the passions. It is the spirit of God who keeps it safe. Therefore we ought to weep, and take diligent thought about our uncleannesses. You have the example of Mary who fell down before the sepulchre of the Lord and wept. And the Lord called her by name. It is the same with the soul."

VI.iv.28. A brother asked an old man, "How do you define sin?"

And the old man replied, "Sin is when people take no thought for their own misdeeds but presume to teach others. And so the Lord says, 'You hypocrite, first take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck of dust out of your brother's eye' (Matthew 7.5)."

VI.iv.29. A brother asked an old man, "What shall I do, for I find it painful to undertake even the smallest of struggles."

And the old man replied, "Don't be surprised at that. Joseph when captive in Egypt, the land of those who worshipped idols, underwent many temptations boldly, and God glorified him in the end. Look also at Job who maintained his fear of God right to the end, so that no one was able to disturb his hope in God."

VI.iv.30. A soldier asked an old man whether God accepted repentance. The old man offered him many helpful thoughts and finally said to him, "Tell me, my friend, if your military cloak gets torn do you throw it away?"

He replied, "No, I patch it up and keep on using it."

The old man said to him, "If you take pity on your own clothing, will not God be forgiving towards his own image?"

VI.iv.31. There was a certain brother living in his own cell who would wait around till last after Mass in the hope that someone would invite him back for a meal. But one day at the end of Mass he went out before everyone else and ran back to his cell. The presbyter noticed him running and wondered why. Next week when the brother came into the church gathering, the presbyter asked him, "Tell me truly, brother, how is it that you used always to wait till last after the service except that last Sunday you went out before everyone?" The brother replied, "I used never to cook my own lunch, so I waited about in the hope that someone would invite me back for a meal. But last Sunday I cooked a few lentils before I came, so that at the end of the sacred mysteries I went home." When he heard this, the presbyter made a rule that all the brothers should prepare a meal for themselves before coming to church so that they could speedily return to their own cells.

VI.iv.32. Once when the district judge came to the region where Abba Pastor lived, the local people came to Pastor and asked him to come to the judge and plead for them.

"Give me three days, and then I will come", Pastor replied.

And the old man prayed to the Lord, saying, "Lord, please don't give me success in this undertaking, otherwise people will not leave me in peace in this place."

When the old man came before the judge to plead, the judge said, "Surely you are not asking favours for robbers, abba?"

The old man rejoiced that he did not find favour in the sight of the judge, just as he had asked, and he returned to his own cell.

VI.iv.33. The old men used to say, "Just as Moses spoke with God when he entered into the cloud, and with the people when he came out, so does the monk speak with God when he is in his cell, but when he comes out with the demons."

VI.iv.34. A young man came to Abba Macarius to be cured of a demon, and while he was waiting outside, a brother from another monastery arrived and seduced that young man into sexual misconduct. When the old man came out he saw that brother sinning with the young man, but did not explode in anger, merely saying, "If God who made them can see them and be patient with them, even though he could burn them to ashes if he wanted to, who am I to say anything?"

VI.iv.35. They tell a story of a certain old man who lived in solitude in lower Egypt with a single secular to minister to him. It so happened that the son of

that servant fell ill and he begged the old man to come and pray for him. So the old man bestirred himself and went with him. But the servant ran on before him and going in to his home he called out, "Come and meet this solitary".

When the old man saw them from afar coming out with torches, he realised that they were coming out to meet him, and took off his robes and began to wash them in the river, standing there completely nude. The servant was embarrassed to see him standing there nude and said to his companions, "Go back! This old man seems to be having a brainstorm!"

And going up to the old man he said, "Why did you do that? They were all saying that you had been overcome by a demon."

And he said, "And that was what I was wanting to hear."

VI.iv.36. Certain of the seniors asked Abba Pastor, "If we see a brother sinning should we rebuke him?"

Abba Pastor replied, "For myself if I were to pass by and see him sinning I would continue on my way and not say anything. I know it is written in the Scriptures 'Bear witness to what you see with your own eyes' but I also say to you 'Don't bear witness to anything that you have not touched with your own hands'.

"For there was once a brother who was deceived into thinking that another brother was sinning with a woman, and after much mental conflict, believing that they were having sex, he went up to them and kicked them, saying 'Stop that'. And it turned out that they were only bundles of harvested wheat. That's why I say, 'Don't bear witness to anything that you haven't touched with your own hands.'"

VI.iv.37. The story is told of a certain brother who lived in the desert and was led astray by demons for many years, although he thought they were angels. From time to time his father according to the flesh would go and visit him, and one day he took an axe with him thinking that on the way home he might cut some firewood. But a demon went before him and said to his son, "Watch out! There is a devil coming to you in the likeness of your father, carrying an axe in his basket in order to attack you. Get in before him, take the axe from him and fight him off."

And so when the father came to him as usual, his son took the axe from him, hit him with it and killed him. And the evil spirit continued to stick to him and dragged him down to nothingness.

End of Book VI

Prologue of Palladius, Bishop of Helenopoleos
In the Eighth Book of the Vitae Patrum
Known as the Lausiac History

This book consists of a description and explanation of how the blessed and holy fathers grew in spiritual strength in the course of their wonderful lives in solitude, to provide a model for those who want to enter upon the path to the Kingdom of Heaven and live a heavenly life. We remember also the renowned wise women inspired by God, who entered upon the task of developing in spiritual strength with wholehearted courage. May they serve as examples for those who seek redemption through continence and chastity, and may they encourage a desire to imitate them.

I am indebted to the inspiration and encouragement of a man learned in various wide-ranging subjects, gentle in manner, religious and devout in heart and mind, liberal in giving help to the needy. Among the most prominent people he has been chosen for the highest honours because of the integrity of his life. He is a man governed by the power of the Holy Spirit. He it is who motivated me, or rather, to be more truthful, inspired my dull mind to the contemplation of higher things. He wanted me to set forth how our holy and immortal spiritual fathers struggled to develop in spiritual strength, as an example to be emulated. In order to serve God they spent their lives in hard and rigorous bodily discipline. He wanted me to send him descriptions of the lives of these famous athletes, and to make known the hard won virtues of each one of these great men. This man's name is Lausus, a man who is devoted to everything spiritual and godly. By the grace of God, he is the chamberlain of the divinely inspired and religious emperor [Theodosius II, 401-450]

I, however, am unskilled in writing, I have not attained to a spiritual knowledge any deeper than a sort of lip service, I am not worthy to examine the roll of holy fathers and the way they led their spiritual lives. I fear that this great commission will be beyond my strength. I can scarcely bear the responsibility of it, for it demands both wide-ranging knowledge and spiritual discernment. Nevertheless I trust in the wisdom of him who has bidden me

undertake this task. I believe it will be useful to those who may read it, and I am aware of the danger I might be in if I refuse to agree. So I take this commission to have been given to me by divine providence, and have used the utmost diligence in undertaking this task, upheld by the intercession of the holy fathers, simply setting out as in a sort of catalogue the struggles and signs of these great men, famous athletes as they were.

And I describe not just the men who lived such outstandingly good and virtuous lives, but also those blessed women who led their lives in blameless integrity. I have been blessed in having been able to look upon the holy faces of some of them myself before at last they finished their faithful course. I have learned about the heavenly life of others from those still running their godly race. I have journeyed on foot to many cities and villages, to all the caves and tents of the monks, to learn assiduously about their piety and religion. So I have written down partly what I have seen, partly what I have heard from the holy fathers, concerning the struggles of these great men and women. Because of their hope in Christ they were stronger than you would think nature would allow.

I have committed this book to writing and commend it to your friendly ear, O Lausus, brother and friend of Christ, servant of God. Your divine eloquence is exceptional. You are a paragon among the best and most religious of men, an ornament to this most faithful and religious empire. As far my limited skill will allow, I mention by name each one of those remarkable athletes for Christ, women as well as men, briefly saying a few words about each of their many great triumphs. For many of them I am able to say what nation and city they came from as well as the place where they spent most of their lives.

We mention also some men and women who began by seeking the strength to perfect their lives, but who succumbed to that stupid mother of arrogance called vainglory and were cast down into the lowest pit and abyss of torment. Through studious practice and hard work over a long period they had brought to birth in themselves great benefits which they lost in one moment of time through arrogance and empty self deception. But by the grace of our Saviour, by heartfelt repentance, and with the help of the holy fathers, they were snatched out of the spiritual snares of the devil and through the prayers of the saints were restored to the life of virtue which they had followed previously. [Palladius' dates are c.365 to 425]

Chapter I

THE LIFE OF ISODORE, PRESBYTER AND XENODOCHUS

I first came to the city of Alexandria during the second consulship of Theodosius, the great emperor, who because of his faithful life in Christ now rests with the angels. There I met Isodore, a wonderful man, accomplished in every way, in speech, wisdom and way of life. He was the presbyter and xenodochus (Greek, "one who gives hospitality". It seems to have been an official position in many of the churches of that time) of the Alexandrian church. As a young man he went to live in solitude, taking upon himself the disciplined struggle. I have seen his cell in Mt Nitria, though I came across him when he was seventy years old, fifteen years before he died in peace.

Up to the day of his death this holy man wore no linen apart from his headband, he had no bath, he ate no meat, he never rose from the table with his appetite fully satisfied. But he always appeared to be in such good bodily health that if you did not know about the sort of diet he had, you would have thought he lived well and sumptuously.

Time would fail me were I to try and recount all his many virtues. Because of his unswerving faith in Christ he was so gentle, kind, and peaceful that even the unfaithful and hostile people respected him (or the aura of Christ) for his sheer goodness. He possessed such spiritual grace, knowledge of the Scriptures, and theological understanding that sometimes even at the accustomed time of dining with the brothers his holy mind would go off in a daze, he would fall silent and go into a sort of trance. When asked to tell what had been going on in this state he would say, "My mind had gone off somewhere else, snatched up in a sort of contemplation." I know myself that he was often in tears at the dining table and when asked the reason I heard him say, "I am distressed at having to be fed with this alien food for the reason that I am destined to be led into the delights of paradise, to be fed on ambrosial food, according to the power given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ."

At Rome he was well known to the whole senate and the wives of the nobility from the time that he first went there with the blessed bishop Athanasius, and later with the holy bishop Demetrius.

Although he was well provided with the goods and necessities of life he left no will. He gave no money or anything else to his sisters who were members of a convent of seventy virgins. For he said, "God who created you will also provide for you as he has for me."

When I was young I went to him and asked to be initiated into monastic life. I

was a lusty youth at the time, in need not of sermons but of hard labours to subdue the flesh, and a rigorous and severe rule of life to discipline the body. Like a good horse breaker he led me out of the city into the place called the Cells of the hermits, about five miles from the built up areas.

Chapter II

DOROTHEUS of THEBES

He took me to a certain Dorotheus, a Theban athlete who had been living in a cave for sixty years. He told me to live three years with him in order to learn how to control my troubled thoughts, for he knew that the old man lived a fairly hard and disciplined life. At the end of that time I was to go back to him for further spiritual teaching. But I became very ill and being unable to fulfil the three years I left him before the due time.

His way of life was very disciplined, squalid and quite meagre. All day, even in the midday heat, he would gather stones from the waste land near the sea and build cells which he gave to those who didn't know how to build. He built one each year. I said to him once, "What is the point, father, in your old age, of killing your poor little body in this terrible heat?"

He replied, "I kill it so that it won't kill me." Each day he ate six small pieces of bread and a handful of small olives, and drank a little water. As God is my witness, I never knew him to put his feet up. Of set purpose he never slept in a bed or even a couch but sat the whole night long weaving a rope from palm branches to make a shroud for himself. I wondered whether he had practised such an extreme regime only since I had come to be with him, so I sought enlightenment from several of his disciples as to whether this elaborate and demanding regime was such as he had always practised. They were good and virtuous people, who had each been with him one after another, and they told me that from the beginning he had arranged his life in this way, never deliberately going to sleep except that sometimes in between working and eating he closed his eyes for a cat-nap. Sometimes through lack of sleep, the food would just fall out of his mouth when he was eating. Once when I urged this holy man to lie down for a while he sharply replied, "You could persuade the angels to go to sleep first, before persuading someone on a quest for perfection."

One day he sent me to the well at about the ninth hour to fill the jar from which he refreshed himself when the hour for eating was at hand. It so

happened that when I got there I saw an asp down below in the well and was too frightened to draw any water and ran back to tell him. "We are in great danger, father," I said, "for I saw an asp down below in the well".

He laughed out loud, understanding my fear very well, and with a shake of his head he said, "If the devil were known to have put serpents, asps, tortoises or any other venomous creature into every well or fountain would you therefore not drink?"

He left the cell, drew some water himself, blessed it with the sign of the cross, drank without taking any food, then said, "Where the cross is, the power of the devil cannot prevail."

Chapter III

THE ACTS AND DISCRETION OF POTAMIAENA

Blessed Isodore the xenodochus told me that he had met the blessed Antony and heard from him a story worthy of being put into writing.

Potamiaena was a beautiful girl who at the time of the Maximian persecutions was the servant of a most intemperate and lecherous person. He importuned her persistently, promising her all sorts of things, but did not succeed in beguiling her. Consumed with rage he decided to denounce her to the Prefect of Alexandria as a Christian and as one who because of the persecutions had slandered the Emperor and his decrees. He promised the prefect a large sum of money for her downfall, saying that if he could persuade her to consent to his desires he would not press for any punishment from her guards. If however she persisted in the inflexibility which she had shown from the beginning, he asked for her punishment to be death, lest she should be able to make a mockery of his intemperance if left alive.

This brave virgin was brought before the tribunal and subjected to bodily torture by different instruments of punishment, but remained mentally as firm and steadfast as a tower in spite of many various arguments put to her. Among all the instruments of torture the judge devised one more cruel than all the others that were there. He ordered a large cauldron filled with pitch to be heated by a scorching fire.

When the pitch was hot and boiling fiercely, this heartless judge turned to that blessed woman and said, "Come now, submit to the will of your master, otherwise, you must understand, I shall order you to be thrown into the cauldron."

She replied, "May a judge never be so wicked as to order me to submit to his unrestrained lechery." Infuriated, he ordered her to be stripped and thrown into the cauldron.

She cried out, "By the head of the emperor whom you serve I beg you not to have me stripped, but lower me bit by bit into the cauldron that you may see how bountifully I have been endowed with the patience of the Christ whom you deny."

For a space of three hours she was lowered into the pitch and gave up her spirit when the pitch reached up to her neck.

Chapter IV

THE LIFE OF DIDYMUS THE BLIND

At that time there was a great company of holy men and women gathered together in the church of Alexandria, who were found worthy of being numbered among the meek of this world. Among them was the blessed Didymus, a writer who was blind. I met with him four times over a period of ten years. He died aged eighty-five. He told me that he had lost his eyes when he was four years old, never learned to write, and never resorted to any teachers. All he had was his own conscience, a naturally strong and authoritative teacher. He was so greatly endowed with the grace of spiritual knowledge that in him was literally fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet, "The Lord gives light to the blind" (Psalms. 146.8). He was able to interpret the words of both old and new testaments, and expounded their teachings so subtly and forcefully that he exceeded in wisdom all who had gone before. In his cell he once asked me to say the prayers but I was not willing to do so. He said to me, "Blessed Antony came to see me three times in this cell, and when I asked him to say the prayers, he immediately prostrated himself in this cell. He did not make me ask him twice, and in so doing gave me a valuable lesson in obedience. So then, if you want to follow in his footsteps by becoming a monk and seeking virtue, don't argue."

He also told me the following story, "One day I was feeling troubled and distressed in mind because of the terrible career of the Emperor Julian and his persecutions, so much so that I could eat nothing from Vespers until late at night, when I fell asleep sitting in my chair. I dreamt that I saw four white horses with riders, galloping along and crying, 'Tell Didymus that today at the seventh hour Julian died, so get up and eat, and send this news to the house of

Bishop Athanasius, so that he may know about it also.' I made a note," he said, "of the hour, the day, the week and the month, and so it turned out to be."

Chapter V

THE LIFE OF ALEXANDRA

This blessed man also told me about a certain woman called Alexandra, who left the city and shut herself up in a tomb. She was supplied with what was necessary for life through a window, and was seen by neither man nor woman for ten years. They say that in the tenth year she died in her sleep, so that when those who usually visited her got no reply they came and told us about it. When we got there we broke down the door of the tomb, went in and found her dead.

Blessed Melania of Rome, whose life I will talk about in due course (Ch CXVII) had this to say about her:

"I was not able to see the face of this blessed woman," she said, "but I stood outside her window and asked her why she had left the city and shut herself up in a tomb. She spoke to me through the window and said, 'There was a certain man who was infatuated with me, and so as not to seem to despise him or cause any ill will, I preferred to shut myself up in this tomb, rather than cause offence to anyone created in the image of God.'

"I said to her, 'How do you manage, you servant of Christ our God, to go on without consulting anybody, and do nothing but battle all alone with your thoughts?'

"'I pray from morning to the ninth hour', she replied, 'and for the rest of the time I meditate upon the lives of the holy fathers and patriarchs, and the struggles of the blessed apostles, prophets and martyrs. After I have given praise to God at Vesper time I take my meal of bread, and spend the greater part of the night in prayer, looking forward to the time when I shall leave this world and appear before the face of Christ our God.'"

I shall not omit to tell of those who have also lived in this kind of way, and let those who read be circumspect and attentive if they would condemn such a one while at the same time praising those who have lived ordinary lives of virtue.

Chapter VI

A CERTAIN VIRGIN WHO STRUGGLED WITH THE LOVE OF MONEY.

There was a certain woman of Alexandria known only as The Virgin who dressed quite modestly but whose nature was niggardly, proud and insolent, governed by avarice, fonder of gold than of Christ. She would not spend a single obol of her money on guests, the poor, the afflicted, the monks, the virgins, or the church. In spite of the many warnings given her by the holy fathers she would not get rid of the heavy burden of her riches. She had a family however, for she had adopted her niece as her own daughter. Night and day she thought of nothing but spending her treasure on this daughter, and in so doing began to care less for treasure in heaven. One kind of deceit which the devil offers is to encourage avarice under the disguise of family concern. It is obvious that he has no real concern for families, for it is he who encourages fratricide, matricide and patricide, as Scripture proves. (Deuteronomy 12.31). And although it may seem that he sometimes encourages concern for family, it is not in order to do people good but to provoke parents' souls to wickedness. He is not ignorant of that far-reaching precept, 'the unjust shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 6.9). Of course when your family lacks anything it is quite possible to supply their needs without danger to your soul, as long as you are spiritually aware and your motives are directed towards God. But when you set your whole mind on concern for family to the neglect and exclusion of all else you fall under the condemnation of the law as one who rates the salvation of your own soul as of no importance. David the sacred psalmist who feared God sings about those who seek their soul's salvation, when he says, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord' (as if to say, not many) 'or who shall stand in the holy place? Even he who has clean hands and a pure heart, and has not reckoned his soul to be of no value' (Psalms.24.3). Those neglectful of their spiritual health reckon that their souls are of no value and will disappear when this little body dies. When the holy presbyter, Macarius, saw that this woman, known only by the name of Virgin, had become very negligent in her prayer, he decided to take action to remove from her this insidious fault of avarice. He was the warden of a hostel for physically disabled people, and in his youth had been a jeweller.

"I have come across some precious stones, green emeralds and blue irises," he said to her. "I don't know whether it is a genuine merchant or a thief who owns them, but no price has been put upon them, because I think they are priceless. However, the person who has them is selling them for five hundred solidi. If

you would like to have them, give me five hundred solidi. You will be able to get five hundred solidi for one gem alone, and the rest you can use for your niece's benefit."

Totally absorbed in this niece as she was, she immediately conceived a desire to see her decked with this jewellery, and falling at Macarius' feet she begged him not to let any one else get hold of it.

"Come to my house and you can see them," Macarius said.

"No," she said, "but take these five hundred solidi and buy them yourself if you will. I don't want to see the man who is selling them."

Macarius took the money and put it into the funds of the hostel.

Some little time passed by and she hesitated to say anything to him, such was the respect in which he was held among the Alexandrians for his faith and generosity. But at last she went to him at church and said, "Can I ask what is happening about those stones that I gave you five hundred solidi for?"

"From the day that you gave me that gold," he said, "I have been spending it on the gems, and if you would like to see them come to my hostel. That is where the gems are. You can see them and if you don't like them you can have your money back."

She came eagerly.

Now in the hostel the women were in the upper floor and the men in the lower. When they got there, Macarius asked her in the vestibule which she wanted to see first, the irises or the emeralds.

"Whatever you like," she said.

So he took her upstairs and showed her the women, with distorted limbs and faces disfigured by all kinds of sores.

"These are the irises," he said.

He took her downstairs and showed her the men.

"These are the emeralds," he said. "I don't think there is anything more precious than these. But if you disagree of course you can have your money back."

Chapter VI, A Certain Virgin (continued), Book VIII

The Virgin was overcome with shame. She went back home grieving greatly that she had not given money for God's sake instead of parting from it as a case of necessity.

She later showed her gratitude to the presbyter when the girl she looked after

got married and died without having had any children, after which she regularly gave some of her money to charitable uses.

Chapter VII

THE LIFE OF ABBA ARSISIUS AND THOSE WHO WERE WITH HIM IN MOUNT NITRIA.

I spent three years living with that company of holy people in the cells around Alexandria. There were about two thousand admirable and indefatigable men there, examples of every kind of virtue.

From there I went into Mount Nitria. There is a lake called Lake Maria between Alexandria and the mountain where there were about seventy thousand men. A day and a half's journey further on I arrived at the southern part of the mountain. There is a vast desert here stretching as far as Ethiopia, Mazices and Mauretania. Five thousand men live there, of various different life styles, each one according to his ability and his aspiration, some alone, some in twos or threes, or in any combination you like to mention. There are seven mills in the mountain which provide for them and the six hundred anchorites who live in the vast empty spaces.

I lived for a whole year in the mountain with those blessed and holy men, Arsisius, Putaphastus, Hagio, Cronius and Serapio, after which I went into the inner desert, inspired by the spiritual stories of many ancient fathers. There is one great church in this Mount Nitria, and in this church there are three palm-tree trunks from each of which hangs a whip. The first is for punishing delinquent monks, the second for any robbers who turn up, and the third for any who come and fall into some other offence. Any transgressor who is judged to deserve punishment hugs the palm tree, receives on his back the due number of lashes and is then released.

There is a hostel next to the church constantly receiving guests, who stay even for two or three years if they want, until they decide to go of their own free will. For the first week they are allowed to be idle, but from then on they are given work to do, either in the garden, the mill or the kitchen. If anyone wants a book for some good reason he is given one, but is not allowed to talk until the sixth hour. There are no physicians or entertainers (placentarii) in this mountain, but they do drink wine, which is also on sale. They all make linen clothes for themselves, and no one goes short of anything.

Around about the ninth hour, work stops and in all the cells can be heard the

singing of psalms and prayers to Christ, with prayers added to the psalms, so that you might think you had been transported into the Paradise of delights. They go to the church only on Saturday and Sunday. There are eight presbyters officiating in the church, but for as long as the senior presbyter is alive no one else makes the offering, or sits in judgment or preaches, but just sits with him in silence.

This great man Arsisius, and many others whom we saw with him, had been contemporaries of the great Antony. And Arsisius told me that he had also seen Amoun of Nitria whose soul Antony had seen being taken up into heaven by the angels (VP, VA.32). He said he had also seen Pachomius, that famous man with the gift of prophecy, whose virtues I shall describe later

Chapter VIII

HOLY AMON AND HIS WIFE.

He told me how Amon spent his life.

He was about twenty-two when his parents died, and his uncle made him get married. He couldn't argue against his uncle's claim that it was necessary, so he agreed to be decked with the crown, enter the marriage chamber and accept the married state. After being escorted into the bedroom and put to bed, the blessed Amon got up as soon as the guests had left, shut the door, sat down and spoke to his blessed wife like a brother talking to a sister.

"Can you bear with me while I unburden myself of something? You are not just a married woman (domina), you are like a sister to me. The fact that we have been joined together in matrimony is not really anything very marvellous. Let's do something really special for the love of Christ. Let's sleep separately right from the beginning and keep our virginity intact." At this he pulled out of his pocket a little book and read the greater part of it to her, as she was unable to read. Like an Apostle and Saviour he added some divinely inspired teaching of his own, setting out the reasons for living a life of virginity and chastity.

The effect of this was that she became filled with the grace of Christ and said, "My dear husband (domine mi), I also am convinced that I can gladly embrace a life of chastity. So if that is what you wish, I agree, right from the start."

"What I want and ask you for," he said, "is that we should live apart."

"I don't agree with that," she said. "Let us stay in the same house but have separate beds."

So he lived with her for eighteen years in the same house, passing his time in the garden and in the balsam room. For he was a producer of balsam, which is planted out like vines, and involves a great deal of labour in cultivating it and looking after it. He would go home in the evening and after saying prayers would have a meal with her. At night he would pray and do the synaxis [A non-Eucharistic service of psalms, Scripture and prayers], and first thing in the morning go out into the garden. Living like this they both came at last to be entirely free from passions, and his prayers came to be very strong and powerful.

That blessed woman said to him at last, "There is something I want to say to you, my husband, and if you will listen to me it will show me that you truly love me for God's sake."

"Well, say it," he said.

"You are a devout, religious and upright person," she said "and I too have followed the same rule of life. It would be only right if we were to live apart for the benefit of others. It is not fair that for my sake such great virtue and wisdom should be hidden away while you go on living with me in chastity."

He thanked her and gave glory to God

"I think you have made a good decision," he said, "and if you like you can have this house and I will go away and build another."

He left, and went into the inner parts of Mount Nitria, where at that time there were no cells, and built himself a two-roomed cell with domes. He lived for another twenty-two years, disciplining himself into the highest degree of virtue. Holy Amon died as a monk, or rather was translated into heaven, at the age of sixty-two, having never failed to visit the blessed companion of his life twice a year.

While he was living alone in Nitria, a boy shaking with rabies was brought to him, having been bitten by a rabid dog. He was bound in chains, for the force of the disease had been making him cut himself. When Amon had seen them coming and had listened to their cries for help, he said to them, "Why are you telling me all your troubles, my friends, and asking me for something which is beyond my powers when the remedy lies in your own hands? Compensate the widow woman whose ox you secretly slaughtered, and your son will be healed."

Thus they were convicted, and willingly did what they had been told, so that by Amon's prayers the boy was healed.

There were some others who sought him out whose integrity he tested by

asking them if they would bring him a dolium (i.e. a large globular water jar) so that he could store enough water to satisfy the needs of those who came to visit him. They promised they would. When they got back to their village, however, one of them changed his mind.

"I don't want to kill my camel," he said. "If I load it up with a dolium it will die."

When he heard this, the other one with great difficulty managed to yoke his asses together and transported the dolium to Amon.

When Amon saw him coming he said, "What? Has your friend's camel died in the meantime while you have been on the journey?" And when he got back home he found that the camel had been eaten by wolves. Amon was responsible for many other things like this also.

Athanasius the bishop of Alexandria narrated the following story in his Life of Antony. At the time when Antony was in his inner mountain, he sent some of his monks to Amon, who then began to walk back with them. When he came to cross the river Lycus with Theodore, his disciple, he was worried about getting undressed, lest anyone should see him naked. While they were still discussing the problem, he suddenly found himself on the other side of the river. Without the aid of any boat he was carried across by an angel while in an ecstasy. The brothers however had to swim across.

As soon as Antony had welcomed them he said, "God has revealed many things to me about you, and in particular the way you crossed the river shows me that your visit to me is absolutely necessary for our mutual benefit so that we can pray for each other."

When he had established how far away it was that Amon lived he begged him not to go back there to die, but when eventually he did die a long way off from him, Antony saw his soul being taken up to heaven by the angels. So there you have Amon, how he lived and how he died.

I myself once crossed the River Lycum with great trepidation in a flat-bottomed boat. It forms a gully which is a tributary to the great Nile.

Chapter IX

THE LIFE OF ABBA OR

In Mount Nitria there was a marvellous abba called Or, held in high regard because of his angelic demeanour, who had monasteries [A 'monastery' is a place where someone may live monos, alone. It may consist of a single cell or

of any number of people] in which were a thousand brothers. At the age of ninety, he had lost nothing of his physical strength, and his expression was so bright and lively that you only had to look at him to reverence him.

He had lived for a long time further into the desert before he gathered the monasteries together nearer at hand. He brought a swamp into cultivation with his own hands and made an area of intense cultivation in the desert. The fathers who were with him told me that there was not a single growing thing there when he first arrived, but he planted it all so that the brothers who were coming to him would not have to wander abroad to find the necessities of life. He cared for them all, praying to God and labouring for their salvation, so that they should lack nothing necessary, or have any excuse for laziness. He had been accustomed to a life of privation when he first went into solitude, eating herbs and sweet roots and drinking water when he could find it, while persevering continuously in prayers and psalms.

When he had arrived at a state of perfection in his old age, an angel appeared to him in a dream as he lay all alone, saying, "You will become a great nation and many people will believe because of your faith. Ten thousand people will be saved through you, and all those you bring light to here will appear in the world to come. Have no doubt that you will ever lack anything you need to the time of your death, so long as you keep calling upon God."

When he had been told this, he came to the nearer desert, alone and possessing nothing, where he built himself a small hut, managing on nothing more than dried vegetables, often eating only once a week. At first he had been unable to read, but when he came back out of solitude to more settled parts divine grace was given to him to enable him to expound Scripture from memory. And when the brothers gave him a book he began to read it as if he had always been able to read. He was also given the grace of being able to expel demons, as everyone knows. Many of the demons as they came out of people shouted that it was because of him, even when he had not wittingly done anything. Three thousand monks came to meet him as a result of all this, and when he saw them coming, he greeted and embraced them with great joy. He washed their feet himself and then began to converse on spiritual matters. His knowledge of Scripture was immense, divinely inspired. He clarified many points of Scripture according to the orthodox faith, and then invited them to prayer. For it was the custom among these great men to provide spiritual food first of all, the Communion of Christ, before providing for the needs of the body. So therefore only when they had all shared in the giving of thanks (= the

Eucharist) did he summon them to a meal, during which he moved among them speaking of things which are good and honourable and necessary to salvation.

He was a man who stood out among many of the fathers. When many monks arrived, he would call all the company together, and make sure that they would all have a cell that same day by making one responsible for collecting clay, another for making blocks and another for drawing water. Once the cells were built he would show them what to do.

An untruthful brother once came who lied about how much clothing he had. Or exposed him in front of everyone. No one after that had the temerity to tell him lies, so greatly was he filled with the grace which had resulted from the integrity of his life. The throng of monks with him in the church was like a choir of angels praising God.

The whole brotherhood testified to the great virtue of this holy man, especially that handmaid of the Lord, Melania, who visited the mountain before me. Indeed I did not come across him during his lifetime, but all these famous things about this man were told me by Melania. He never told lies, never swore oaths, wished no evil to anybody, never said anything which had no effect.

Chapter X

THE LIFE OF ABBA PAMBO

Near this mountain lived abba Pambo, who was the teacher of Bishop Dioscuros, the brothers Ammon, Eusebius and Euthymius, Origen his nephew, and that famous and praiseworthy man Dracontius. There were many different qualities which enabled this Pambo to govern his life in an upright and virtuous fashion, among which was an ability to despise both gold and silver, according to the command of the Lord, to a greater degree than any one else. On this subject the blessed Melania told me how she had heard about his virtues from the blessed Isodore, presbyter and xenodochus, when she first came to Alexandria from Rome. She told me that Isodore had escorted her to Pambo's secluded cell.

"I brought to him," she said, "some silver vessels weighing three hundred pounds, because I wanted to share some of my wealth with him. He just kept on working, weaving rushes together, and spoke quite kindly to me in a loud voice with the words 'May God reward you'. He then said to Origen his

steward 'Take them and distribute them among all the brothers in Libya and the islands, for their monasteries are very poor, but don't give anything to the Egyptians because they live in a much richer and more fruitful region'. I just stood there expecting some sort of blessing, or at least praise, for giving so much. He said absolutely nothing at all, so I said to him 'There's three hundred pounds of silver there' to make sure he knew exactly how much it was. Again he showed absolutely no reaction, did not even take the cover off the vessels, but simply said 'He to whom you have given these things, my daughter, does not need you to tell him how heavy they are. If he can weigh the mountains and forests in a balance (Isaiah 40.12) how much more likely is he to be aware of the weight of your silver! Of course, if it is me you are giving this silver to, you are correct to have stated the weight, but if to God who values the two mites [of the widow] more than all the rest (Mark 12.42), then you had better stay silent.' And so, by the grace of God," she said, "this is the way he shared things out, when I visited him on the mountain."

This man of God died a short while after this. He wasn't ill, had no pain in any part of his body, but was just finishing off a basket when he called me. He was aware of a fatal attack coming on, and said to me 'Let me give you this basket for you to remember me by. I don't possess anything else that I can give you.' And when he had said this, he just passed away without any fuss, commending his spirit to God. He was seventy years old. I laid his holy body out, wrapped it in linen cloths, buried him, and departed from his retreat. I shall keep that basket till the day of my death.

It is also said that before Pambo died, in the very hour of his departure, he said to all those who were there, Origen the presbyter and steward, that famous man Ammon, and all the rest of the brothers, "Since the time that I came into this place of solitude, and built my cell and settled down here, not a day has passed by without my doing some work with my hands, nor do I remember ever having eaten bread provided free for me by someone else, nor do I have any regrets at this time about anything that I have ever said. Yet now as I go to God I have not even begun to be truly holy and devout."

The servants of Christ, Origen and Ammon, also had this to say about him, that whenever they asked him anything about Scripture, or about what would be the right thing to do in any situation, he would never answer immediately, but said, "I don't know yet what the right answer to that is."

Sometimes he would wait three months without answering, saying, "I haven't got to the bottom of it yet."

He sought the answers from God so earnestly, that every one reverently accepted those answers as if they really did come from God. He was said to surpass even the great Antony in this virtue, and to have taken more trouble than any of the other holy people to ensure that what he said was accurate and perfect.

Chapter XI

THE LIFE OF ABBA PIOR

Among other things that Pambo did, it is said that when Pior, who also lived a monastic life, went to visit him in his cell he took his own bread with him

"You need not have done that," Pambo rebuked him.

"I did not want to be a burden on you," Pior replied.

Pambo said nothing more about this and eventually brought the visit to an end.

A little while later, the great Pambo came to Pior's cell and brought with him his own bread already steeped. [It was the practice in the desert to keep a supply of dried bread for up to six months or more, steeping it in water when required]

"Why have you brought bread already steeped?" asked Pior.

"I've steeped it so that in my turn I would not be a burden to you either," replied Pambo.

Chapter XII

THE LIFE OF ABBA AMMON AND HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

Ammon was a disciple of the great Pambo along with his three brothers and two sisters. When they had attained to a high degree of holiness and devotion they came into solitude and built separate monasteries, one for women and one for men, with an appropriate space between them.

Ammon, this best of men, became so distinguished for his wisdom that one particular city wished to have him for bishop. They went to the blessed bishop Timothy asking him to ordain Ammon bishop.

"Bring him to me," he replied, "and I will ordain him."

A great army of people went to try and get him, but he immediately took to flight. But when he realised that he could not escape he confronted them and begged them to desist. They did not comply, but the old man swore that he would have nothing to do with the idea and refused to leave his solitude.

When they persisted, he seized a knife and as they watched, cut off his left ear completely.

"Now you must realise this," he said. "I cannot do what you want me to because the law forbids anyone to go forward to the priesthood who has had his ears cut off."

He told them to go, and they went, returning to tell the bishop what had happened.

"That was the Jewish law," the bishop said. "As far as I am concerned if you were to bring me someone with his nose cut off I would still ordain him provided he was of an upright life."

Chapter XII, Abba Ammon (continued) Book VIII (Life of Benjamin begins further down page)

They went back to Ammon again. He still refused, so they threatened to take him by force.

"If you keep on threatening to force me," he said, "I will even cut my own tongue out."

They could not do anything but let him go, and they returned to their own place.

Extraordinary to relate, he is also said to have burnt his own flesh with hot iron whenever any little bit of his body reacted to some illicit pleasure, with the result that he had scars all over him. And from his youth up till the day he died his food consisted of nothing but the barest essentials. He never ate anything cooked except bread.

He could recite both Old and New Testaments by heart, and was so well versed in the writings of Origen, Didymus, Pierus and Stephen that he could quote six million lines, as many of the venerable solitaries can testify. He also had the gift of prophecy, and was a greater strength to the brothers in solitude than anyone else.

Evagrius also gave this unsolicited testimony that he was a man outstanding in the power of discernment, and that he had never met anyone who was more serene, with a mind completely free of disturbing thoughts.

Chapter XIII THE LIFE OF ABBA BENJAMIN

In Mount Nitria there was a wonderful man called Benjamin, who lived an upright and virtuous life for eighty years. At the height of his powers, he was given the gift of healing, so that whomever he laid hands on, or anointed with blessed oil, was freed from any sickness from which he was suffering. Yet even though endowed with such a grace as this he began to suffer from dropsy for the last eight months before his death. His body swelled up so much that because of his sufferings he became known as the Job of our times. Dioscuros the presbyter of Mt Nitria at that time (who was later a bishop) took the blessed Evagrius and me to see him.

"Come and see this new Job," he said, "who in spite of being so sick in body and of such an immense size, by God's grace shows such great patience."

When we got there, we could see that his body was so swollen that we could not even get the fingers of both hands round his little finger. We just could not bear to look upon such grievous affliction and turned our eyes away, whereupon that blessed Benjamin said to us, "Pray for me, my sons, that I may not be internally diseased. For this body has not been of much benefit to me even when behaving itself, and certainly of no lasting harm to me now it is not."

For those last eight months he had to stay seated on a very wide couch. He could not lie down on a bed by reason of his bodily necessities. Even while suffering from this untreatable disease, he continued to minister to people suffering from all kinds of ailments.

I feel it is necessary to describe the illness of this holy man lest anyone should think that it is impossible for holy people to suffer ill fortune. After he died, the lintel and doorposts of his cell had to be removed in order to get his body out, such was the size of this holy and renowned father Benjamin's body.

Chapter XIV

THE LIFE OF APOLLONIUS, KNOWN AS 'THE EX-BUSINESSMAN'.

When Apollonius, 'the ex-businessman', (a negotiatoribus) left the world and came to live in Mount Nitria, he was too old to learn how to read or learn a craft, so for his twenty years in the mountain this is what he did.

He used his own money and energy to buy in Alexandria medical supplies of all kinds, and ministered freely to the illnesses of the whole brotherhood. You would see him from first light to the ninth hour all round the cells going in to

see if anyone was ill. He carried with him dried grapes, pomegranates, eggs, fine white bread, and everything else needed for the sick. Handing out these things became the life work of this servant of Christ right up to old age. When he was about to die, he handed over all his bits and pieces to someone else, asking him to carry on with the same ministry. With five thousand monks living in that mountain, there was certainly a great need for such a service, desert place that it was.

Chapter XV & XVI

THE LIFE OF PÆESIUS & ISAIAH

Pæsius and Isaiah were the sons of a Spanish merchant, and when he died they divided up the disposable assets, which turned out to consist of five thousand sesterces, besides clothing and slaves. They had a meeting and took counsel together as to what sort of life they should lead from then on.

"If we carry on our father's business," they said, "we shall only end up leaving the fruit of our labours to someone else, quite apart from the risk of robbery, or shipwreck. Let us embrace the monastic life, and so make good use of our father's property and save our own souls."

So they each looked for a suitable type of solitary life, one of which turned out to be different from the other. They divided up the money and the rest of the goods, united in the intention to choose a way of life pleasing to God, but differing in the way they would go about it. One of them gave his money away to monasteries, churches and other charities, learned a craft whereby he could earn his bread and gave himself totally to a life of prayer and labour. The other gave nothing away, but founded a monastery with a few brothers, and took in travellers, cared for the sick, looked after the elderly and gave to the poor. On Saturday and Sunday, he and the brothers set up three or four tables and provided food for the needy, and in this way he spent the rest of his life.

After they died, various blessings upon them were uttered by the brothers, but they wondered among themselves which of them would be considered the more perfect in virtue, some saying the one who had given up everything, others the one who ministered to the needs of the poor. So there arose a contention among the brothers about the two different kinds of life which they had followed, each one being greatly praised in a different way. They went to abba Pambo and asked him to give them an answer to the question of which

kind of life was of greater value.

"Both of them were perfect in God's eyes," he said. "One of them possessed the gift of Abraham in offering hospitality, the other had the steadfast, unshakeable zeal of Elijah the prophet who also pleased God."

"But how can that be?" some of them asked. "We fall at your feet and beg you to explain to us how they can be equal." And some of them made out a case for the man of prayer, saying how he had obeyed the gospel precept of selling all and giving to the poor, how he had persevered in prayer night and day, bearing the cross, and following the Saviour. Others however disagreed, pointing to how the other man had shown compassion to all the needy, gone out into the highways and gathered up all those in distress to give them relief, saving not only his own soul but that of others, curing the sick and providing aid.

"Let me repeat," said the blessed Pambo. "Both of them were equal in the sight of God, and I shall satisfy each one of you on this point. Granted, if it had not been that the first brother had laboured unceasingly, I could not compare him with the goodness of the other. For this other brother showed himself on a par with the Lord who said 'I come not be ministered to but to minister', in so far as he received and refreshed the weary travellers and ministered to the needy. And although it may seem that to be this kind of minister involves nothing but burdens and hard work, yet it also forms an agreeable and satisfying way of life. Leave it with me for a little while until I can seek some guidance from God, which I will tell you about when you come again."

After a few days they returned to ask the great man what the outcome was. He replied, "In God's sight I tell you, I have seen them both standing together in Paradise."

Chapter XVII

THE LIFE OF MACARIUS THE YOUNGER.

When the younger Macarius was eighteen years old, he accidentally killed someone while playing around with his companions when they were tending the cattle near Lake Mareotis. He did not tell anyone but fled to the desert and lived so deeply in fear of God and man that he stayed for three years in the desert without a roof over his head. As everyone knows, either by hearsay or

from experience, that is a very arid part of the world.

This Macarius afterwards built himself a cell, and when he had lived there for a further twenty-five years, he had grown so full of grace that he really enjoyed living in solitude and had nothing but contempt for the demons.

After I had been acquainted with him for quite a long time, I learned how he had come to terms with his sin of murder. He said that far from wallowing in remorse about it he actually had cause to give thanks for this crime.

"That accidental death was a springboard for me into the way of salvation," he said. Look what the Scripture has to say about the murder which Moses, that great servant of God, committed in Egypt. If it had not been for that murder and his fear of Pharaoh, he would never have been found worthy of the vision of God, or of his other great gifts, or of being numbered by the Spirit among the holy writers, for it was to Mount Sinai that he fled out of Egypt."

I mention this not to condone the sin of murder, but to show how virtue can sometimes come forth out of a great fall, when someone has had no previous desire to seek for goodness of his own free will. To make up your mind to follow the path of virtue of your own free will is one thing, to follow it from force of circumstances is another.

Chapter XVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA NATHANAEL

Among the holy men of old there was one other outstanding athlete of God named Nathanael. I never met him in the flesh for he died about fifteen years before I went up to the mountain. But when I met up with those who had worked with this holy man, I questioned them eagerly about his virtues. They showed me a cell in which no one was living any longer as being too close to inhabited areas. But it was the cell which the blessed man had built for himself when as yet anchorites were few and far between. They told me what was truly noteworthy about his way of life, namely that he kept so firmly to his cell that nothing was able to prise him out of it.

At first he had been deceived by the deceiver of all, who caused him to slide gradually into laziness and bitterness of mind in order to drive him out of the cell. It seemed too gloomy and mind-constricting there for him so he abandoned it and built himself another closer to the village. After being there three or four months, the demon came to him by night carrying a whip such as lictors do, looking like a soldier, but dressed in ragged clothes, and roaring

like a bull.

[People in authority in imperial Rome were escorted by 'lictors' who carried a bundle of rods by which punishment might be administered, wrapped round an axe used for execution.]

"Who are you, carrying on like this in my refuge?" the blessed Nathanael asked him.

"I am the one who drove you out of your first cell," the demon cried, "and now I have come to make you run away from this one."

Nathanael realised how he had been deceived and went straight back to his first cell, and for thirty-seven years did not stir outside the door, striving with the demon, who made more efforts more often to try and drive him out than anyone could possibly count.

Among other things, the enemy of mankind tried to drive him away from his first good intentions by putting thoughts of shabby and unacceptable behaviour into his mind. Whether by God's providence or by the devil's temptation, this holy man very nearly broke his rule when seven holy bishops visited him. For they came in and prayed together, but when they were leaving that holy man would not stir one step outside to see them on their way, lest he give place to the devil. The deacons said to him, "You conduct yourself rather arrogantly, abba, do you not, by refusing to accompany the bishops?"

"I have every respect for the bishops," he replied, "and, indeed, all the clergy. And I accept that I am the most sinful of men, but as far as I am able, I consider myself to be as dead in the sight of all of them and of their way of life. God who knows the hidden depths of my heart knows that there are deep reasons for my not going out with them."

When this ruse of the devil did not succeed, about nine months before Nathanael died, the devil disguised himself as a boy aged about twelve, driving an ass carrying bread in its panniers. He appeared late in the evening outside the cell, making a show of his ass having collapsed, and crying out to Nathanael to take pity on him and lend him a hand. When Nathanael heard what sounded like a boyish voice, he opened the door of his cell and said without going out, "Who are you and what do you want me to do for you?" The demon replied, "I am helping this monk who is a well known brother of yours by carrying bread which will be needed for the offering at Saturday's Lighting of the Lamps tomorrow. Please don't turn me away, lest I be devoured by the hyenas which abound in this place.'

[I have translated the word *agape* here by 'offering.' The practice was to have a

vigil from the time of the Lighting of the Lamps on Saturday evening through the night, culminating in the offering of the Eucharist on the Sunday morning. This would include an agape or communal meal]

The blessed Nathanael stood saying nothing, sad at heart, stirred by a great compassion, and wondering what he ought to do. "Either I bend my rule or transgress against the Commandments," he thought. But then, having second thoughts, he rightly said, "It is better not to allow any compromise to my long standing rule of showering disgrace on the devil and defeating him."

He prayed to the Lord and then said, "Listen, boy, or whatever you are. I believe in God, the Lord of all spirits, and worship him only. If you really are in need of help, the Lord will come to your aid and neither the hyenas nor any other creature will do you any harm. But if you are Temptation, the Lord will make this plain to me at this point." And he went inside and shut the door. Mortified at being thus beaten once again, the demon dissolved into a raging tornado and disappeared with a sound like the frenzied flight of wild asses. Such was the struggle of the blessed Nathanael, and the power of his way of life and unconquered battle against the adversary. And here ends the life of this famous man.

Chapter XIX & XX

THE LIFE OF MACARIUS OF EGYPT AND MACARIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

I am almost afraid of committing to writing the story of these holy and immortal fathers, those famous and unbeaten athletes, Macarius of Egypt and Macarius of Alexandria, lest I be labelled a liar. Their integrity of life and their many great battles would be unbelievable to anyone without faith. But just as God destroys liars (Psalms 5.6), so it is plain to be seen when the Holy Spirit speaks.

Since then by the grace of God, Lausus, I do not lie, let your deep faith prevent you being sceptical about the struggles of the fathers, but rather help you to glory in emulating the labours of those who indeed were Macarius, i.e., 'blessed'.

The first of these athletes of Christ called Macarius was born in Egypt. The other with the name of Macarius was born in Alexandria where he had been a dealer in precious objects. Although junior in years he was an outstanding monk, excelling all others.

I will deal first of all with the virtues of Macarius of Egypt, who lived for ninety full years, for sixty of which he was a solitary. From being still a young man of thirty he spent the next ten years bearing the rigours of the life with such grace that he gained a reputation for having great discernment and was spoken of as being in *puerili aetate senex*, that is, 'old head on young shoulders', since his virtues grew much more quickly than you would have thought possible for his age. By the time he was forty he had developed ascendancy over the spirits, the grace of healing, and the ability to see the future, and so was judged worthy of being ordained priest. Two disciples lived with him in the inner desert known as Scete, one of whom was his helper, always with him when people came to him for healing. The other remained always by himself in the cell.

This first helper was called John and later was ordained presbyter in Macarius' place (for the great Macarius had been an ornament to the presbyterate). As Macarius developed the gift of second sight in the course of time, he said to John, "Listen to me, brother John. Accept a warning from me without getting upset but draw profit from it. You will be tempted, and your tempter will be the spirit of avarice. So I have seen; and I know that if you will accept this warning with an open mind you will overflow with the fear of God and in doing his will in this place. You will be praised, and no scourge will afflict your dwelling. But if you don't listen to me, you will end up like Gehazi, suffering an affliction similar to his" (2 Kings 5.21).

And it so happened that after the holy man's death, John did not take this warning to heart and fell victim to the snare which entrapped Judas because of his avarice. After about fifteen or twenty years, when he had cheated the poor of their money, he became so badly attacked by leprosy that you could not have put a finger on a sound place in his whole body. This is what the holy Macarius had prophesied.

There was a certain lustful Egyptian who became infatuated with a free-born married woman, but he had no success in trying to seduce her, for she modestly maintained her chastity towards the husband she had had since her virginity. This repulsive man then consulted a sorcerer. "Either persuade her to love me," he said, "or by your arts make her husband divorce her." The sorcerer accepted his fee and began his spells and incantations. He found it impossible to make her give in to him, so instead he made it seem to anyone who looked at her as if she were a mare. When her husband went outside, he saw his wife as if she were a mare; when he went to bed it seemed very

strange to see a mare lying there. The husband wept, lamenting that he could not understand what was happening, imagining that he was talking to an animal but getting no answer except that she looked very angry. Tormented in his mind, he at last realised that it really was his wife, changed into a mare by some extraordinary human wiles. So he approached the local presbyters, took them home with him and showed her to them, but they had no idea of how such a calamity could have happened. For three days she had eaten nothing, unable to eat either hay as a horse or bread as a human being. At last, that God might be glorified and that the power of Macarius might be seen, it occurred to the husband to put a halter on her and take her to the holy man in the desert. As he drew near, the brothers standing in front of his cell confronted him and asked why he was bringing this mare with him.

"That mercy may come from the holy man's prayers," he said.

"Why, what's the matter?" they asked.

"This mare that you see is my unhappy wife," he said, "and I have not the faintest idea how she got changed into a mare, and it's now three days since she had anything to eat."

When they heard this, they took him inside to where the holy Macarius was already praying, for God had already revealed the matter to him while they were still on the way to him, in answer to his prayers that he should be shown the reason for this visit. As the brothers began to tell him about this person who was bringing a horse to him he said, "It's you who are horses. You've got horses' eyes. This is simply a woman in her natural created state. She has not been transformed. It is just that she appears to be so to the eyes of people who are under a delusion."

He asked her to come near, blessed some water and poured it over her bare head, and prayed over her. At once it appeared to everyone that she was indeed a woman. He asked for bread to be brought, made her eat some and delivered her back, cured, to her husband, giving thanks to God. And the man of God admonished her, saying, "Never neglect the church. Don't stay away from the communion of the Sacraments of Christ. All this has happened to you because you have not been near the incomparable Sacraments of our Saviour for the last five weeks."

Here is another aspect of his extraordinary way of life. When he was in the prime of life, he dug a tunnel a hundred yards long from his cell to where he hollowed out quite a large cave. When he was bothered by too large a crowd of people, he would slip out of his cell while no one was looking and go into

his cave where no one could find him. One of his devoted disciples told us that he would recite forty-four prayers on the way to this cave through the tunnel, and the same on the way back.

He also had the reputation of having brought a dead person back to life in order to discredit heretics who denied the Resurrection, and this story was well known throughout the desert.

Chapters XIX and XX, Macarius (continued) Book VIII

Once a mother weeping copiously brought him her son, grievously afflicted by a demon. He was held securely on each side by two young men. The way the demon attacked him was that after he had had three measures of bread and a jar of water, he would bring it all up turned into a fiery vapour. Anything he had eaten and drunk, it looked as if it had been consumed by fire. (For there is a class of demons known as igneus, that is 'fiery'). Indeed, there are as many kinds of demons as there are humans, not essentially different, but different in their purposes. If his mother did not give him anything to eat, he would eat his own excrement and drink his urine. His weeping mother lamented this strange calamity that had befallen her son, and begged and pleaded with the holy man, until that victorious athlete of God humbly prayed to God for him. After one or two days, the holy Macarius drove the demon out, and he said to the youth's mother, "How much would you like your son to be able to eat?"

"Oh, please ask for him to be given ten measures of bread," she replied. And he was angry with her for asking too much.

"Why ask that, woman?" he said. And when he had fasted and prayed for seven days, and expelled the dangerous demon of gluttony, he ordered that he be given three measures of bread to eat, which is what he would have had normally anyway. In this way, by the grace of God, he cured the boy and gave him back to his mother.

Wonderful, unbelievable things God did through the holy Macarius, whose immortal soul is now with the angels. I never met him myself, for he died the year before I went into the desert. But I met the one who had been the companion of his faithful deeds, whose name also was held in deep respect.

I will turn now to the holy Macarius of Alexandria, who was the presbyter of that place known as the Cells. I lived there myself for nine years, three of which were near this same Macarius, who lived in quiet solitude. I saw quite a

lot of his wonderful way of life, and the work and the signs that he performed. Other things I have learned from those who lived with him.

Once when he was with that great and holy father, Antony, he noticed some quite excellent palm branches which he was working with, and begged for a handful of them for himself.

"It is written, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods'," said Antony. And while he yet spoke, the palm branches shrivelled as if destroyed by fire. When he saw this, Antony said to Macarius, "The Holy Spirit indeed rests on you, and you will wear my mantle after me."

Again, the devil came upon him once in the desert in a state of extreme bodily exhaustion, and said to him, "See now, you have been given the blessing of Antony. Why not use that power and ask God for food and strength to continue your journey?"

"My strength and praise is in the Lord," he replied. "Do not tempt the servant of God."

So the devil made him see a mirage in the shape of a camel wandering through the desert heavily loaded up with everything he needed. When it saw Macarius, it came and knelt down beside him. But he recognised it for the mirage that it was and fell to prayer, whereupon it was swallowed up by the earth.

On another occasion Macarius of Alexandria went to visit the great Macarius in Scete. In order to cross the Nile they both got into a large ferry along with two tribunes accompanied by great pomp and circumstance. They had their own private four-wheeled carriage made of bronze, horses with golden harness, soldiers crowding around them, servants, and boys adorned with golden neckbands and girdles. When the tribunes noticed those two dressed in old and tattered clothing, sitting in a corner, they thought how blessed it must be to have such a lowly and simple life style, and one of them said, "Blessed are people like you who make a mockery of the world."

Macarius of Alexandria replied, "We may well make a mockery of the world, and it is the world which makes a mockery out of you. But you should know that what you have said came not of your own free will but by a spirit of prophecy, for we are both called Macarius, that is 'blessed'."

Cut to the quick by these words, when the tribune got home, he discarded his fine clothes and decided to live as a solitary, giving away much of his wealth in alms.

Once Macarius was given a truly appetising bunch of fresh grapes which he

was really looking forward to eating, but instead he gave proof of his great self-discipline by giving it to another brother who had expressed a great desire for it. On being given these grapes, the brother appeared absolutely delighted - but this was really in order to hide his self-discipline, for he gave them to another brother who had expressed a desire for them. He too accepted the gift and made out how delighted he would be to eat them. And so it went on, the grapes passed through the hands of many of the brothers, none of them having ventured to eat them. In the end, the last person to receive them gave them back in a magnificent gesture of generosity to Macarius himself. Macarius investigated and marvelled, giving thanks to God that so many of them could be so disciplined as to forbear eating those grapes.

There is something else about the way of life of the great Macarius that I and many others accurately learned about him, and that is that if he heard of any great feat that someone else had carried out, he would eagerly do it himself, without fail.

So when he heard that the monks of Tabennisi ate nothing cooked during Lent, this holy man decided to eat nothing cooked for a period of seven years. For the whole seven-year period he ate nothing but raw olives, except that sometimes he would soak in water some herbs which he might have happened to find. He carried out this programme faithfully and then abandoned it, for this best of monks heard of another monk who restricted himself to one pound of bread. In order to go one better, Macarius broke up his loaves and put the pieces into a narrow-necked jar, deciding to eat only what he would be able to get by putting his hand in. He treated his body with great austerity! He told us that on a feast day, he was wanting to get several pieces out but was unable to do so because of the narrowness of the opening.

"My own personal rationing officer prevented me from eating any more," he said.

He kept up this abstinence for three years, eating only four or five ounces, except that during one whole year he also ate the sixth part of an olive.

Here is another thing this athlete did. He made up his mind that he was determined to conquer sleep. He told us how he went about it in order that we might profit from it. For twenty days and nights he stayed outside, so that by day he was restless because of the heat and by night he shivered with cold.

"By not going inside any sooner," he said, "my brain became so inactive that I was able to enter into ecstasy. I was able to do this only by conquering sleep.

When I returned to my normal way of living, I ceased from it."

Once he was greatly troubled by the spirit of fornication, so he condemned himself to expose his flesh for six months in the empty desert of the marshlands of Scete, where there were midges as big as wasps, capable of penetrating even the hides of wild boars. He became so covered in bites that you would have thought he had leprosy. When he returned to his cell after six months it was only by the sound of his voice that he could be recognised as being indeed Macarius, the master.

He told us once that he wanted to visit the garden where there was the monument known as the kepotaphion ('memorial garden') of Jannes and Mambres, the magi of the time of Pharaoh. He did not just want to see it, but also he wanted to confront the demons which came from there, for it was said that Jannes and Mambres had gathered together by means of the power of their most infamous arts, a great number of demons in that place of the most ferocious kind. This monument had been built by the brothers Jannes and Mambres who because of the force of their magic arts were at that time the most powerful in the land after Pharaoh. Because they had more power at that time of their life than anyone else in Egypt, they were able to build this great work out of squared stone in order to make a monument for themselves. They spent a great deal of money, and planted all kinds of trees, and dug a very large well, for there was plenty of water in the ground there. But they did all these things in the hope that after their death, they would enjoy the delights of paradise.

Seeing that Macarius, the holy servant of God did not really know the way to this garden, he set a course by the stars and journeyed across the desert like a ship sailing over the sea, and having gathered together some rods, he planted one after every thousand steps so that by these signs he would be able to find his way back again. He travelled the desert for nine days, and was not far from the garden when that night as he was taking a little sleep an enormous demon appeared, the eternal enemy of the athletes of Christ. He had collected all those rods while Macarius slept, placed a stone from the monument near his head and scattered the rods all around it before disappearing from sight. When Macarius awoke, he found all those rods gathered together which he had put out as signposts. Perhaps God allowed this to happen in order to increase his ability to put his trust not in signposts but in the grace of God which guided the Israelites by means of a cloudy pillar through the fearful wilderness for forty years.

Macarius continued, "When I drew near to the monument, seventy of those

demons that I mentioned came rushing out at me in various shapes, some of them shouting, some of them leaping, some frighteningly gnashing their teeth at me, some flapping their wings like crows, some reviling me face to face.

"What do you want, Macarius?" they said. "What are you monks trying to do? Why do you come here? Have we attacked any of your monks like this? You and those like you enjoy the same thing in your place as we do here, that is, solitude, and you have driven our brothers out of your place. You and we have nothing in common. Why are you invading our territory? If you are an anchorite, why can't you be content with your solitude? Those who built this place gave it to us. You can't stay here. Why should you seek to enter our possessions into which no living person has ever entered, where we ourselves are entrusted with commemorating those who built it?"

As this crowd of demons rudely rushed about, the holy Macarius said, "I only want to go in, have a look and go away again."

"Give us your solemn promise on that," the demons said.

"I do," the servant of Christ said. And the demons vanished. But when he went into the garden, the devil rushed threateningly at him with drawn sword.

"You come at me with drawn sword," said the holy Macarius, "but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel ready for battle. I have come in, however, and all I have found is a bronze jar hanging over a well on an iron chain rusty with age, pomegranates with nothing inside them because of being dried up by the sun, and several golden altars."

The holy man departed from the tumult and clamour and for the next twenty days went back towards his cell, suffering a great deal when he ran out of bread and water. For a further twenty days he went on through the desert, eating nothing, as I understand it. Perhaps he was being tested to see how much he could stand. When he was almost ready to collapse, he saw something which looked like a young woman dressed in a clean linen garment, so he told us, carrying a jar dripping with water. Macarius said that it went before him about a furlong away for three days. He could see her standing there with the jar, taunting him, but not letting him get near, and this he bravely endured for three days in the hope of having something to drink.

But then a herd of oxen appeared, one of them with a calf turning round towards him. (It was a place where there were many oxen). According to what Macarius told us, the udder of this cow was full of milk, and he heard a voice from above saying, "Macarius, go up to this cow and milk it."

"I did so, and was satisfied," he said. "And the Lord, to show me even greater

favour in my littleness, ordered the cow to follow me to my cell. That mother cow obeyed the order, feeding me, while not allowing her calf to come near." On another occasion, this man of exemplary virtue was digging a well for the monks near some leafy branches out of which an asp came and bit him. (They are vicious and poisonous beasts.) The holy man took both jaws of the asp in both hands and tore it apart, saying, "My God did not send you. How can you dare to come near?"

When the great Macarius heard that at Tabennisi there was an institution famous for its way of life, he changed his clothes, putting on a working man's clothing, and went off into the desert for fifteen days till he arrived at Tabennisi, where he asked for the Archimandrite, Pachomius by name. He was an excellent man who also had the gift of prophecy, although it was not revealed to him that this was the great Macarius. When he came out, Macarius asked to be allowed to become a monk in his monastery.

"You are too old now to become a monk," said the great Pachomius. "You would not be able to manage it. Our brothers have been here since they were young and have got used to hard work. At your age you would not be able to put up with the trials of our life, you would get disillusioned, and go away and slander us."

And he would not accept him, neither on that day or the next day nor on the seventh day afterwards. But he persisted, staying there, fasting. At last Macarius said to him, "Take me in, abba, and if I can't fast and carry out all the other duties, then order me to be thrown out of the monastery."

So the great Pachomius persuaded the brothers that he should be allowed in, and in he went. (Forty thousand men have been gathered together in that one monastery up to the present time.)

A short time afterwards, the season of Lent arrived, and the old man Macarius noticed that each of them undertook various disciplines. One did not eat till evening, another after two days, another after five. There was one who remained standing all night except for sitting down from time to time in order to work. Macarius soaked some palm leaves and stood in a corner for the whole of Lent up till Easter, eating no bread, drinking no water, neither kneeling, sitting or lying down, and taking nothing except a few cabbage leaves on Sundays, so that he could be seen to eat and save himself from appearing arrogant in what he was doing. If he had to go out for the necessities of nature he quickly went back in again to his work still standing up, saying nothing, standing in silence, doing nothing except sustaining

silence in his heart, and praying, and working with the palm branches in his hands. When the others in the monastery saw what he was doing, they complained to his director that they were being undermined.

"Where did you get this unearthly man from, who is showing us all up?" they asked. "Either you get rid of him, you know, or else we shall all leave."

When Pachomius heard this from the brothers, he asked what it was all about. They told him what Macarius was doing, and he prayed to God, asking who this man really was. It was then revealed to him that it was the monk Macarius. The great Pachomius took him by the hand and led him out into the oratory before the altar, embraced him and said, "You are welcome, an old man worthy of respect. You are Macarius, and it was hidden from me. For many years, ever since I first heard about you, I have wanted to meet you. And I thank you that you have given my brothers an object lesson, to prevent them getting conceited and proud of what they are doing themselves. But now, I beg you, return to your own place, and pray for us. You have taught us quite enough."

Obedient to this request and the prayers of all the brothers, he departed.

On another occasion he told us the following story,

"After having lived without faltering through all the paths of monastic life, I began to have even deeper spiritual desires. I decided that for a period of five days I would try to keep my mind totally centred on God without any distraction, refusing to think about anything else. The moment I decided this, I shut the cell door and closed off the outer room, so that I would not have to open up to any visitors. And standing up, I immediately began to say to my thoughts, 'Don't come down out of heaven. You have the angels and archangels and all the heavenly powers, cherubim and seraphim and God the power behind them all. Turn thither. Don't sink lower than the heavens lest you fall into worldly thoughts.' I persevered in this for two days and two nights, which so annoyed the demon that he became a flame of fire, and set light to everything I had in the cell, including the rush mat I was standing on, so that I was afraid that I too was about to go up in flames. At last, on the third day, I was so frightened that I gave up the whole idea. I could not keep my mind concentrated any longer, so I came down to earth. I suppose God allowed this lest I be carried away by pride."

I once went to visit him and found outside his cell the presbyter of a neighbouring village whose head was so eaten away by the disease known as cancer that his mouth appeared to be almost at the top of his head. He had

come hoping to be cured, but Macarius would not even speak to him.

"Have pity on this poor wretch," I said, "and at least say something to him."

"He does not deserve to be cured," he replied. "This has been sent to him by God to teach him a lesson. If he wants to be cured urge him to give up administering the holy sacraments."

"Why that?" I asked.

"He carries out his ministry even though he is a fornicator," he replied, "and that is why he is being punished. Now then, if he gives up in fear what he has dared to do without shame, the Lord will cure him."

So I went and spoke to this afflicted person, and he swore an oath that he would no longer exercise his priesthood. Macarius then let him in and said to him, "Do you believe in God from whom nothing is hidden?"

"Completely," he replied.

"You know you cannot deceive God?" Macarius asked.

"Indeed, sir, I can't," he said.

"Well, if you acknowledge your sin and accept that God has punished you for it, the result will be a cure."

So he confessed his sin, and promised to sin no more, to give up ministering at the altar and embrace the lay state. Then the holy man laid hands on him, and after a few days he was cured, his hair grew back and he went back home giving glory to God and thanks to the great Macarius.

This holy man had several cells, one in Scete, which is the inner part of the desert, one in Libya, one in the Cells, and one in Nitria. Some of them had no openings, and during Lent he stayed in them in complete darkness. Another was rather narrow, so that he was unable to stretch his legs in them, but he did have a bigger one in which it was convenient to meet those who came to visit him.

He cured so many who were vexed with demons that it would be impossible to number them. A rich and noble woman was carried to him while I was there. She had come from Thessalonica, the furthest part of Greece, and had been paralysed for many years. He took pity on her where she had been put outside his cell, and for twenty days he prayed and anointed her with oil with his own hands, until he was able to send her away, cured, to her own country. She went back on her own two feet, and sent a generous offering to the holy brothers.

I saw a boy vexed with a spirit brought to him. Macarius put one hand on his head and his left hand on his breast, and prayed over him for quite some time

until he made him float up in the air. And the boy swelled up, getting so big as to be completely distorted. Suddenly he cried out, and expelled water from all his bodily openings, after which he returned to his normal shape. Macarius anointed him with oil and poured water over him, after which he gave him back to his father, ordering him not to eat meat nor drink any wine for the next forty days. And so he cured him.

He was once troubled by vainglorious thoughts which suggested to him that it would be a good plan and in a good cause to go to Rome for the sake of all those who were sick there. But grace strongly counteracted such inclinations. He fought against them for a long time and was greatly disturbed by them. He flung himself down on the threshold of his cell, thrust his feet outside and said, "Cut them off and drag them away, you demons, if you can, but I shan't keep my feet company." He vowed he would stay there till evening if they would not let him go, and in any case would not listen to them. After he had lain there a long time, night came on, and the argument intensified. He filled a large basket with sand, shouldered it, and walked off into the desert. Here he met Theosobius Cosmetor of Antioch who said to him, "Whatever is that you are carrying, abba? Let me ease your burden by carrying it for you"

"I am simply putting a burden on him who is a burden to me," he replied. "For I am so remiss and unstable that he is making me want to go off wandering about." Having gone about like this for quite some time he returned to his cell with his body suitably chastened.

The servant of God Paphnutius, who was a disciple of this famous holy man, told us that once when Macarius was sitting in his outer room praying to God, a hyena brought to him its calf who was blind. She pushed upon the door with her head, went in to where he was sitting and laid the calf down at his feet. Macarius took the calf, spat in its eyes and prayed. Immediately the calf could see. The hyena fed it, picked it up and departed. The next day she brought a large sheepskin to Macarius. When Macarius saw it, he said, "How did you get hold of this if it wasn't through killing somebody's sheep? I can't accept this, as it is the outcome of crime." But the hyena gently lowered its head, bent her knees and placed the skin at the holy man's feet.

"I said I can't accept this" he said "- unless you promise never to hurt poor people any more by eating their sheep." She nodded her head as if consenting, and then Macarius picked up the sheepskin. That blessed handmaid of Christ, Melania, told me that she had accepted that same skin from Macarius, known as the hyena's skin. Is it anything to be wondered at that a hyena should sense

that here was a man crucified to the world, and should bring a gift in return for the kindness it had received, to the glory of God and the honour of his servant? He who in the prophet Daniel tamed the lions also enlarged the intelligence of the hyena.

It was also said about this man that from the time he was baptised he never spat upon the ground. He was baptised at the age of forty and lived for sixty years after that.

Chapter XIX & XX, Macarius,(continued) Book VIII (Life of Abba Mark begins further down page)

In stature he was like this. (It behoves me to tell you this, O servant of Christ, as one who knows what I am talking about, since my poor life was contemporary with his.) He was small and thin and somewhat bent in stature, with hair growing only on his upper lip, and very little on his head. Because of the intensity of his physical discipline, no hair grew on his chin.

I came to this holy Macarius one day rather distressed in mind and said to him, "What shall I do, abba Macarius, for my thoughts bother me saying, 'Give it up and go away'?"

"Say to your thoughts," said the holy father Macarius, "For Christ's sake I will maintain the defences."

So, O loving and diligent servant of Christ, I have now told you about some of the many signs and struggles of the famous Macarius, who excelled in virtue. Macarius told us (he was a presbyter) that at the time of the Communion of the Sacraments of Christ, he never gave Communion to Mark, for an angel took it to him from the altar, but he saw only the finger of the hand that brought it.

Chapter XXI

THE LIFE OF ABBA MARK.

When Mark was young, he learnt by heart the old and new testaments. He was a very gentle person with a calm temperament. Once when I had some time to spare in my cell, I went to visit him when he was very old and I sat outside the door of his cell. As is natural in an inexperienced youth, I revered him as someone superhuman, but so indeed he was. I could hear what he was saying and doing. As he sat there inside, for all that he was a hundred years old and

had lost his teeth, he was still fighting with himself and the devil.

"What are you after now, you kakogere ('wicked old man')?" he was saying to himself. "Look, you are a winebibber and you massage yourself with oil.

What are you after now, you tholiophage ('wallower in filth') and koiliodole ('slave to your stomach'), bringing blame and guilt upon yourself?"

And to the devil, "Get away from me, you devil. You have embroiled me in strife, you have brought me to infirmity of body, you have made me drink wine and use oil, turning me to dissipation. Do I owe you anything at this present time? You won't find anything in me that you can destroy. Get away from me this instant, you enemy of the human race."

And as if provoking and stirring himself up he went on saying; "Are you still there, you no-good, you wallower in filth, you elderly glutton. How much longer do I have to put up with you?"

Chapter XXII

THE LIFE OF ABBA MOYSES WHO WAS A ROBBER

Moyses was a black man, an Ethiopian by race, the slave of a certain prominent civic official. This official got rid of him because of his lax morals and thievery. Some say that he had even committed murder, and I must be quite frank about the depth of his depravity in order to emphasise the heroic virtue of his repentance. They say that he became the head of quite a large band of robbers. Among his other evil deeds it is said that he became very hostile and vindictive towards a certain shepherd, who together with his dogs had become an obstacle in his way when he was trying to carry out a raid. He vowed to kill him, and went off to find out where the shepherd was feeding his flocks. When he was told that the shepherd was on the other side of the Nile, he swam across holding his two-edged sword between his teeth and carrying on his head the tunic he had been wearing, even though the Nile was in flood at the time and over a mile wide. The shepherd had time to hide away in a cave while he was crossing, and when Moyses could not find him, he killed four prime rams, tied them together with a rope and swam back over the Nile. When he got to a certain small village, he skinned the rams, ate the best parts of the meat, exchanged the skins for wine, drank about eighteen Italian measures of it and then set out to walk the fifty miles back to where he had left his band.

This robber chief later was overcome by remorse through something which

happened to him, joined a monastery and did penance according to the measure of his crimes.

Among other things told about him it is said that four robbers burst in upon him in his cell, not knowing who he was. Blessed Moyses succeeded in tying them up like a bundle of straw, carried them on his shoulders to the door of the church.

"I took these men in the act of attacking me, but since I may not do harm to any human person, what do you think should be done to them?"

Having been captured thus by Moyses, they confessed their sins to God. When they realised that this man was Moyses, who had been the famous leader of a robber band, they glorified the name of Christ, renounced the world also, inspired by his change of heart, and ended up as most exemplary monks.

"If this enormously strong man could so fear God that he turned his back on his robbery," they thought, "why should we delay in seeking our own salvation?"

The demons then began to rise up against Moses the Blessed (for so we must call him), by driving him continually to violent thoughts of fornication. Up till then, so he told us, he had not been tempted by anything very much to make him renounce his calling. He went to the great Isidore in Scete and told him about his battle with fornication.

"Don't worry too much, brother," the holy man replied. "They are only just beginning, but they attack the more vigorously if there is a prior welcome for them. A dog who goes into a butcher's shop to gnaw a bone will not stop doing so if he is always made welcome. But if the shop is shut and no one gives him anything, he is left hungry but comes no more. So if you keep on being continent, mortifying your members which are on earth, allowing no entry to anything which might give rise to disordered gluttony, the demon will find things difficult. If there is no one to give him food, he will go away."

Moses the servant of Christ went back and from then onwards shut himself up in his cell, testing himself to the limit, abstaining from food to the extent that he ate nothing but twelve ounces of dry bread, working constantly and saying fifty prayers a day.

After a while, however, although his body became somewhat emaciated, he still remained over-stimulated, especially in his dreams. He got up and went to see a certain well-respected holy monk and said to him, "What shall I do, abba? The dreams pour out from my spirit into the darkness of my mind as if I am still taking pleasure in the things I was once used to."

"You have not turned your mind away from the visions which come into it," the holy man said, "and that is why they still continue. Follow my advice and undertake a few vigils, pray judiciously, and you will soon be free from these things."

Moyses listened to these words coming from the mouth of an acknowledged expert, went back to his cell and decided to do what his own conscience prompted, namely to go all night without sleep, and not to prostrate himself under the pretext of praying, in order to banish the tyranny of sleep.

He spent six years standing up in the middle of his cell, without shutting his eyes, praying earnestly to God, but he still was not able to overcome his intemperate desires.

After this, he thought up another method of living a hard life. This adversary of Satan would go by night to the cells of those monks who had grown old in the practice of their way of life and who were no longer able to carry water for themselves without help. He would take their water jars without anyone knowing and fill them with water. They had some distance to go to get water in these places, for some it was two miles, for others five, for some only a half. The demon noticed what he was doing and decided that he could put up with the tenacity of this athlete no longer. So one night he hit him in the back with a club as he was bending over the well to fill the jar of one of the monks, and left him there for dead, ignorant of who or what it was that had hit him.

Next day another monk came to draw water and found him lying there lifeless. He went to tell Isidore, that great presbyter of Scete, who came with some others, picked him up and took him into the church. For a whole year he lay there grievously ill, with body and soul scarce hanging together. Then Isidore, that fine priest of Christ, said to him, "Brother Moyses it is time you stopped fighting with the demons and carrying on the battle in this particular way. You need some moderation in your way of life."

"I will not stop fighting with them," he replied, "until the phantasies of my dreams stop."

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" said Isidore the presbyter, the servant of Christ, "your foul dreams will stop from this moment of time, so that with a good and faithful conscience you can receive the Sacraments. But don't boast about this as if it were through your own efforts that your desires have been tamed. It is God who has shown his power in you, to your great benefit, lest you should fall into an overrated opinion of yourself."

At this Moyses returned to his cell and lived more quietly, having taken up a

more moderate way of life. After two or three months, the blessed Isidore asked Moyses whether the demon had been giving him any more trouble, to which he replied, "From the moment when the servant of Christ prayed for me, nothing of that sort happened any more." But this holy man was found worthy of being given grace in his fight against the demons. He became as free from the attentions of demons as of flies in wintertime.

Such was the holy religious life lived by the indomitable athlete, Moyses the Ethiopian who was numbered among the great. He became a presbyter and died in Scete aged seventy-five, leaving behind him seventy-five disciples.

Chapter XXIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA PAUL

There is a mountain called Pherme in Egypt on the edge of the vast desert of Scete where about five hundred men live the ascetic life. Among them was a fine monk called Paul who had never lived any other kind of life than this. He had never had paid employment, nor engaged in any sort of business, and never accepted more food from anybody than he could eat in the course of one day. He devoted his life to the work of perpetual prayer. He used three hundred distinct set prayers, and kept the same number of pebbles in one of his pockets.

[The Latin also has that at each prayer he 'threw' a pebble. Is this the first ever recorded instance of the use of prayer beads?]

For each prayer, he would transfer one pebble to another pocket. He once visited the holy man Macarius Pollicitus in search of grace and spiritual profit and said to him, "I am extremely distressed, abba Macarius." And the servant of Christ began to explain the reason why he was troubled by telling him of:

Chapter XXIV

THE LIFE OF A VIRGIN WHO SAID 700 PRAYERS.

"In a certain village lived a virgin who had been an ascetic for 30 years. I have been told by many people that she ate nothing except on Saturdays and Sundays, dragging out the whole week without eating for five days, and saying seven hundred prayers daily. When I heard about this I felt very ashamed, for here am I, created with the strength of a man, and yet I can't manage more than three hundred prayers."

"Sixty years I have been at this life," replied the holy Macarius, "and I have said only a hundred prayers, as well as labouring with my hands to supply myself with necessary food, and carrying out my obligations to the rest of the brothers, and I have no reason to think that I have been negligent. So if your conscience is making you feel guilty about the three hundred prayers you say, you are obviously not praying properly. Either that or perhaps you could be able to say more prayers than you are doing."

Chapter XXV

THE PRESBYTER CRONIUS

Cronius the presbyter of Nitria told me the following,

"I was very young when I began, and was very depressed and unstable, so much so that I fled from my monastery and archimandrite and wandered off to holy Antony's mountain. Blessed Antony lived between Heraclea and Babylon in that vast desert which leads to the Red Sea, about thirty miles from the River Nile. Antony's disciples Macarius and Amatas, who buried Antony after his death, had their cells near the river in the place called Pisper. After I arrived there I waited five days before I could see the holy Antony. I was told he came down to these cells sometimes at ten day intervals, sometimes twenty, sometimes five, to give help to visitors. Several of us brothers met him for various reasons, among whom was Eulogius, a monk of Alexandria, and with him someone disabled in all his limbs. The reason they had come was as follows":

Chapter XXVI

EULOGIUS AND THE DISABLED MAN.

This Eulogius was a scholar of the liberal arts, but he became seized by the love of God, and he renounced the crowds in a desire for everlasting life. He disposed of all his property, retaining a small allowance for himself, for he was no longer able to work for a living. He was much perplexed in his mind and somewhat depressed, for he did not fancy the idea of living with others, and he could not sufficiently persuade himself to live alone. At which point he came across someone lying in the market place maimed and mutilated, for he had no hands or feet, although his tongue remained intact, enabling him to call out to the passers-by. Eulogius stopped and looked at him and prayed to God

and made a promise:

"Lord, I accept this crippled man in your name, and I promise to look after him and provide for him to the hour of his death, so that I might be saved through him. Christ, give me patience that I might be his servant."

He went up to the man and spoke to him.

"Would you like to come home with me, where I shall look after you and provide for you?" he said.

"Would you really like to do that?" he said. "But that is more than I deserve."

"I can go and fetch my donkey and take you away."

And the disabled man gladly agreed.

So he lifted him up and took him to his own little cell, and began to see to his every need.

For fifteen years he looked after him compassionately like a father, washing him, anointing him, keeping him warm, and carrying him about, and over and above that, he even tended him in sickness. But then a demon possessed the man, with the intention of depriving Eulogius of his promise and his way of life, and his patient of his maintenance and the action of the grace of God. He began a campaign of harassment against Eulogius:

"Why don't you go away. You are just a wicked man on the run anyway. The truth is that you have stolen someone else's money and ruined his life, and you are using me as pretext to hide behind. Under the pretext of doing good you have taken me into your care, hoping that will save you."

"No, my friend, don't say that," replied Eulogius. "Just tell me how I have offended you, and I will try to make amends."

"I can't put up with your protestations. Just take me away and put me back into the market place. I don't want your patronage any longer."

"Please, let me keep on looking after you. Tell me what has upset you."

"I can't put up with your crafty and hypocritical attentions any longer. The parsimonious and miserable life you lead is ghastly. I would like to be able to eat meat sometimes!"

So Eulogius patiently brought him some meat. But even the sight of that did not satisfy him.

"Your company is just not enough for me," he said. "I would like to meet with some more people."

"Well I can ask a number of monks to come and see you."

"How can I support this! I can hardly bear the sight of your face, and you are proposing to bring me people like yourself, lazy idlers who have the same sort

of diet! No, No! I want to go back to the forum." And he continued with a terrible tongue-lashing. "Murder and mayhem! Take me back to where you found me. I tell you, if I had hands I would either suffocate myself or fall on my sword."

With the demon continuing to stir things up, Eulogius consulted some neighbouring monks:

"What shall I do? This cripple is driving me to despair."

"Why, what's happening?" they asked.

"He is abusing me constantly, and I don't know what to do. Should I send him away? But I am frightened of doing that for I gave God my right hand on that. Should I keep him? But day and night he gives me no peace. I don't know what to do."

"The great man is still alive," they said (for this is what they called the holy Antony), "Go and see him. Take ship with your cripple and take him to the monastery, and wait there till the great man comes down there from his cave and submit the whole thing to his judgment. And what ever he says, stand by his opinion."

Eulogius took their words to heart, and persuaded the cripple to travel with him in a shepherd's skiff to the monastery of the great Antony's disciples. It so happened that the great man had arrived at the monastery late in the previous evening, wearing his sheepskin cloak, so Cronius told me, and was still in the monastery. It was his custom to call to his disciple Macarius.

"Macarius, has anyone come to see me today?"

"Yes, they have."

"Are they from Egypt, or from Jerusalem?"

Now the great man had told him that if there was someone who had come upon some trifling business, he was to say, "From Egypt". But if there was anyone rather more serious and thoughtful, he should say, "From Jerusalem." So as usual he asked Macarius whether the visitors were from Egypt or Jerusalem.

"A bit of a mixture," said Macarius.

If they were from Egypt, Antony would usually say, "Prepare some food, give them some refreshment, pray with them, and let them go in peace." But if they were from Jerusalem, he would quite likely sit with them all night and talk with them of the things pertaining to salvation.

On this evening, the great man summoned them all. Now no one had told him that one of the visitors was called Eulogius, but even though it was late in the

evening he called him.

"Eulogius, Eulogius, Eulogius!"

Eulogius did not stir, thinking he must be calling for someone else of the same name.

"You, Eulogius," he repeated, "from Alexandria."

"What must I do?" he asked.

"Tell me why you have come here."

"Surely he who revealed to you my name must have revealed to you the reason for my coming!"

"Yes, I know why you have come. But tell it out yourself, so that all the brothers can hear."

So Eulogius did as he was told and related the whole story.

"I found this cripple lying in the market place in ragged clothes, and had pity on him. I begged God that he would give me the grace to look kindly on him and take him in. I swore by my right hand that I would care for him in his disability, so that I might be saved through him and that he might be cared for by me. Fifteen years we have carried on like this, as has doubtless been revealed to your holiness. I am at a loss to know what harm I might have done him, but now after so many years he is continually getting at me, and I have a good mind to throw him out, which is what he keeps on urging me to do. This is why I have come to your holiness that you might advise me what I should do and to pray for me, for I am under terrible pressure."

"Would you really throw him out, Eulogius?" asked Antony in a severe and wrathful voice. "His creator has not cast him off. Let God who cherishes him bring you to a better frame of mind."

Eulogius was silent, fearful at hearing what Antony had to say. Antony turned his attention away from Eulogius and began to give the cripple a tongue-lashing.

"You maimed and mutilated object, unworthy of either heaven or earth, how much longer will you contend with God and upset your brother? You don't seem to realise that it is Christ who ministers to you. How dare you make complaints against Christ? Isn't it for Christ's sake that this man has bound himself to your service?"

Having given them both a good talking to, he then turned away from them and dealt with the needs of each of the brothers, before coming back again to Eulogius and the cripple.

Chapter XXVI, Eulogius (continued) Book VIII

Antony's Vision begins further down page)

"Don't delay any longer, my brothers," he said, "but go in peace and stay together. Cast out all the malice that the demon has injected into you, and return to your cell in brotherly love, where you have been for such a long time. God himself will aid you. This time of testing has been at the instigation of Satan because he knows that you are nearly at the end of your journey. But you will receive crowns, you because of him and he because of you. Don't think anything other than that. If the Angel when he comes does not find you in the same place, it could be that you might lose the crown."

They hastened back to their own cell in perfect charity with each other.

Blessed Eulogius passed over to the Lord forty days later, and the cripple died three days after that, mutilated in body but firm and robust in spirit, commending himself into the hands of God.

Cronius stayed a little longer in the Thebaid, and then went down to the monastery in Alexandria, where he learned that the funeral of the blessed Eulogius had indeed taken place on the fortieth day and that of the cripple three days later. He was so amazed that he picked up the Gospels and laid them down in the midst of the brothers and swore an oath so that they would believe what he was saying. He told them how Antony had foreseen it all and related everything that had happened.

"I acted as interpreter for them," he said, "for the blessed Antony knew no Greek, but I knew both languages. By the grace of Christ I was able to speak to the blessed Eulogius and the cripple in Greek and tell them what the great man had said, and tell the great and blessed Antony in Egyptian what both of them had said."

Chapter XXVII

THE VISION WHICH ABBA ANTONY SAW

Cronius also told us that on that same night Antony had told him of a vision that he had seen.

"I had prayed for a whole year that I might be shown the places of both the just and the unjust, and then I saw a gigantically tall black man whose head reached up to the clouds. His hands were stretched up to heaven, but below him was a lake as big as the sea. I saw human souls flying up like birds. Some

of them were carried up over his head and his arms by Angels, but those whom he caught in his hands, he threw into the lake. And a voice came to me, saying, "The souls you see flying over the head of the giant are the souls of the just whom the Angels are taking up into paradise; the others, caught in the hands of the black man, are sent down to hell. These are they who were overcome by the desires of the flesh, and walked in hateful paths, and loved injustice."

Chapter XXVIII

THE LIFE OF PAUL THE SIMPLE

The Servant of Christ, Hierax, as well as Cronius and several other brothers, told me the story I am going to tell you about Paul the Simple. He was a peasant farmer of transparently innocent and simple life, and he had taken a most beautiful woman for a wife who nevertheless was of very lax morals. Led by providence to an outcome which he was in fact half hoping for, he came back from the fields unexpectedly one day, went inside, and found her and a man together. When he saw her and the man she was having sex with, he gave a forthright and heartfelt laugh.

"Fine, fine," he said. "This means that she is no longer any responsibility of mine. In Jesus' name I acknowledge her no longer. Go, take her with you, and her children, for I am leaving to become a monk."

Without saying anything to anybody else he took an eight day journey to holy Antony and knocked on his door.

"What do you want?" asked Antony when he came to the door.

"To become a monk," replied Paul.

"You must be at least sixty. You can't become a monk," said Antony. "Live in the town, work for your living, trusting in the grace of God. You would not be able to cope with all the trials of solitude."

"Whatever you told me to do I would do it," the old man replied.

"I have told you," said Antony. "You are old. You can't be a monk. Go away. Or if you do really want to be a monk, go to a cenobium where there are many brothers to support you in your frailty. I am here all by myself, fasting for five days before eating." And with these words he tried to drive Paul away. Refusing to admit him, Antony shut the door and for three days did not go outside, not even to answer the call of nature. But the old man stayed where he was.

On the fourth day he really had to go outside, but when he opened the door and went out he saw Paul still there and said, "Go away, old man. Why do you keep on bothering me? You can't stay here."

"I don't intend to stay anywhere else except here," said Paul.

Antony looked at him and saw that he had nothing with him to sustain life, no bread, no water or anything else, and he had now been fasting for four days.

"He is so unused to fasting he might die," thought Antony, "and I will be to blame." And so he took him in.

"If you can be obedient and do what I tell you," said Antony, "you'll be all right."

"I will do whatever you say," Paul replied.

Antony in those days followed just as rigorous a way of life as he did when young. In order to test Paul's mettle, he said to him, "Stay here and pray, while I go in and fetch something for you to work with." He then went into his inner room and watched Paul through the window. For the rest of the week he stayed there without moving, even though scorched by the heat. At the end of the week he brought some palm branches which he had soaked in water.

"Take these and weave a rope as you see me doing," he said. The old man wove until the ninth hour, completing fifteen arms-lengths with great difficulty. Antony inspected what he had done and was not satisfied with it.

"You've done that very badly," he said. "Undo it and do it again." It was now the seventh day that this elderly man had been fasting, but Antony was treating him severely like this to see whether he would give up and abandon the life of a monk. But he just took the branches and rewove them, and with great labour put right the unevenness with which he done them at first. Antony saw that he had neither grumbled, nor been downcast, nor turned aside, nor become resentful to the slightest degree, and he began to feel sorry for him. And as the sun set he said, "Well, little father, shall we break some bread together?"

"If you think that's right, abba," replied Paul, thus leaving the decision to Antony without jumping up eagerly at the mention of food. Antony began to change his mind.

"Get the table ready then," he said. And he did so. Antony put the bread on the table, four six-ounce rolls. He put one to soak for himself (for they were dry) and three for Paul. Antony sang a psalm which he knew, and when he had repeated it twelve times, he also said a prayer twelve times. This he did in order to test Paul further. But the old man prayed too, as promptly and eagerly

as the great Antony himself. (I really think that he would rather feed on scorpions than live falsely.)

"Sit down," the great Antony said to Paul after the twelve prayers, "but we won't eat until vespers. Wait till the bread is eatable." The time for vespers came and Paul still had not eaten, when Antony said, "Get up. We'll pray and then sleep." They left the table and did so. Half way through the night Antony woke Paul for prayers and went on with them right through to the ninth hour. But at last when vespers came and the table had been prepared and they had sung and prayed they sat down to eat.

Antony ate one roll and did not pick up another one. The old man was eating more slowly and still had the roll which he had started. Antony waited till he had finished and said, "Come, little father, eat another roll."

"If you have another one, I will," said Paul, "but not if you won't."

"I've had quite sufficient for one who is a monk," said Antony.

"Since I want to be a monk," said Paul, "that's enough for me too, then." And he got up and said twelve prayers and sang twelve psalms. After the prayers, they slept a little for the first part of the night, then rose and sang psalms again till dawn.

He then sent him out to wander in the desert.

"Come back after three days," he said.

This he did.

When some brothers came on a visit he paid close attention to Antony and did whatever Antony wanted.

"See to the visitors' needs and keep silence," he said, "and don't eat anything till they have started on their journey back."

At the end of the third week in which Paul had not eaten anything, the brothers asked him why he kept silent, to which he replied nothing at all.

"Why keep silent?" said Antony. "Speak to the brothers." So he spoke.

Once when Antony was given a jar of honey he told Paul to break the jar. He did so and the honey spilled.

"Now scrape up the honey with this shell," he ordered, "but don't get any dirt mixed up in it."

Once he ordered him to draw water all day.

When his garment got a bit tattered, he told him to just get used to it.

In the end, this man had grasped such firm hold on obedience by the divine grace given him, that he was able to command the demons. When the great Antony saw that this man had promptly carried out everything he had asked

him to do in the way he ordered his life, he said, "See if you can keep on doing this day by day, brother, and stay with me."

"I don't know what else you can show me," said Paul. "I do whatever I see you doing, quite easily and without any strain, the Lord being my helper."

On another day Antony admitted 'in the name of Jesus' that he had indeed become a monk. The great and blessed Antony had become convinced that the soul of this servant of Christ had become almost perfected in all things, even though he was somewhat simple. After a few months Antony was moved by the grace of God to build a cell for him three or four miles away from his own cell, and said to him, "See now, by the help of the grace of Christ you have become a monk. Now live by yourself, and even take on the demons."

So a year after Paul the Most Simple came to live with him, he was highly experienced in a disciplined way of life and was found worthy to battle against the demons and against all kinds of diseases.

One day there was brought to Antony a young man vexed beyond measure by one of the most powerful and savage demons, who railed against heaven itself with curses and blasphemies.

Antony had a look at the young man and said to those who had brought him, "This is not a task for me. I have not yet been given the grace to deal with this very powerful type of demon. Paul the Simple has the gift of dealing with this one." The great Antony went to Paul, that most excellent man, taking them all with him.

"Abba Paul," he said, "Cast out this demon from this person so that he may return home cured and glorify God."

"Why not you?" asked Paul.

"It is not for me," said Antony. "I have other concerns." And the great Antony left the boy there and returned to his cell.

The unassuming old man stood up and poured out a strong prayer to challenge the demon and said, "Abba Antony says, 'Depart from this man'"

"I will not, you disgusting, pompous old man," said the demon, with many curses and blasphemies. Paul put on his sheepskin and belaboured him in the back, crying, "'Go out,' abba Antony says."

The demon abused both Paul and Antony with curses, saying, "You are disgusting old men, lazy and greedy, never content to mind your own business. What have you got in common with us? Why are you browbeating us?"

"Either go now," said Paul, "or I will call upon the power of Christ to bring

destruction upon you."

But this unclean demon railed against Jesus also with curses and blasphemies "I am not going," he shouted.

This made Paul get angry with the demon. He went outside. It was midday - when the Egyptian heat bears comparison with the furnace of Babylon. The holy old man stood up straight, like a statue, on top of a rock, and prayed, "O Jesus Christ, you were crucified under Pontius Pilate, take note that I will not come down from this rock, nor will I eat or drink even if I die, until you hear me and cast out this demon from this man and liberate him from the unclean spirit." And even as the simple and humble Paul was praying, before he had even finished, the demon cried out, "I'm going, I'm going, driven out by force, overcome by tyranny. I'm getting out of this man and won't come back any more. It is the simplicity and humility of Paul which has driven me out and I don't know where to go."

The moment he went, he changed into an enormous dragon about seventy cubits long which crept off towards the Red Sea. Thus were fulfilled the words of Holy Scripture, 'The righteous man shows his faith by what he does' (Proverbs 12.17), and 'On whom shall I look, says the Lord, if not on him who is gentle and humble and trembles at my words?' (Isaiah 66.2). Although lesser (*humiliores*) demons can be cast out by the faith of men in authority (*principales*), it takes humble (*humiles*) men to be able to put to flight the demons of greatest power (*principales*).

Such were the miracles of the humble Paul the Simple, and there were many others he did, even greater than these. He was known as Simple by all the brothers.

Chapter XXIX

THE LIFE OF ABBA PACHON

There was a certain Pachon living in Scete who had reached the age of seventy. It so happened that I had become tormented by a desire for a woman and I was labouring under thoughts and visions at night. It was all I could do to refrain from leaving the desert because of this temptation, so great was this turbulence of mind that was fiercely attacking me. I did not tell any of my neighbours about this, not even Evagrius my superior, but unknown to anyone I went into the desert where I wandered about among the older brothers in Scete for fifteen days. Among them I came across the holy man Pachon. When

I realised how sincere he was and how skilled he was in the discipline of his life, I was emboldened to open up my heart to him.

"Don't think that this is anything strange or unusual," this holy man said to me. "It is not caused by voluptuousness, laziness or carelessness - your own character bears witness to that. You make do with the minimum of what is necessary, you have not made a habit of consorting with women. It is more likely the case that this is coming to you from the devil, because of your search for purity. There are three ways in which the enemy drives one towards fornication. Sometimes if the flesh has been too delicately pandered to it runs riot and takes control, sometimes thoughts can provoke assent in the mind, sometimes it is a demon in person who harasses us through envy. This is what I have found as a result of the many cases I have seen.

"Look at me now, an old man. I've been forty years in this cell working out my salvation, and I have arrived at this age being tempted right up to the present day. And I solemnly declare that for twelve years from the age of fifty onwards there had not been a single day or night when I was not attacked. I began to think that God had forsaken me, so fiercely did the devil show his power against me. I felt I would rather go mad and die than do something disgraceful driven by vice and bodily desires.

"I went out from my cell into the desert and found a hyena's cave. I stripped and stayed in that cell all day in the hope that the hyenas would come and devour me. After vespers, as the scripture says, 'The sun knows it is time to set. You bring on the darkness and it is night when all the wild beasts come out. The young lions roar and strike, seeking their meat from God.' (Psalms 104.19-21). And the wild beasts did indeed come out at that time, male and female, and sniffed at me from head to toe as they prowled around me. Just as I was expecting that they would devour me, they went away. Even though I lay there all night I was not devoured. I realised that God had certainly spared me, and I got up and went back to my cell.

"But after a few days the devil returned and attacked me even more fiercely than before, so that I could hardly refrain from blaspheming. He changed himself into the image of an Ethiopian girl that I had seen gathering ears of corn in the days of my youth. It seemed as if she came and sat on my knee, and got me so excited that I thought I had had sex with her. I gave her a box on the ear and she vanished. I'm telling you this, believe me. For two years I wasn't able to bear the smell given off by my hand.

"For these reasons I became so weak and despondent of mind that I

acknowledged defeat and gave up all hope. I wandered off into the empty desert, where I came across a small asp. I picked it up and placed it on my genitals so that I might be bitten and die. I put its head on my manhood, the source of all my troubles, so that thanks to providence I might be bitten. And then I heard a voice saying in my thoughts. 'Come, Pachon, put up a fight! I have allowed this power to be exercised over you lest you become puffed up and arrogant in spirit. Maybe now you can overcome your desires, accept your own weakness, trust not in the way you have organised your life, but rely only on the help of God.' Thus admonished and strengthened I returned to my cell and stayed there with confidence from then on. I was no longer worried about the outcome of the battle, but lived out my days in peace. When the demon realised how much I despised him he was disconcerted, and bothered me no longer."

With this advice he confirmed me in my own strife against Satan, instructed me in the nature of the battle and prepared me by his teaching for the attacks of the demon. And so he sent me back home, telling me to be of good courage in all things.

Chapter XXX

THE LIFE OF ABBA STEPHAN

Stephan was a Libyan and lived for sixty years on the borders of Marmarica and Mareotis. When his disciplined life had become thoroughly developed, he became well known for his powers of discernment, and was given this gift that if anyone came to him with whatever kind of trouble, they never left him without this trouble being entirely removed. The blessed Antony knew him well. He lived right through to our time, but I never visited him because he was so far away. But the holy Ammon and Evagrius visited him, and they told me that they found him to have an advanced infection in his testicles, and a large cancer, known in Greek as a phagidaina, in his penis. They said that even as he was being attended to by a doctor, he was working with his hands weaving palm branches and talking to us at the same time, while the surgeon was treating the rest of his body. This outstanding person, by the grace of God, obviously had such patience that he was affected no more than if it were somebody else's body that was undergoing surgery. Even when the knife was slicing bits off his members he might simply have been having a haircut, so little did he react.

"We were half revolted and half terrified," they said, "that the life of such a great man should be violated by such a terrible disease and be subject to such excisions by the doctors, but the blessed Stephan realised what we were thinking and said, 'Don't be upset by this, my sons. Nothing that God wills is ever meant for evil but for an ultimate good. Perhaps it is the case that these members deserve punishment. Better to be punished now than after departing from this world.' With these words he encouraged us and helped us to be indifferent to pain and bear calamity cheerfully."

I have told you all this so that it won't seem strange to you when good people suffer afflictions.

Chapter XXXI

VALENS WHO FELL FROM GRACE.

Valens was a Palestinian by race but a Corinthian by inclination, in that he shared the vice which St Paul attributed to the Corinthians when he said, 'You are puffed up' (1 Corinthians 5.2). After coming into the desert he lived for several years among us before he was deceived by the devil and gave way to pride. Little by little he was beguiled into thinking himself to be brilliant and important, conversing with angels who ministered to his special needs. He claimed that once he was working in the gloom when he lost the needle which he was using to stitch up a basket. When he could not find it, a demon made a light for him and the needle came to hand. From such incidents as this, he conceived a highly inflated opinion of himself and became so self-important that he even felt that he had no need to participate in the Sacraments. But the Lord had mercy on him and saw to it that his failings should quickly become known to the whole fraternity. It so happened that some guests offered some presents to the brothers in church. The holy Macarius, our presbyter, accepted them and distributed a handful of them to each person in the cells round about. When it came to Valens' turn, the person delivering them was subjected to verbal abuse.

Chapter XXXI, Valens (continued) Book VIII

(Life of Ero begins further down page)

"Go and tell Macarius," he said, "that I am not inferior to him that he should bestow blessings on me."

Macarius realised that he was suffering from delusions and went to see him next day in order to admonish him.

"Valens," he said, "you are being led astray. Give it up and ask God's pardon." Valens would not listen to his warning, and Macarius went away very troubled in mind, lamenting because Valens had fallen.

The demon was now convinced that Valens believed in his deceptions implicitly. He decided to impersonate the Saviour and at night time sent to Valens a vision consisting of a thousand angels bearing torches and a fiery wheel in which could be seen the image of the Saviour. One of the angels proclaimed, "Christ loves what you are doing. He loves the freedom and confidence of your life. He comes to greet you. Go out of your cell, and do not fail to fall down and worship him when you see him and then go back to your cell."

He went out of his cell for about a mile, following the vision of torches, and there fell down and worshipped the Antichrist. The next day, in a state of mental disturbance, he went into the church and said to the assembled brothers, "I have no need of Communion, for I have today seen Christ himself."

The fathers then imprisoned him for a year in iron shackles, and prayed that he might be cured of his shameful behaviour. By this extremely severe treatment, his delusions were drawn out of him. As the saying goes, contrary things are cured by contrary medicines.

It is very necessary to include the lives of such people in this book to serve as a warning to the lector. There are sacred twigs on the tree of paradise, that is, the knowledge of good and evil, so that if anyone plucks them while doing the right thing they might not get carried away and fall from virtue. For virtue itself can often be the occasion of sin, if not performed with the right aim. For it is written, 'I saw the righteous perishing in his own righteousness. This also is vanity.' (Ecclesiastes 7.15).

Chapter XXXII

ERO

My neighbour Ero was a city youth from Alexandria, very intelligent, and of an upright life. He too, after working and struggling exceptionally hard, fell headlong into pride and presumption. In his pride he insolently defied the holy fathers, among them the blessed Evagrius, upon whom he poured scorn,

saying, 'Those who listen to your teaching are deceiving themselves, for we should call no one our master except Christ.' Thus he perverted the Testament by interpreting in his own foolish way the saying, 'Call no one on earth your father.' (Matthew 23.8). His mind was so darkened by the empty obstinacy of his own opinion that he too was shackled when he refused to come to the Sacrament.

But let us be faithful to the truth. In the beginning, his life was extremely well planned and punctilious, so that many who lived near him spoke up for him, saying that sometimes he went for three months without a proper meal, being content with the Sacrament and whatever wild olives he could find. I also had had occasion to observe him when the blessed Albinus and I travelled with him to Scete forty miles away. In the course of those forty miles we ate twice and drank some water three times. But he ate nothing, and as he walked he recited first fifteen psalms, then the long psalm, then the epistle to the Hebrews, then Isaiah and part of the prophet Jeremiah, then the gospel of St Luke, then Proverbs. And we could not keep up with him as he walked.

But in the end, he was captured by the evil workings of a demon, and stirred up by his burning fire, he found he could stay in his cell no longer. In some mysterious dispensation of providence he went off to Alexandria, driving out one nail by another. He deliberately adopted a dissolute and careless way of life, which brought him later to a state of health he had not bargained for.

For from going to the theatre and the horse races, and giving himself up to gluttony and drunkenness, he eventually fell into a squalid lust after women. Having succumbed to this, he associated with a certain actress and was rewarded by developing a sore spot, which by divine providence developed into a carbuncle in his testicles. In the space of a week he became so ill that his genitals went completely putrid and fell off of their own accord. As he convalesced after this, he turned back to the things which he knew were of God. He went back to the desert and confessed all these things to the fathers, but before he could even return to his former work he died.

Chapter XXXIII

PTOLEMY WHO FELL FROM GRACE

There was another called Ptolemy who lived in further Scete in the part known (in Greek) as Klimax, that is, 'Ladder'. It is difficult to talk about his life but better that than not talk about it at all. Klimax is a place where no one

should be able to live because the nearest well is eighteen miles away. But he had a great number of earthen jars, and during December and January, he collected dew, soaking it up off the rocks with a sponge. There is a great deal of dew in those parts. For fifteen years he managed to live like this. But deprived as he was from the teaching and fellowship of the holy men, and from the benefits of regular participation in the Sacraments, he began to depart from the right path. Many people think that this is the root cause of all error, and he unfortunately is a good example of this, as the demon of error began to gain control over him. The enemy suggested to this empty headed man that *res nullam habere essentiam*, (lit. 'things had no essence', i.e. 'nothing had any essential meaning', or even 'his way of life had no foundation') since all things existed because the world itself existed of its own accord.

So the enemy of life insinuated into his mind these questions, "If this is the way things are, why do you live in these remote parts? What pleasure is there in it, Ptolemy, if there is no reward for it? And who is going to give you a reward for your many great labours if there is no one to do the giving? Is there any value in the judgement threatened by Scripture if there is no such thing as providence?"

Undermined by these satanic thoughts this miserable Ptolemy became so disturbed in his mind that he wandered off to Egypt where he gave himself up to gluttony and drunkenness, talking to no one, but silently frequenting the market place as a miserable and tear-jerking spectacle to the eyes of Christians and a laughing stock for those who were ignorant of our way of life.

This incurable disease afflicted the unfortunate Ptolemy from a sort of irrational arrogance, deceived by the seductions of a demon. He thought he was better off with his own brand of wisdom apart from all the holy fathers. His swelled head made him his own worst enemy and he rushed headlong into profound destruction, because he never paid attention to the wise leadership of any of the holy fathers and was not established in their spiritual teaching. He had no guide and so walked into the ways of death. A tree may be flourishing with healthy leaves and beautiful fruit but can be made sterile in a moment of time if stripped bare. Those without guides fall like leaves.

Chapter XXXIV

A LAPSED VIRGIN

I knew a certain virgin of Jerusalem who was enclosed and wore sackcloth for

six years. She would not allow anything which tended towards self-indulgence but was renowned among women for her temperance. But pride, that root of all evils, made her a stranger to divine grace, so that she opened her door to the one who ministered to her and went to bed with him. They were not living for charity or the laws of God, but only on a human level, which leads only to vainglory and the beginning of depravity. For while she was busying herself in pious thoughts about damning others she was driven mad by the demon of pride who was absolutely delighted. The angel of temperance however deserted her entirely.

Now, O most faithful of men, I have written about the lives of those who have been upright and virtuous, and also about those who after many labours have fallen through laziness and stupidity from the high standard they had set, led astray by all kinds of devilish snares. Anyone who knows what hidden nets the demon will set for him in his own life may then know how to escape such snares. There are many great men and women who in the beginning faithfully pursued their chosen way of life but then were rooted up by the enemy of the human race. I have made mention of just a few of them. The rest I pass over in silence, for I will do neither them nor myself any good by dwelling on them to the neglect of describing the virtuous divine work of the athletes of Christ who prevailed.

Chapter XXXV

THE LIFE OF ABBA ELIAS

Elias, best of workers, was a great friend of women, and took great care of the weaker sex. He was one of those people for whom the end in view acts as a spur to the exercise of all their skills. He gave a great deal of help to a group of women who were living a disciplined life, and used resources which he had in the city of Athribe to build them a large monastery, and there he gathered together all virgins who had gone astray. He took care of them in all things, supplying them with everything they needed, a garden and tools to cultivate it, in a word, everything necessary for a life of discipline. They had been drawn together however from living private lives in various diverse circumstances with the result that they quarrelled a great deal. So it was necessary for this holy man to listen to them and try to make peace among them. For he had gathered together about three hundred of them and for two years had been having to act as mediator among them, even though at about thirty or forty

years of age he was quite young.

He began to be tempted by lust. He went out from the monastery and wandered about in the desert for a couple of days, beseeching and praying, "Either kill me lest I abuse them, or take away from me this disordered desire, so that I can look after them in a rational manner." That evening in the desert he dreamed. He told me that three angels came and confronted him, saying, "Why have you left this monastery of women?"

He told them all. "I am frightened that I will do both them and me some great injury."

"If you were to be liberated from these desires would you go back and continue to take care of them?"

"Yes, I would."

They told him he would have to swear an oath, and spelled out the details, "Swear this to us, 'By him who cares for me, so will I care for them.'" And he swore.

One of the angels then grasped his hands, another his feet, and the third took a razor and, in his vision, seemed to cut out his testicles. And it seemed to him in his dream that the dismemberment had cured him.

"Do you feel any benefit from this?" the angels then asked him.

"An enormous benefit," he said. "I feel I have lost a great burden, and been freed from the difficulty of controlling my desires."

"Go back to your monastery," the angels said.

Five days later, he turned back and went in to the monastery to find them all mourning for him. From then on, he lived in his cell by the side of the monastery, and because of his nearness he was able to govern them conscientiously to the best of his ability. He lived with them another forty years, and during all that time, so he told the fathers, he did not have a single lustful thought come into his mind.

Such was the life of that holy man Elias, his discipline and the way he ruled his monastery of women.

Chapter XXXVI

THE LIFE OF ABBA DOROTHEUS

Elias was succeeded by Dorotheus, a most worthy man, who grew old in the knowledge of how to live a good life. He found that he could not look after the monastery in the same way as the blessed Elias. Instead of living in Elias'

cell, he shut himself up in an upper room of the monastery and made a window overlooking the women which could be opened and shut. He was forever sitting at the window, ensuring that they lived together in peace. There were no stairs, so he grew old in this upper room without anyone able to go up to him, nor was he able to go down. Such was the religious life, adorned with many virtues, of the blessed Dorotheus.

Chapter XXXVII AMMA PIAMUN

There was a virgin called Piamun who lived with her mother all the days of her life, spinning flax, and eating alone with each other every evening. She had the gift of being able to foretell people's future.

It so happened that one year when the Nile flooded, villages began to attack each other, quarrelling about sharing the water, causing injuries and deaths. A stronger village threatened to invade hers, and a crowd of men carrying spears and pointed sticks set out, intent on destroying the village. But an angel of the Lord appeared to this blessed woman telling her of this invasion. She called the village presbyters and said to them, "Go out of the village and run to those who are coming out against you and ask them to desist from these evils they are preparing against you, lest you perish along with the whole village."

The terrified presbyters fell at her feet. "We don't dare to go out and meet them," they implored her, "for we know only too well their drunken fury. But if you have any pity for us and the village and your own house go out to meet them yourself, calm them down and turn them back."

She would not agree to do that but went back to her own little house and stood all night in prayer, hardly prostrating herself at all.

"O Lord, judge of the world," she prayed, "who hate injustice, let this prayer come to you and let your power stop them in their tracks like a column of stone wherever it finds them."

And as this holy virgin prayed so it happened. Early in the morning, about three miles away, the enemy stood transfixed, like columns of stone, unable to move. And it was revealed to them that they had been brought to a halt through the prayers of Piamun, the servant of Christ, and they made peace with her village, saying, "Thanks be to God and the prayers of Piamun that we were prevented from doing you any harm."

Chapter XXXVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA PACHOMIUS AND THOSE WHO WERE WITH HIM

Pachomius lived in a place called Tabennesi, which is in the Thebaid. He was among those who lived in the greatest and most perfect way of life, and was found worthy of the gift of angelic visions and foretelling the future. He was a great lover of the poor and was full of charity to all.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him as he sat in his cave.

"Pachomius," he said, "You have done properly and thoroughly all the things given you to do. You no longer need to live in this place, so get up, go out, gather together all the young monks and live with them. Give them rules according to the formula which I will give you."

And he gave Pachomius a bronze tablet on which was inscribed the following: Allow each person food and drink according to his strength.

Give difficult tasks to the strong. Give lighter, less arduous tasks to those who find things difficult because of their weakness.

Put several cells in each wing and put three in a cell, but let all the food be prepared in one building.

Let them not lie down to sleep, but provide semi-reclining chairs, give them blankets and let them sleep there sitting up. Let them wear at night linen shifts and girdles and let each person have a sheepskin of white wool. They should not eat or sleep without them.

When they go to the Communion of Christ on Saturday and Sunday, let them put off their belts and sheepskins and let them go in wearing only their cowls which should have no shaggy wool on them, but have a purple cross superimposed on them.

Let there be twenty-four groups of monks according to the twenty-four letters of the [Greek] alphabet. Each group should be known by its Greek letter, from α, β, etc. down to ϭ. If the archimandrite wants to enquire about any particular person out of such a great number, he should ask, "How is group α?" or "How is group β?" or "Give my greetings to group α," according to the letter belonging to each group. The more sincere and simple ones should be given the letter α, the more difficult ones the letter ϭ. Thus you can conveniently match every group to each letter of the alphabet according to the discipline and style of life of each one, without anyone except the spiritual teachers understanding the meaning

Also written on the tablet,

If you have a guest from a different monastery which has a different rule, let him eat and drink separately and do not admit him into the monastery unless he is simply on a journey.

Furthermore, when once a person has entered, do not finally admit him till he has proved his ability to endure the battle for three years. But when he has coped with this difficult life for three years, then let him carry on with the contest.

Let the brothers wear their hoods up in the refectory so that one brother cannot see another chewing. They should not speak while eating, nor should they take their eyes off the table and their plates.

They should say twelve sets of prayers during the day, twelve at the lighting of the lamps in the evening, twelve during the night vigil, and three at the ninth hour. When they are eating together en masse let each group sing one psalm before each set of prayers.

When the great Pachomius objected to the angel that the prayers were rather few, the angel replied, "I have decided it this way so that even the least can fulfil the rule without being overburdened. The more proficient ones don't need to keep these laws; they can give their whole lives to contemplation when they are in their cells. These rules I have given for the sake of those whose understanding is less developed, so that like stubborn servants going in fear of their master they may fulfil the discipline of their lives securely and freely."

When the angel had finished his task in setting up these rules, he departed from Pachomius. There are about seven thousand men in monasteries following these rules. The principal great monastery where Pachomius lived, from which the others sprang, contains about fourteen hundred men.

Chapter XXXIX

THE LIFE OF ABBA APHTHONIUS

Among them is a servant of God called Aphthonius, a close and sincere friend of mine, who is now second in command of that monastery. Because he is strong in Christ, stable and reliable, and unlikely to be distracted, they send him to do their business in Alexandria, by selling their goods and doing their shopping.

There are other monasteries of two or three hundred people, and I entered one of them in the city of Panos where there were three hundred men. They

practice all kinds of trades, and besides what I list below they even build monasteries for women, and also prisons. After rising in the morning, they go according to their individual gifts, some to the kitchen, some to laying the tables with bread, country herbs, olives, cheese, animals' feet and diced vegetables. The weaker go in to dine first, at the seventh hour, others at the ninth, others at the tenth, others at evening, but some only after two days, some three days, four days or five days, so that each group had its own hour. The work they did was as follows: some worked in the fields, some in the garden, some in the corn mill, some in the forge, some in building work, some in the laundry, some in the tannery, some in shoemaking, some in calligraphy, some weaving big baskets, some smaller baskets and some bread baskets. And all learned the Scriptures by heart.

There was also a monastery of about four hundred women who had the same rule and way of life, except that they did not have the sheepskin. These women were on the other side of the Nile, opposite the men. When one of them died, the others saw to her burial by taking her out and placing her on the banks of the Nile. The brothers then crossed over, carrying palms and olive branches and singing psalms, brought her back and buried her in their own graveyard. Apart from the presbyter and deacon, and then only on Sundays, nobody else went over the river to the women's monastery.

Chapter XL

THE VIRGIN WHO WAS FALSELY ACCUSED.

The following incident occurred in the women's monastery. A secular shoemaker crossed the river in ignorance, looking for work. He made his request to a junior sister who happened to meet him when she was outside in a rather isolated place.

"We have our own shoemaker," she replied.

They were seen by another sister who had a mind burning with malice. Inspired by the devil she made this conversation a cause of scandal and blackened the name of the brothers. Others believed her, though not moved by malice.

The junior sister was grief stricken at being accused of a wrong which had not even entered her mind. Unable to bear it she secretly threw herself into the river and died. When the sister who had started the calumny realised that her scandal-mongering was unfounded and that she had committed a grievous

crime she too was unable to bear it and hanged herself.

When the presbyter came and the sisters told him about it, he said that no mass should be said for either of them, and he excommunicated for seven years those who had been party to the calumny by not recognising it for what it was and believing the false tale.

Chapters XLI

THE VIRGIN WHO PRETENDED TO BE A HALFWIT

There was a virgin in this monastery who for Christ's sake pretended to be a halfwit and possessed by a demon. She thought by this to practise the best way of developing that most desirable of virtues, that of being downtrodden and humble. The others looked down on her to such an extent that they would not even eat with her, which she quite happily accepted. She worked in the kitchen, doing all kinds of menial tasks for the others, so that there was never a moment when she was not slaving away for somebody. She was, as the saying goes, the 'blessed sponge' of the monastery, believing truly that in this she was fulfilling what was written in the Gospels: 'Whosoever would be great among you, let them be as slaves and servants of all' (Matthew 20.26), and again, 'If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let them become foolish in order to be wise' (1 Corinthians 3.18). The other virgins wore proper monastic hoods on their heads, she went about her task of serving others covering her head with only a scrap of old rag. No one ever saw her eating for all the forty years of her life. She never sat down at table, never even ate the broken bread, but gathered up the crumbs from the table with a sponge, and cleaned up what was left in the pots. She was content with that. She never wore shoes, never spoke angrily to anyone, never complained, made no reply either small or great when treated with anger, or even with blows and curses, despised by all.

Chapter XLII

HOLY PITIRUM

A revelation about this holy woman was given by an Angel to a holy anchorite called Pitirum, who was very experienced in practising the virtues, and who lived in Porphyrites.

"Why are you so pleased with yourself," the Angel said, "sitting in this place

so grandly satisfied with the things which you quite rightly and virtuously do? Would you like to see a woman far more pious and religious than you? Go to the women's monastery at Tabennisi and you will find there a woman much better than you, crowned with a chaplet. In the midst of much turmoil and at the beck and call of all, her heart is never turned away from God, though the rest of them spurn her in their pride. But you just sit here, visiting in your thoughts all the cities of the world, though you have never walked there on your own two feet."

So the great Pitirum came to the monastery at Tabennisi and asked those in charge if he might cross over to the women's monastery. He was held in high regard by the fathers, who agreed to this proposal in a happy and trusting frame of mind. They crossed the river and introduced him. After they had prayed together, the great Pitirum asked to be allowed to see all the virgins face to face. So they all came before him, with, of course, only one exception. "I wanted them all to be brought to me," said the holy Pitirum.

"But we are all here," they said.

"There is one missing here," he replied, "who was described to me by an Angel."

"There is only one other. She is in the kitchen, but she is a Sale." (For so they called anyone not quite right in the head.)

"Bring her here, nevertheless," he said, "I must end up by seeing her."

So they went and called her. She did not want to come, either because she sensed what was going on, or else, perhaps, because it had been revealed to her. So they forcibly dragged her.

"Holy Pitirum wants to see you," they said, "and he is a man of great reputation."

So she arrived, and the great man saw her face, and the old bit of rag covering her head, and he fell down at her feet.

"Bless me, Amma," he said.

"No sir, you bless me," she said, falling down before him.

All the others were horrified at this sight.

"Don't allow her to behave in this shameful and vicious way. She is a Sale!"

"It's you who are Sale," said the holy Pitirum, "she is better than I and all you others. She is an Amma" (for so they call spiritual mothers), "and I expect she will be found worthy in the day of judgment."

Hearing this, they all fell at his feet weeping, and confessed all the various ways in which they had persecuted her.

"I have always mimicked her funny ways."

"I've always laughed at her low status."

"I've often been rude to her, even though she has said nothing."

"I've often poured the washing up water over her."

"I have struck her."

"I stirred up animosity against her."

"I pulled her nose."

One and all admitted to the various ways in which they had maltreated her. He listened to their confessions, prayed with them all, and spent a long time in giving comfort to the venerable servant of Christ, before going back home. She was from then on respected and honoured by all, but after a few days she found that she was unable to bear all the glory and honour bestowed upon her by the whole community, and making that her excuse she slipped out secretly, but where she went, or where she lived, or how she died, no one knows to this day.

Such were the righteous deeds and works of this generous, humble and blessed virgin.

Chapter XLIII

ABBA JOHN OF THE CITY OF LYCUS

There was a certain John in the city of Lycus who from his boyhood had learned the building trade. He had a brother who was a dyer. When he was about twenty-five years old he renounced the world, and after five years in a monastery went alone from Lycus into the mountain. On the top of the mountain he built a three-roomed cell with three domes and walled himself into it. One of the rooms was a latrine, one was where he worked and one was where he prayed. After living like this for thirty years, with the help of someone who brought the necessities of life to him through the window, he was found worthy of receiving the gift of foretelling the future. It proved obvious from what he did that this gift of prophecy had been given him. He was able to tell the pious Emperor Theodosius what God was bringing into the world before anyone else did, and could foretell future events, in particular the revolts of the two tyrants, their subsequent speedy downfall, and the destruction of the people who rebelled against him.

[Theodosius the Great c.346-395. Emperor in Constantinople from 378. There was a revolt in Britain by Maximus in 383, and by Eugenius in the Western

empire in 392.]

When the Ethiopians burst out over their borders and laid waste the neighbouring regions as far as Syene in the Thebaid, a certain general asked him whether he would be able to defeat them.

"If you go up against them," said John, "you will surround them, conquer and subdue them and you will be most famous among generals." And so it happened. The event confirmed the prediction.

He also used to say that the most Christian Emperor Theodosius would die at the same time as he did.

This admirable man excelled in the gift of prophecy. This was endorsed by all the fathers who had anything to do with him, men whose reputation stood high among the community. They did not exaggerate anything about him, but were inclined to say even less than he deserved. For there was a certain tribune who came to see him and begged permission for his wife to pay a visit. She had suffered a great deal and longed to come to him at Syene so that he could pray for her and send her away with his blessing. He was now ninety years old and had not even seen a woman for forty years. He never went outside his cell, he would never allow a woman to be seen, and certainly did not want to see the tribune's wife. No man had even been inside his cell. He simply used to give blessings from his window, and deal kindly with visitors, dealing with each one according to their needs. So when the tribune arrived asking if he could send for his wife (for John lived five miles into the desert) he would not agree, said it could not be done, and sent him sadly away.

But the wife would not stop nagging her husband day and night about it and swore that she would never give up until she had seen the prophet. The husband returned and told John of her determination.

"In that case," said John, recognising her faith, "She shall see me tonight in a dream. But she won't get any nearer than that to seeing my face in the flesh." The husband told his wife what the father had said, and in her dreams she saw the prophet coming towards her.

"Why should a woman bother about me?" he said. "Why should you want to see my face? Am I a prophet who has obtained a place among the elect? I am just a sinful man, vulnerable as you are, but I have prayed for you and your husband's house that it may be to you according to your faith. Now go in peace." Having said this he departed.

When the woman awoke she told her husband what the prophet had said and described to him what he looked like and what he wore. She sent her husband

back to him to give him thanks. When blessed John saw him he welcomed him and said, "See now, I have done what you asked. So having seen her, I have warned that she should not see me any more. Go in peace."

The wife of another prefect went into labour while her husband was absent. The baby was born at the exact time that her husband was consulting Father John, while she herself became dangerously ill with mental depression. And the holy man was able to tell the husband about this.

"Just think what God has given you. A son is born to you this day, so you may glorify God. But his mother is in some danger. When you get back, however, you will find that your son is seven days old. Name him John, bring him up strictly, and when he is seventeen send him to the monks in the desert." This sort of miracle he often showed to people who came from afar.

His own local community frequently resorted to him also to their own advantage. He foresaw and predicted the future for them and counselled them on all the secrets with which they entrusted him, as well as (predicting the Inundation of) the Nile, and the fertility of the approaching year. In like manner he forewarned his clients of the judgments of God, and justified his reasons for doing so.

The blessed John did not openly perform cures on anyone, but he did give them oil which relieved many of their complaints. There was a senator's wife who had lost her eyesight because of a white film which covered her eyes. She asked her husband to take her to John. When he told her that John never received women, she begged that if only he would ask John on her behalf he would do something for her. He did so; he sent her some oil. After she had treated her eyes with the oil for only three days, she recovered her sight and gave thanks to God.

I hardly need add that there were many other things he did which we saw with our own eyes. There were seven of us brothers wandering in Nitria, including the blessed Evagrius, and Albinus and Ammon. We sought diligently to determine accurately the power of this man's life.

"I would gladly learn what this man is like," said the great Evagrius, "from someone skilled in mental and spiritual assessment. For if I can't see him myself, I could learn accurately about his way of life from what somebody else tells me. I will find out if I can visit him, and if I can't I won't go to his mountain."

Hearing this I said nothing to anyone for a whole day, then gave up my cell to someone else, and commending myself and my cell to God, I set out for the

Thebaid. I arrived there after eighteen days, travelling sometimes on foot, sometimes on the river. It was the time of the Inundation, when many become ill, which indeed happened to me.

When I got there I found the door of his vestibule locked (for the brothers had later built this great vestibule holding about a hundred people which they kept locked and opened up only on Saturdays and Sundays). When I learned why it was locked I kept silence until the Sunday. I got there at about the second hour and found that he was sitting in his window, listening to people and counselling them.

"Where are you from and why have you come?" he said to me through an interpreter, after greeting me. "I do know that you belong to the congregation of Evagrius."

"I am a stranger from Galatia," I said, "and I do belong to Evagrius' company." While we were speaking, the governor of the region, Alypius by name, came running in and he stopped talking to me. I yielded my place and withdrew out of earshot. They seemed to be talking together for such a long time that I was very upset and resented the way in which this venerable person had treated me with contempt while honouring this other man. I was so irritated that I was on the point of going off in disgust, when he called the interpreter, Theodore by name, to tell me not to be upset for he would soon be finished with the governor after which he would be talking with me. It struck me that although I had been criticising him he really was a spiritual man and was dealing with me very gently.

"Why were you angry with me?" he asked me, when he summoned me after the governor had gone. "What was there that you could swear on oath had offended you? You were imputing to me things which were totally absent from my mind, and which did you no credit at all. Don't you know the Scripture, 'It is not the healthy who need a physician but the sick' (Matthew 9.12) ? I can come to you whenever I want, just as you can come to me. And if I can't help you, you have many other brothers and fathers who can. But this man who is bedevilled by pressing worldly affairs has managed to snatch a small space of time to seek for some help, like a slave escaping from a severe master. It would have been ridiculous for me to have ignored him in order to attend to you when you have all the time in the world to work out your own salvation."

I asked him to pray for me. I had established that he was indeed a spiritual man. He then playfully struck me on the right cheek and said,

"There are many difficulties ahead of you. You have already gone through many struggles about whether or not you should leave the desert. You have become fearful and you have changed. The demon has put many pious excuses into your mind, with many apparent good reasons, such as longing to go to back home so that you can initiate your brother and sister into monastic life. Well, I have got good news for you. They are both seeking salvation and will renounce the world. And your father will live for another seven years. So don't go back home for their sakes but be strong and persevere in the desert. It is written, 'No one who has put his hand to the plough and has turned back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

These words greatly helped and strengthened me, and I gave thanks to God when I realised that the motives which had been driving me had been shown up as excuses.

"Would you like to be made a bishop?" he asked, playfully teasing me again.

"Not possible." I said. "I already am one."

"Where?" he asked.

"I am bishop over a flock of kitchen utensils, food supplies, dining tables, storage jars. I watch over them diligently. If the wine is sour I excommunicate (segrego) it. I only drink it if it is good. I likewise keep a careful eye on the canisters, and if the salt or spices are low I replenish then ready to be used. This is my episcopacy, my jurisdiction. It is towards these things that my inclination is drawn."

"Joking aside," he said, laughing, "Your future is to be made a bishop, along with many labours and troubles. But if you wish to avoid these troubles, don't leave the desert. You can't be made a bishop if you stay in the desert."

But I forgot his words. Three years later I fell ill from spleen and stomach disorders. The brothers sent me to Alexandria, for the disease was developing into dropsy. The doctors advised that I should go from Alexandria to Palestine, for the sake of the air, for they thought that what I needed was a more temperate, mellow climate. From Palestine I went to Bithynia, where somehow or other, whether by a human decision or by divine will I don't know, God knows, I was found worthy of being ordained, given a higher strength than my own, and so it happened to me as John had predicted.

I spent eleven months in a cheerless cell, taking note of this blessed man who foretold my future. Towards the end he told me that he had been in his cell for forty years without seeing either women or money. He had not seen anyone while they were eating, nor had anyone ever seen him either eating or

drinking. He told me this to help me bear my own solitude.

After I left him I went back to my own usual place of solitude and told all these things to the blessed fathers, who after a couple of months went to see him themselves. And this is what they told me:

"When we arrived, he received us and welcomed us most warmly, with a cheerful word for each one of us. We asked him immediately if he would offer prayers - for this is the custom among the Egyptian fathers. He asked whether there was a cleric among us. We all said that there wasn't, but he looked us all over and singled out one of us who had a secret, in that he had in fact been found worthy of being ordained deacon. There was only one other brother who was aware of this but the deacon had asked him not to tell anyone. In his humility he was so far from wanting any particular honour that in comparison to the fathers he felt he was hardly even worthy to be called Christian.

"This man is a deacon," said John, pointing him out to everyone. He denied it vigorously and tried to escape, but John grasped his hand through the window. "Don't spurn the grace of God, my son," John admonished him, "lest by telling a falsehood you tarnish God's gift. Christians should not tell lies. Whether in big things or small it is always reprehensible. The Saviour himself says, 'Lying is of the devil'" (John.8.44).

His guilt exposed he accepted this paternal rebuke and protested no more.

After prayers were done one of our brothers asked to be cured of a fever which had been plaguing him for three days. He told the brother that he was suffering this illness because of the weakness of his faith, but nevertheless gave him some oil and told him to anoint himself with it. When he had done so he vomited out what was in his stomach, his fever subsided, and he went back to the guest house on his own two feet.

John was obviously about ninety years old, very frail of body, and as a result of his regime no beard grew on his face. For he ate nothing but fruit and that not till after sunset even in his extreme old age. He observed a very strict regime, eating neither bread nor anything else cooked.

He asked us to sit down and we gave thanks to God that we were to enjoy a conference with him. He accepted us as if we were beloved long lost sons, and smiled as he spoke.

"Where are you from, my sons? What country have you left in order to come and see this frail and unimportant old man?"

We told him our native land, and added, "We have come to you from Jerusalem for the good of our souls, so that what we have heard with our ears

we might see with our eyes. For ears are not so reliable as eyes. It is easy to forget what you hear, but what you see is not easily erased from the memory; it is somehow imprinted on the mind as part of your history."

"And what marvels were you hoping to see, my beloved sons," said the blessed John, "undergoing such a long journey with great hardship in order to get here? Was it really some frail and unimportant human beings you wanted to see, who have nothing worth looking at or admiring? After all, there are admirable and praiseworthy prophets and apostles of God appointed in all the churches, good examples for you to follow. I am amazed at your enthusiasm and how you have braved all kinds of dangers to come to us hoping for some kind of benefit, when we ourselves are so lazy that we have never even wanted to travel outside our cell.

Chapter XLIII, Abba John (continued) Book VIII (A Tale of Abba John begins further down page)

"Think now, is this venture of yours so praiseworthy, after all? It is as if you are putting your trust in some splendid thing that you have done, when what is really needed is to search for the virtues which your fathers sought. And even if you possessed them all, a rare thing indeed, you would still not have anything in yourselves to boast about. For some who are confident that they have arrived at the very pinnacle of virtue have fallen at last from their high estate. Take care rather that your prayer is sound. Is the purity of your heart disturbed? When you pray is your mind distracted with all kinds of other things? Does some thought or other in your mind jump about to something else? Is there some thought in your memory which is doing damage to your soul? Ask yourself whether you have truly renounced the world. Have you come here simply to gaze at our freedom of spirit? Are you chasing after virtue simply for the sake of vainglory? - as if you could then show off to people by imitating what we are doing?

"Take care that you do not become entirely governed by turbulent thoughts, by honour and glory and human praise, by putting on a show of your concern for holy things, by self love. Don't consider yourself to be righteous, for if you glory in your own righteousness, you are liable to be puffed up above yourself by a sense of your own virtue. Don't even think about your family when you are praying. Don't dwell on thoughts of mercy or indeed of anything else in the whole world. For if you do, your prayer comes to nothing. Anyone seeking

God is dragged down by these thoughts which come against you. These mental wanderings happen to anyone who has not entirely renounced the world but chases after subserving it. Because of the multitude of matters occupying his attention his mind is fragmented by earthly and bodily worries, and for as long as he is arguing away with his disturbed thoughts he cannot see God. But even your knowledge of God should never be considered full and exact, for you may not really be worthy of such a prize. Or perhaps in getting part of the way you may wrongly think you have attained it all and so fall into destruction.

"Your progress towards God should be gentle and devout, tempered to the mind and human potential of each individual person. Those who would seek God must free their minds from all other things. 'Be still,' he said, 'and know that I am God' (Psalms 46.10). Anyone who gains even in part the knowledge of God (for no one can gain it in full), gains with it an insight into everything else. He understands the mysteries which God shows him, he sees into the future, grasps such revelations as are fitting for a saint, grows in virtue, and obtains from God all his petitions."

He had much to say also on the subject of the ascetic way, and how to think of death as a change to a better life. We should not worry about the weakness of the body, nor should we indulge it with every passing fancy.

"For," he said, "anyone who satisfies every desire is the same as someone living in luxury. Rather, it is necessary to deaden the appetites by the exercise of discipline. There is no need to relax your mind with everything on offer.

Let us now be weak, afflicted and oppressed if only we may possess the inheritance of the kingdom of God in all its breadth. We can enter the kingdom of God only through many afflictions. 'It is a narrow gate and a constricted way which leads to life,' he said, 'and there are few that find it.

And it is a broad way which leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it.' (Matthew 7.13 & 14). It is necessary to berate ourselves here, for after a little while we go to eternal life. Neither can we boast about what we have done that is right, but must always be humble, and seek for longer periods of solitude if ever we get conceited. For even those who were perfect have often been led astray by living in the midst of the city, as happened to David causing him to say, 'Behold I have fled far away and lived in solitude, and have looked for him who saves me from terror and tempest.' (Psalms 55.7&8). Many of our brothers have had this happen to them and because of their arrogance they have fallen out of sight."

Chapter XLIV

A TALE OF ABBA JOHN ABOUT SOMEONE WHO FELL

There was a certain monk," he said, "who lived in the nearer desert, keeping every proper discipline and working for his daily bread. After he had persevered for a long time in prayer and grown in virtue he began to trust in himself alone and in the beauty of his own settled life. The tempter then began to try him as he tried Job, and one evening showed him the image of a beautiful woman wandering in the wilderness. Finding the door open she came right in to his cell, knelt at his feet and begged to be allowed to stay, overtaken as she was by the night. He took pity on her and let her in, which he ought not to have done.

"A further mistake was to question her closely. She told him a long story, sprinkled with all sorts of flattery and falsehood, and spun out the conversation at great length. Little by little, she somehow enticed him on to thoughts of love. They chattered together, laughing and giggling. The way she talked fascinated him; she began to hold his hand, his beard, his neck, and finally captivated this athlete completely. His mind was in a turmoil, a safe opportunity of pleasure was presenting itself, the deed was as good as done, and he gave consent in his mind to all these thoughts. He tried to have intercourse with her like a foolish horse breaking out wildly in search of a mare. She suddenly cried out with a loud voice and vanished out of his hands, as nothing but a sort of shadow. The crowd of demons who had deceived him could now be heard in the air mocking him and laughing, and crying with a loud voice, "'He who exalts himself will be humiliated" (Luke 14.11). You were once lifted up into heavenly things, so now will you be cast down into the lowest depths.'

"He spent the night weeping, got up in the morning and continued to lament the whole day through. Despairing of his own salvation (which he ought not to have done) he went back to the world. This is what the devil wants. As soon as he makes a mock of anyone he reduces him to a foolishness from which it is not possible to escape. Wherefore, my sons, it is not good for us to live near the towns, nor to converse with women, lest images of them stay in your mind which you cannot get rid of, images which have been put there by what you have seen and heard. But neither should we let our minds be weighed down, driving us into despair, for those who do not lose hope will not be deprived of the mercy of the merciful God."

Chapter XLV

A TALE OF THE SAME ABBA JOHN ABOUT SOMEONE WHO WAS LED TO REPENT.

There was a certain young man in the city who had done many evil things and sinned gravely. He began to be sorry for his sins, inspired by God, and went into a graveyard where he fell on his face, weeping for his past life, speechless, not daring so much as to call upon God to ask pardon, so little did he estimate his life to be worth. So having shut himself up in a tomb and faced up to the sort of life he had been leading, he groaned from the depths of his being. At the end of a week the demons who had been leading his former life into damnation came shouting at him by night.

"Where is this profane wretch, sated with lust and pleasure-seeking, who now suddenly pretends to be honest and moderate in this untimely manner? Has he got beyond it? Does he now want to be a Christian, with upright and clean habits? As if you could expect anything good to become of you in future, stuffed full as you are with the wickedness we have given you. You are going to get out of here quickly, aren't you, and return to what we are accustomed to give you. There are lots of brothels and taverns left for you yet. Will you not come and indulge your desires, since there is no other hope left for you? Doubtless judgment will come swiftly, but you are destroying yourself. Why rush madly towards your own punishment? Why are you so intent on being punished before the due time?"

They said much more. "You belong to us. You are enrolled in our company. You are familiar with every kind of wickedness. We all find you disgusting, but will you dare to flee? Aren't you going to listen to us? Won't you answer? And come away with us as well?"

He just kept weeping, shutting his ears, replying never a word, however much the demons kept on at him. When they saw that all their continued urgings were having no effect these wicked and disgusting demons took him and laid about him heavily with whips, beating every inch of his body. When they had finished their torment they went away leaving him half dead. He lay where they had left him, unable to move more than anything else. He came to his senses and began groaning again.

When his family came to look for him and learned the reason for what had happened to his body they begged him to return home, but he refused, even

when they tried to force him. The next night the demons tormented him again worse than before. To prevent his relations persuading him to go back home they kept telling him that it would be better to die than return to his former sinful ways. On the third night they invaded him with such cruel torments that they pushed him to the limits of endurance and nearly made him give up the ghost. But they saw that he would not give in and they departed leaving him lifeless. As they went they cried, "You have won, you have won, you have won."

No further harm came to him. For the rest of his life he dwelt simply in that tomb, cleansed of all evil, displaying nothing but pure virtue. He was very precious in the sight of God for his virtues and for the miracles that he did, for he led many to admire him and awakened their zeal to emulate the integrity of his way of life. Thus it came about that many of those who had given up hope for themselves were led into doing good things, and conducted their lives properly. In them the Scripture was fulfilled, 'He who humbles himself will be exalted.' (Luke 24.11).

So let us practise humility, my sons, the foundation of all virtues. A long spell of solitude at a distance also brings many benefits.

Chapter XLVI

ANOTHER TALE OF ABBA JOHN ABOUT SOMEONE WHO FELL AND WAS LED TO REPENT

There was another monk who lived in the Inner Desert, conducting himself properly and scrupulously for many years. When he was already getting to be quite elderly he was severely tested by the wiles of the demons. His usual practice consisted of passing his days in silence, with many prayers and psalms and periods of contemplation. He had clear insights into many divine visions, sometimes waking, and sometimes even when asleep, although he actually slept hardly at all, living a life apart from the body. He did not till the ground, he took no thought for the necessities of life, he cultivated no garden to supply his bodily needs. Nor did he catch birds or hunt any other animal, but full of the faith in which he had abandoned human community he cared nothing for whether or not his body would be nourished. Forgetful of all else he was sustained solely by his desire for God, waiting for his call to depart from this world, feeding above all on those un hoped for delights which cannot be perceived with the senses. Throughout all this time his body did not waste

or show any ill effects, nor was he gloomy in spirit, but he continued to appear his normal attractive self. And God truly honoured him indeed, for after a due interval of time he supplied his table with bread for two or three days, not just apparently but actually, for him to use. He would go into his inner room when he felt the pangs of hunger and find this food there. And having praised God and taken some food he would again sing psalms, persevering in prayers and contemplation, growing daily, giving himself to the pursuit of virtue in hope of the future. He went on progressing more and more, until he almost got to the stage of putting his trust in his own powers of improvement - and thereby came to his downfall, almost perishing in the temptations which then came upon him.

Why should we not spell out the very cause of his fall? His thoughts had arrived at such a pass that he was little by little imprudently beginning to think more of himself than anyone else, and that he possessed much more than other men, and for this reason he began to put his trust solely in himself. Not long after he first thought like this, his vigilance relaxed slightly, but so little that he did not even notice that there had been any relaxation. But his negligence grew until it progressed to the extent that he could not fail but notice it. He was later in waking up to sing psalms, his prayers became shorter, his psalm singing did not last so long, his soul said to him that he wanted to rest and his mind agreed with that, his thoughts wandered and scattered, his secret meditations were vapid.

But the impetus of his earlier routine still motivated him, and kept him safe for a while, so that when he went in after his usual prayers of an evening he found the bread supplied by God on his table and refreshed himself accordingly. But he still did not cut off his unworthy thoughts, he despised the idea that his soul was being damaged, he made no attempt to seek a remedy for these evils. Little by little he fell into omitting many of the things which he ought to have been doing. In thought he began to develop a desire for human company. The next day he put a temporary restraint on himself, and returned to his usual exercises, but after he had prayed and sung his psalms he went into the storeroom, and found that the bread placed there was not so well baked or wholesome as usual, but was dirty and polluted. He wondered about this and was very sad about it, but nevertheless picked it up and ate it.

Came the third night and with it a third evil. For thoughts suddenly erupted in his mind, activating his memory so much that he imagined there was a woman lying with him. This image persisted in front of his eyes, and he actively

encouraged it. But on this third day he went out to his work and his prayers and his psalms, although his mind was not clean any more, and strayed frequently. He lifted up his eyes to the heavens, turning them this way and that, but the images in his memory prevented his work from being unspoiled. In the evening when he returned feeling hungry, he found that the bread looked as if it had been chewed by mice or dogs, and the scraps left over were dried up as if left outside.

He began to groan and weep, but not so much as to make him want to correct his faults. Having eaten less than he would have wished, he prepared himself for rest, but at once his thoughts went wild, dancing around in every direction, battling for possession of his mind, and taking it captive into uncleanness. He got up and began to go to the inhabited regions, walking through the desert by night. Daylight came and he was still a long way off from any habitation. He began to be overcome by the heat and felt very tired. He gazed around him in a complete circle, and saw at some distance what appeared to be a monastery where he might go in and get some refreshment. And so it was. He was accepted in by some good and faithful brothers, who treated him as a real father and washed his face and his feet. They prayed with him, put food before him, and invited him most kindly to partake of what they were offering him. After he had eaten, the brothers asked him for a word of salvation, and what means there were of being able to be safe from the wiles of the devil, and how to overcome unclean thoughts. Like a father admonishing his sons he urged them to be strong and constant in their labours, in order to arrive quickly to a state of being at peace. He discussed many other aspects of their discipline with them and helped them greatly.

When he had finished, he thought for a while and marvelled at how he was giving advice to others without looking to himself and trying to amend. He acknowledged he was beaten and straightaway went back to the desert, weeping for himself, and saying, "Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul had remained in hell" (Psalms 94.17). I have almost been overcome by evil. They have brought me back to earth." Thus were fulfilled in him the words, 'A brother who is helped by a brother is like a city built up on high, whose wall cannot be breached.' (Proverbs 18.19). Whereas before he used to spend all his time without doing any physical work, now he was deprived of the bread provided by the Lord and laboured for his daily bread. And when he had shut himself up in his inner room and covered himself in sackcloth and ashes he did not get up from the ground or cease from weeping until he had

heard the voice of the angel saying to him in a dream, "The Lord has accepted your repentance and has had mercy on you. From now on live in such a way that you will not be deceived. The brothers you gave advice to, will come to you and will show the high opinion they have of you. Accept them, live with them, and give thanks to God always."

I have told you these things, my sons, that you may always cultivate humility and be seen to do so in small things as in great. This was the first of the Saviour's precepts, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5.3). And do not be deceived by the demons, stirring you up with visions and fantasies. If anyone approaches you, whether brother, friend, woman, father, teacher, mother or sister, first lift up your hands in prayer. If they are fantasies they will flee. And if either demons or human beings would deceive you by agreeing with you and flattering you, don't listen to them or get carried away by them. For the demons would often try to deceive me at night also, preventing me from praying, disturbing my peace, presenting fantasies to me the whole night through, and mockingly prostrating themselves in the morning, saying, "Forgive us, abba, for giving you such hard work all night." I just say to them, "Depart from me, all you who work evil, do not put the servant of the Lord to the test." (Psalms 6.8).

Do you likewise, O my sons, seek peace. Direct your whole self always towards contemplation, begging God that your mind may be purified. Anyone practising his faith in the world may also be a good workman, engaged in doing good, showing humanity and pity, hospitality and charity, giving alms, blessing those who come to him, helping those in difficulties and avoiding giving offence to anyone. Such a person is to be commended, for he keeps the commandments and gets things done, even while busy with earthly affairs. But a greater and more excellent thing is to be turned towards contemplation, given not to action but to thought, leaving to others the production of material goods. Denying himself he will contemplate heavenly things, completely forgetful of self, standing before the God of all completely free and unencumbered, turning away for no other consideration whatsoever. Someone like this may not yet enjoy God yet turns always towards God in eager songs of praise.

I know someone in the desert who never tasted earthly food for a space of ten years. An angel fed him every third day with heavenly food, placing it directly into his mouth. To him it was as good as food and drink. I know also that the demons came to this man in the form of fantasies, showing him heavenly

armies, chariots of fire, a crowd of followers, as if some king were coming, and saying, "You have done all things well and virtuously, O Man. All you need now is to worship me and I will take you up like Elias." But the monk replied, "Daily I worship my King and Saviour, but if he were here now that is not a demand that he would make of me." From the bottom of his heart he then cried, "God is my Lord and King whom I ever adore. My king you are not." And the vision vanished immediately. Unlike some, he strove to keep secret his way of life and the things he did. It was the fathers with him who said that he had seen these things.

These and many other things the blessed John told us, nourishing our souls up to the ninth hour for three days. And as he blessed us, bidding us go in peace, he also gave us a prophecy. "It has been announced today in Alexandria," he said, "that the most devout Theodosius has won a victory over the tyrant Eugenius, [in the year 394] who has died his own well-deserved death", which came to pass exactly as he had said.

We were also aware of a great number of monks who were with him in the church, like a great choir of the righteous, dressed in white robes, glorifying God in fervent psalms.

After we saw many other fathers, some brothers came and told us that the blessed John had died a wonderful death. For he had given orders that no one should visit him for three days, during which, as he knelt in prayer, he passed away into the presence of God, to whom be glory for ever.

Chapter XLVII

POEMENIA

Poemenia, a servant of the Lord, once went to visit abba John. He did not speak to her but sent her a warning message not to turn aside to Alexandria when going down from the Thebaid, lest she be put to very severe trials. But either she simply ignored this or else forgot all about it, for she did go down towards Alexandria in order to see the city. As she was on the way near the town of Nicia some boats passed by in which she was offered a passage. But they were all fiercely attacked by some workmen, aggressive and destructive people living locally. They cut off the finger of one of the eunuchs and killed another. In their ignorance they threw the holy bishop Dionysius into the river, treated Poemenia to abusive curses and severely wounded all the other servants.

Chapter XLVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA AMMON, AND HIS COMPANIONS

We also saw another man of the Thebaid called Ammon, the father of three thousand monks. They were called Tabennisiites and had an impressive way of living their lives. They all wore sheepskins with which they covered their faces when eating, leaning forward so that no one could see the person next to him. They practised silence so thoroughly that they seemed to be entirely alone, each one pursuing his own hidden order of life, only making an appearance to sit at table, where even there they tried to hide from each other. Some of them once or twice picked up some bread or an olive to eat, or whatever else was set out for them. When they had tasted from each dish they reckoned they had had enough. Some just quietly persevered in eating some bread, while only pretending to taste other things. Others tasted three only and abstained from the others. I admired the way in which each ate what was right for himself, aware of the benefit each one was gaining.

Chapter XLIX

ABBA BE

We saw another old man called Be who excelled all others in gentleness. The brothers who lived near him said that he never used strong language, never lied about any one, never berated anyone, was never angry. He was always quiet and mild in manner as an angel, of great humility, counting himself as nothing. We asked him eagerly to give us a word of exhortation, but he could hardly bring himself to believe that he could teach us anything about gentleness.

When a hippopotamus ran wild in neighbouring country the farmers asked for his help. He stood near the river where he could see this enormous beast and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ I forbid you to do any further damage to this region." As if driven by an angel it completely disappeared. He also dealt with a crocodile in the same way.

Chapter L

ABBA THEONA

Theona was another we saw. He lived in solitude not far from the city, a holy man who had shut himself up in his little cell and had practised silence for thirty years. He was held to be a prophet because of the many virtues he possessed. A great number of sick people went out to him every day, on whom he laid his hands through the window and sent them away healed. He seemed to have the face of an angel, with smiling eyes, totally full of grace. Not long ago some robbers broke in one night ready to kill him for the sake of the gold they imagined they would find in great quantity. But he prayed, and as a result they remained rooted to the spot in the doorway until morning.

When the usual morning crowd arrived, they would have burnt the robbers alive, but he just said one word to them, "Let them go in safety, otherwise the grace of healing will depart from me." They listened to what he said, they did not dare disobey, and the robbers went well away to some monasteries which were scattered about, where they changed their way of life and did penance for what they had done.

He was able to speak and write in three languages, Latin, Greek and Egyptian, according to what many people said and as we can testify ourselves. For when he realised that we were foreigners, he wrote on his tablets in Latin that he gave thanks to God for us.

His food was uncooked cereals. It was said that at night he went out and mingled with the wild beasts, giving them water out of his own supply. You could see all around his cell the tracks of the wild asses, oxen and goats in which he delighted.

Chapter LI ABBA ELIAS

Another old man we saw was called Elias, who was a hundred and ten years old and lived in the desert which takes its name from Antinous, the chief city of the Thebaid. The spirit of the prophet Elijah was said to have fallen upon him. He was well known for having lived in that terrible desert for seventy years. Words are not adequate to describe the harshness of the mountain in that desert place where he lived, and from which he had never come down into the inhabited regions. There were a few footpaths by which people visited him, offering very little foothold, so jagged were the rocks they were built up with. He sat in a rocky cave, an awe-inspiring sight. His whole body trembled, a sign of his great age. He performed many signs daily, and always brought

relief to the sick. The fathers who lived near him said that nobody could remember the time when he came to the mountain. In his old age he ate a three ounce loaf and three olives every evening, though in his youth he used to eat only once a week.

Chapter LII

THE LIFE OF ABBA APOLLO

We saw another holy man in the valleys of the Thebaid near Hermopolis, which is the place to which the Saviour came with holy Mary and Joseph, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, 'Behold the Lord shall come into Egypt upon a swift cloud and the idols of Egypt shall shake before his presence and fall to the ground' (Isaiah 19.1) We saw there the very temple in which the idols fell to the ground on their faces when the Saviour entered the city. In the deserts there we saw a man called Apollo who had a monastery in the mountains. He was the father of about five hundred monks, and was very well known and admired throughout the Thebaid. He did great things, the Lord endowed him with many powers and many signs and wonders were done through him. From boyhood he had used a strict discipline and he grew in grace with age. When he was eighty, he had gathered a great monastery of flawless men, who were all capable of performing signs.

He had left the world at the age of fifteen and spent forty years in solitude, developing all the virtues, when he seemed to hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Apollo, Apollo, through you I will confound the wisdom of the wise in Egypt and the prudence of the peoples. For my sake you will do away with the wise men of Babylon and pluck from their midst all their worship of demons. Now go to the place where they live, and you will bring forth for me a peculiar people eager for good works."

"Take pride away from me, O Lord," he replied, "lest if I be placed above a brotherhood I corrupt any good work that may be done."

Again he heard the divine voice. "Put your hand upon your neck, grasp what you find there and bury it in the sand."

As soon as he had done so he found that he had grasped a small Ethiopian, whom he buried in the sand as he cried out "I am the spirit of pride."

And again the voice came to him, "Go, What you have asked for you will be given." And he went immediately to the inhabited places (it was in the time of the tyrant Julian), and from there to the nearby desert.

He remained there on (the side of) the mountain, having occupied a small cave. This was how he worked: He said prayers throughout the whole twenty-four hours, a hundred at night, and the same number by day, with prostrations. His food had always been supplied in the same way; contrary to any reasonable expectation he was fed directly by God. In that desert place the angels brought him food. He was clothed in a simple tunic with a small linen head covering. These did not wear out while he remained in the desert which was not far away from inhabited places. He performed many signs and wonderful deeds in the power of the Spirit. No one could tell the exact number, there were so many of them, according to the old men who had had dealings with him. Some of them were men of very advanced stature (*viri perfecti*), and had many brothers under their care. He was famous and for ever being talked about, as if he was some new prophet or apostle for our generation, and as his fame spread, all the monks scattered about nearby always used to come to him as to a father, freely opening their hearts to him. Some of them he guided towards contemplation, others he taught how to actively cultivate the virtues, first of all illustrating by his own example what he was advocating by his words. He often showed them the way he disciplined his life, mingling with them only on Sundays, taking no bread, fruit or vegetables, none of the cooked dishes that people are accustomed to use, nothing except wild herbs.

During the reign of Julian he once heard that a brother had been conscripted into the army and chained up in prison. He visited him along with some brothers, urging him to remain strong and steadfast in adversity, and to hold his imminent danger in contempt. He warned him about a coming time of conflict, when his resolution would be sorely and suddenly tried. No sooner had he encouraged him with these words than the tribune arrived. Someone pointed the monks out to him, whereupon, yielding to some evil impulse, he closed the gates of the prison, shutting in Apollo and the monks who were with him as suitable to become soldiers in future. Having appointed a sufficient number of guards, he went home without even allowing them a hearing. In the middle of the night, an angel bearing a torch appeared to the guards, illuminating everyone in the prison, and making the guards fall down in a stupor. When they came to, they opened the doors of the prison and begged everyone to go, for they said that they would rather be put to death for doing that than ignore the liberty which was being offered by God to these people who were being wrongly detained. And when the tribune arrived in the

morning with the magistrates, he saw to it that those prisoners should get right out of the city, for he said that his house had collapsed in an earthquake during the night and crushed the best of his slaves. At this they gave thanks to God and departed into the desert, where, as the Apostle puts it, they were all of one heart and mind.

He taught that one should daily develop in virtue, especially in the power of continually repelling the attacks of the devil through thoughts. For if you can crush the serpent's head its whole body dies. The Lord warns us that we should look out for the serpent's head, that is, that we should refuse entry right at the start to all evil and sordid thoughts, not just in order to drive obscene fantasies out of our minds but to overwhelm them by contrary virtues, and to let no other prize be more valued than this. For this is the sign that you have progressed in virtue when you are free from the power of all urges and desires. This is the highest of the gifts of Christ. But when God gives anyone miraculous powers let him not get proud as if he has no need for further progress, nor get carried away by the thought that he is honoured above other people, or draw attention to the graces that he has received, lest with a closed mind he deceives himself and is deprived of grace. His teaching was full of this most important doctrine, as we later often heard from him ourselves. But the things he did were greater, for his every petition was immediately granted by God.

He was even granted visions. He had an elder brother who had also lived out his life in the desert and even surpassed him in the beauty of his life. He had lived with him in the desert for a long time. This brother he seemed to see sitting on the same sort of throne as the apostles, having left him a legacy in the shape of all his virtues. So he prayed to God that his own translation might be swift so that he might enjoy the peace of heaven with his brother. But it seemed that the Saviour said to him that he had to stay on earth for a while yet, in order that many might be brought to perfection, since there were many who would come to emulate his virtues. His faith would be responsible for a vast number of monks, a devoted army whose labours will give great glory to God. This is what he saw, and so it turned out, for many who had heard about him came to him from far and wide to become monks. Through his teaching and way of life, a great number totally renounced the world, so that a community of up to five hundred brothers came into being, living a common life, eating at a common table, all clothed in white. In them was fulfilled the Scripture, 'Rejoice, O desert without water, break forth and shout you have not

given birth, for many are the children of the desert, more than the children of men (Isaiah 54.1).

That eloquent prophecy has indeed been fulfilled by the existence of the church gathered up out of all the nations, but shown up to perfection in this Egyptian desert, where more children of God can be seen than in the inhabited places. Where in the cities can you find as many flocks on the road to salvation as you can find in the deserts of Egypt? There are as many monks in the desert as there are ordinary people in the cities, and it seems to me that this also is a fulfilment of what the Apostle said, 'Where sin abounded, there grace abounded more abundantly' (Romans 5.20). For in Egypt there used to be a great deal of idolatrous worship, more than in any other country. Some worshipped dogs and monkeys, others garlic and onions, many humble vegetables they thought to be gods, according to what this same holy father told us as he explained the ignorance of former times.

"For since the people who lived here in former times," he said, "had tamed the ox for agricultural purposes, they made a god out of it. The same with the waters of the Nile, since it watered all the fields, making the land cultivated there more fertile than any other. All the other abominations, the dogs and the monkeys and the rest of the disgusting collection of animals and vegetables, they made cults out of because they had been saved by them in Pharaoh's time when he had been drowned in pursuit of the Israelites. Those who did not follow Pharaoh made gods out of whatever they had been occupied with at the time, for they said, "This is my god today, for it has been the reason that I did not perish with Pharaoh." So Apollo in his discourses taught us.

It is more important, however, to write about what he did than what he said. Now there were a number of heathen (gentiles) worshipping demons scattered about in various places fairly near at hand, and ten particular districts even closer. In one of the villages there was a great temple containing a very famous idol made of wood. It used to be carried about in a procession through various villages by disreputable priests in drunken revels with the crowds, as they celebrated the mysteries of the waters of the River. On one occasion, however, it so happened that Apollo was there with some of his brothers and when he saw the crowds throughout the region going mad in their devilish celebrations, he prostrated himself before the Saviour, with the result that all those people suddenly became rooted to the spot. They could not move out of the place, however much they pushed each other, but sweltered all day in the burning heat, unable to understand why this should have happened to them.

The priests however told them that it was a certain Christian living nearby in the desert who was responsible, meaning Apollo. He would need to be approached, if not they would all be in great peril.

Meanwhile, people living at some distance had heard their shouts and weeping.

"What is this which has suddenly hit you?" they asked, as they came running up. "How did it happen?"

"We are not sure," they said, "but we suspect a certain person who will have to be appeased."

"Yes, we saw him going along with us," others said. And all begged that help be speedily brought to them.

They brought oxen and tried to move the idol, but it remained immovable, along with the priests. After exhausting all means of trying to move, they sent the neighbours on a delegation to Apollo promising to renounce their errors if they were freed. When Apollo, the man of God, heard this he immediately went down, prayed, and released them. With one accord they all came to him professing belief in the God and Saviour who could do such great things and consigned the idol to the fire. They were then enrolled in the catechumenate and added to the churches. Many of them since that day have been in monasteries right up till now. The fame of this happening spread everywhere, and so many believed in the Lord that soon no heathen (gentilis) could anywhere be found in those districts.

Not long after this, two villages began to fight with each other in a dispute over some fields. When Apollo heard about this he went down immediately to try and make peace between them. The aggressive side did not make an appearance, but refused, relying on a certain robber chief who was an outstanding man of war. Apollo went and confronted him in his refusal, saying, "If you make an appearance, my friend, I will pray to God for your sins to be forgiven." Hearing this he laid down his arms without hesitation, fell on his knees and begged for mercy. Peace was restored at his plea, and he ordered his men back to their own place.

When they had agreed to make peace and had gone away, their famous fighting leader followed Apollo, openly fulfilling what he had promised. Apollo took him back with him into the desert, taught him and encouraged him to be patient and steadfast of heart, for God was able to forgive. That night they both had a dream in which they saw themselves before the judgment seat of God. Both of them gazed on the Angels adoring God along

with the saints. They both fell down with them and adored the Father. And they both heard the voice of God saying, "'What has light got to do with darkness? Or what part do the faithful have with the unfaithful?' (2 Corinthians 6.14-15). How is it that a murderer who is unworthy of such contemplation stands among the righteous? Come away, O man. To you it has been granted to be born again and abandon your former life."

They fervently told their companions of many other wonders they had seen and heard, which speech dare not describe nor ear dare hear. All were filled with wonder as they each described exactly the same vision. A murderer no longer, the former leader of the robbers remained with these disciplined men, amending his life right up to the time of his death, changed from a wolf into a simple and innocent lamb. In him was fulfilled the word of Isaiah the prophet, 'The wolf and lamb shall graze together, the lion and the ox shall both eat straw.' (Isaiah 65.25). Ethiopians also could be seen working with the monks, and surpassing many of them in virtue, and the Scripture was fulfilled in them also, 'Ethiopia shall hold out her hand to God.' (Psalms 68.3).

On another occasion there were some heathen (gentiles) in a dispute with Christian farmers over their land. There was a large band of armed men among them, to whom Apollo went with the intention of making peace. The heathen battle-leader, a big, savage man, had no intention of cooperating. He swore positively that he would die rather than make peace.

"Be it unto you even as you have chosen," said Apollo. "No one will be killed before you. But after your death you will not be buried in the earth. You will fill the bellies of the wild beasts and vultures." And it so happened that these words came true almost immediately, since on both sides of the battle no one was killed except this battle-leader. They buried him in the sand, and the next morning they found his limbs torn to bits by hyenas and vultures. When they saw the miracle of how things had turned out exactly as he had said, they acknowledged that he was a prophet, and all believed in the Saviour.

Much earlier than this, the holy Apollo had just five brothers with him in his mountain cave. These were his first disciples after coming out of his solitude. When Easter had come and they had worshipped God, they prepared to eat what food they had. But all there was were a few dried loaves, and certain dried herbs.

"If we are faithful members of Christ's family, my sons, " Apollo said to them, "let each one of you ask God for what he would most like to eat." But with one accord they all entrusted that task to him, considering themselves to be

unworthy of receiving such a great grace. With shining face he prayed, and they all said Amen. And that very evening there arrived at the cave some complete strangers, who said they had come from a long way away. They brought all sorts of things with them, things which nobody had ever heard of, things which did not grow in Egypt, garden fruits of all kinds, grapes and pomegranates, even some honeycomb and a jar of fresh milk, large nicolai, fresh warm foreign made loaves. The bearers of this food handed it all over as if from some great rich person and promptly went away again. When the monks had taken stock of all this food they found that there was enough to see them through to Pentecost, so that they all marvelled and said, "These things truly are sent by God."

One of the monks asked Apollo to pray for him as a father that he would be granted some kind of grace. Apollo prayed, and the monk was given the grace of humility and gentleness, so that they were all amazed at how gentle he had become. The brothers who were with him told us of these powers, and there were many other brothers to corroborate it.

Not long before this there had been a famine in the Thebaid. The people in the neighbouring regions heard that, contrary to all hope and reason, those who lived near the monks were eating daily. With one accord they came with their wives and children, seeking both food and blessing. Without any fear that the food supply might run out, Apollo gave to everyone who came sufficient food for one day. When the famine grew worse and there were only three large baskets of bread left, he ordered the baskets to be put in the middle of the place where the monks were to eat, and in the hearing of the monks and the crowds of people shouted aloud, "Can the hand of the Lord not keep these full? Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'The bread in these baskets will not fail until we have been fed to the full with new grain.'"

And those who were there have testified that the bread lasted four months. And the same thing happened with the grain and vegetables.

Then Satan appeared. "Who do you think you are? Elias? Or some other prophet or apostle, doing this?"

"What's the matter with you?" Apollo replied. "Weren't the apostles and prophets holy people who handed this tradition on to us? If God was with them, then why should he now have departed far off? God can always do these things and there is nothing that God cannot do. If God is good, why are you evil? Why should we also not speak of what we have seen, brothers going in to take bread to the tables, satisfying the appetites of five hundred people, and

finding the baskets still full?"

It is right that we should also describe another miracle we saw which astonished us. When we went to visit him, we had been on the way for three days when the brothers met us, having seen us in the distance after having been told by Apollo we were coming. They hastened towards us on the road, singing psalms, as it is customary for monks to do. They first prostrated themselves, then embraced us, each one in turn.

"See now," they said, "these brothers our father told us about three days ago have arrived. He told us that in three days time there would be three brothers arriving from Jerusalem."

Chapter LII, Apollo (continued) Book VIII (Life of Copres begins further down page)

And some went on in front of us, some followed on behind, all singing psalms, until we got near to Apollo, who when he heard the psalmody came out to meet us, as he always did for every brother. When he saw us, he prostrated himself, embraced us, introduced himself and said some prayers. He washed our feet with his own hands and urged us to take some refreshment. He always did this for any brother who came to visit him. But those who were with him did not eat anything till after receiving the Eucharist of Christ, which they celebrated at the ninth hour.

Having eaten they sat listening to Apollo teaching them over a wide range of subjects (*docentem omnia praecepta*, lit. 'teaching all the precepts') until time for the first spell of sleep.

[The practice was to sleep for a while after Vespers before waking up again for the psalmody of the Night Office, Mattins, after which there was an opportunity for a 'second sleep' (Cassian, *Institutes*, book iii). Some monks evidently carried on psalmodising even during their sleep time.]

After that, some of them went back into solitude, reciting the Scriptures from memory for the rest of the night, others stayed on, praising God with fervent psalms until the next day. I saw with my own eyes how some had begun with the psalms of Vespers and kept up their singing until Mattins. There were many who only came down from the mountain at the ninth hour and went back again after the Eucharist, satisfied with that spiritual food until the next evening. Many of them kept this up for many days at a time. They could be seen to be really happy in their solitude, and unable to think of enjoying any

other form of pleasure or relaxation on earth. And there was no one among them sad or gloomy, although if anyone did seem to have a bit of gloominess about him Apollo as a father would ask him why, and he would reveal the secrets of his heart.

"It does not do to be gloomy about your prospects of salvation," he would say, "for we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven. The heathen may be sad, the Jews may weep, sinners may be fearful, but the righteous can only rejoice. Those who are worried about earthly matters have only got earthly things in which it is possible for them to rejoice. But we who have been found worthy of being given such great hope, how can we fail to rejoice perpetually? Indeed it is the Apostle who urges us to rejoice always and give thanks in all things."

(1Thessalonians 5.16,18). We cannot adequately describe the gracefulness of his speech, or the rest of his virtues, which we observed for ourselves and which others told us about. They are so miraculous they strike us dumb.

He talked to us a great deal about their discipline and way of life. In the matter of welcoming visitors, he often said how we ought to worship brothers on their arrival. "For it is not them you are worshipping," he said, "but God. You have seen your brother? You have seen the Lord your God. We learn this from Abraham. From Lot who welcomed angels, we learn that you should always offer brothers refreshment, and we learn that monks should receive the Sacrament daily, if at all possible. If you separate yourself from the Sacrament, God will separate himself from you. But if you partake devoutly, you devoutly receive the Saviour. 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood,' the Saviour said, 'remains in me and I in him.' (John 6.56) A monk should daily prepare himself for celebrating the saving passion with a pure heart, so that he is ready at all times to receive the heavenly Sacrament, especially since the remission of sins follows on from this.

"The general Catholic fast days should not be neglected except in cases of great need. For the Saviour was betrayed on Thursday and crucified on Friday. To neglect these days is to be identified with those who betrayed and crucified. But if a brother comes to you who really needs refreshment on a fast day give him a table by himself, but don't compel him to if he objects. We do have a tradition of living in common."

He was particularly scathing about those who went to great trouble to keep their hair trimmed. "Those people are simply drawing attention to themselves and trying to please others rather than disciplining their bodies with fasting and keeping their good deeds secret. That is what they don't do; instead they

parade themselves in full view of everyone."

What need I say more? All his teaching was mirrored in the way he lived his life, which no one could adequately talk or write about. Many other things he said to each of us individually, often over the course of the whole week, until dismissing us with the words, "Be at peace among yourselves and stay together on the way."

He asked the brothers with him which of them would like to take us to visit some of the other fathers, then chose three men to go with us who were accomplished in word and deed and skilled in Greek Latin and Egyptian. He told them not to leave us until our desire to see the fathers was satisfied, although of course a whole lifetime would not suffice to see them all. He bade us farewell with a blessing, "May the Lord bless you out of Sion, that you may see the good of Jerusalem all your life long." (Psalms 128.5).

As we were walking through the desert in the middle of the day, we saw the tracks of a large beast, (draco, a dragon) as big as if a tree had been dragged through the sand. We were absolutely terrified at the sight. But the brothers who were guiding us urged us not to be afraid but to be of good courage and follow the beast's tracks.

"You will see how our faith will enable us to overcome the beast," they said.

"We have killed many a beast and horned serpent in fulfilment of the Scripture, 'I have given you the power of treading down serpents and scorpions and over every power of the enemy,'" (Luke. 10.19).

We were not convinced, overcome as we were by great fear, and we begged them not to follow the tracks of the beast but to keep to the beaten path. But one of the brothers said farewell to us at that point and set off with great eagerness in pursuit of the beast. He found it not far away near a cave.

"The beast is in a cave," he shouted. "Come and see what is going to happen." The other brothers urged us not to be afraid, and so we all began fearfully to go off to see the beast. But another brother suddenly ran up to us and took us by the hand into his own cell.

"You have never seen such a beast," he said, "and you would not be able to endure it, whereas I have often seen such beasts of up to fifteen cubits long. You stay here."

He then went off to the brother in front of the cave and suggested that he come away, which he was unwilling to do until he had done his best to kill the beast. But he was at last persuaded, and came back with him, mocking us for being of little faith.

We stayed with that brother, whose cell was about a mile away, until we had recovered sufficiently to continue.

Chapter LIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA AMUN

This brother also told us that he had been a disciple of another holy man of many virtues called Amun, who used to live in that region. Thieves often came and robbed him of bread and other food. Unable to put up with this any longer, he went out into the desert one day and brought back two wild beasts which he ordered to stay and keep guard over his door. When those murderers arrived as usual and saw this miracle, they gasped with astonishment and fell flat on their faces. Amun came out and found them dumb and half dead. He roused them up and told them what he thought of their misdeeds.

"Look! You are worse than these animals," he said. "They at least out of respect for God are obedient to my will. But you neither fear God nor have any respect for the religion of the Christians."

He took them into his cell, gave them a meal and urged them to change their way of life. They departed, and immediately became known as leading better lives than many others. Not long afterwards, they also had the reputation of being able to do similar miracles.

On another occasion there was a wild beast creating havoc in the region, killing so many cattle that the people living near the desert all came to Amun begging him to rid the place of this beast. But he sent them away, saying that there was nothing he could do to remedy their distress. But next morning he got up and went to the place where the beast usually passed by. When he had prostrated himself in prayer three times the beast appeared, breathing out heavy vapours with discordant noise, swollen up, hissing, totally repulsive in appearance.

"May you be subject to Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, who has power over all beasts," he said, turning towards the beast without a sign of fear. As soon as he had spoken the beast burst asunder, spewing out poison and blood from his mouth. When the villagers came back next day and saw this great miracle, their hearts sank within them. They were afraid to come too close to it even though it was dead, so merely piled up a lot of sand round it as the old man stood by.

There had been a boy tending his flocks who had seen a living wild beast and

fainted with shock, lying there lifeless all alone all day. At evening time his friends found him barely breathing but beside himself in a sort of trance. They could not understand what had happened to him but they took him to Amun who prayed for him and anointed him with oil. The boy immediately came to his senses and told them why he had been struck down. It was this event which moved the old man to be converted to the idea of eliminating wild beasts entirely.

Chapter LIV

THE LIFE OF ABBA COPRES, A PRESBYTER.

There was a certain presbyter called Copres who had a cell in the desert, a holy man, nearly ninety, leader of about five hundred brothers. He was a man of many strengths, a physician to the sick who cured many, who drove out demons and performed many great deeds, some of which were done before our very eyes. After he had met us, greeted us, prayed with us and washed our feet, he asked us how we were getting on in the world. But we told him we would much rather he tell us about the virtues of the way of life he was leading and the gifts which God had given him and the way in which he was sharing in God's grace. Without showing any signs of being flattered by what we had asked, he quite simply told us about his life, and the life of those who had gone before him on whom his own life was modelled.

"There is nothing marvellous about me, my sons," he said, "compared with what was shown forth in the lives of our fathers."

And while he was in the midst of telling us about the good and virtuous deeds done by the fathers, one of our brothers began to get drowsy, as if he was not setting much store by what was being said. He suddenly saw in Copres' hands a beautiful book with golden letters and a man in white standing by who said, "Are you listening attentively, or are you going to sleep?" He gave a start, and as we eagerly listened, told us immediately in Latin what he had heard and seen.

While Copres was speaking, a peasant came towards us carrying a wicker basket full of sand, and stood waiting until Copres had finished speaking.

"What does this peasant with the sand want?" we asked.

"My sons," he replied, "it is not for me to glorify myself, not even in telling you of things done by our fathers, lest we become puffed up and lose our reward. However, to help you in the quest which has brought you from such a

great distance, we won't deprive you of any possible benefit, but will tell you brothers here now of what the Saviour has done through us.

"Farming land near us owned by the peasants used to be so sterile that they were barely able to reap the same amount of grain as they had sown. Pests flourished in the new ears destroying the hope of harvest. We introduced them to the catechuminate and made Christians out of them, and they asked us to pray for the harvest.

"If you have faith in God,' I said to them, 'even the sand of the desert will bring forth fruit for you.'

"They lost no time in filling their laps with the sand we walk upon and brought it to us asking us to bless it. I prayed that it might be done to them according to their faith, after which they sowed some of the sand in their fields along with the seed. The land then brought forth bumper harvests, better than anything else in Egypt. So they have been in the habit of doing this for all the years since they had this trouble.

"God also did a marvellous miracle through me in the presence of many people. Once when I went down into the city, I found a Manichaean had been leading the people astray. I failed in public to get him to change his teachings, so I turned to the people and said, 'Build up a funeral pile out in the open and let us both go up into the flames. Let the one who stays unharmed in the flames be the one who has the true faith.'

"No sooner said than the crowd built up a funeral pile and dragged us both towards the fire.

"Each one ought to go in separately,' the Manichaean said. 'You were the one who suggested it. You should go first.'

"I signed myself in the name of Christ and walked into the flames. They divided on either side of me, and I suffered no harm even after having been in there for half an hour. The crowd shouted loudly when they saw this miracle and began to compel the Manichaean to go into the pyre, but he was terrified and refused. The people picked him up and threw him into the middle of it. Totally engulfed in flames he was eliminated from the city as the people cried, 'Burn this impostor alive!'

"As for me I was taken in procession into the church, preceded by the crowd singing praises."

"Once I happened on a certain temple where some of the people were sacrificing to their idols.

"Since you are people with the gift of reason,' I said to them, 'why are you

sacrificing to things totally lacking in reason? Are you even more devoid of reason than they?"

"Realising that I had said something that was absolutely right they believed on the Saviour and began to follow me.

"I once used to have a garden plot on a neighbouring farm, looked after by a certain poor man, in order to provide vegetables for brothers who came to stay with me. A certain heathen person broke in to steal the vegetables, and when he had loaded himself up with them he went away and tried to cook them, but for the space of three hours had no success. They stayed in the bottom of the pot in exactly the same state as when he had put them in, for the water just would not come to the boil. Gathering his wits together, he picked up the vegetables and brought them back to us, asking us to forgive his crime and make him a Christian, which we did. In that same hour we received some brothers as guests, so it was most opportune that the vegetables had been brought back to us. After we had eaten, we were doubly thankful to God, as much for the hospitality shown to the brothers as for the salvation of a soul."

Chapter LV

THE LIFE OF ABBA SURUS

He (i.e. Copres, see chapter LIV) also told us about the abbas Surus, Isaiah and Paul, well known for their devout and disciplined lives, who unexpectedly met together on the banks of a river when they were on their way to visit the great Abba Anuph. They were still a three days journey away from their destination.

"Let us reveal to each other the way we lead our lives and how God has blessed us in our lives," they said.

"I ask as a gift from God," said Abba Surus, "that by the power of the spirit we get to our destination without being tired out." He was the only one of them to make this prayer, but immediately they found that a ship was ready and the wind was favourable, so that in a moment of time they had crossed the river and found themselves at their destination.

Chapter LVI

THE LIFE OF ABBA ISIAH

Isaiah in his turn said, "Would it not be a wonderful thing, my friends, if the

man himself (i.e. Anuph) came to meet us and told us what the life of each one of us was like?"

Chapter LVII

THE LIFE OF ABBA PAUL

Paul in his turn said, "What if God revealed to us that he would take this man to himself after three days?" They had hardly gone on any distance before this man came to meet them and greeted them.

"Tell us how you have lived such a righteous life," said Paul, "for the day after tomorrow you go to God."

Chapter LVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA ANUPH

"Blessed be God," Anuph said to them, "who has warned me of your coming and revealed to me your way of life." He then went through all the good things each one of them had done before telling them of his own deeds.

"Since the time when I openly confessed the name of the Saviour in this world, there has no falsehood come out of my mouth. I have taken no human food but have been fed daily by an angel with food from heaven. There has been no other desire in my heart than desire for God. There is nothing on earth which God has hidden from me, he has shown me how to interpret all things. I do not sleep much, I get no rest at night but continue to seek God. There is always an angel with me warning me of the powers of this world. My lamp of meditation has never been extinguished. God has always answered my petitions. I have often seen numberless myriads of angels in the presence of God, with the choirs of the righteous, the company of martyrs, the ranks of the monks, all of them praising God. I saw Satan cast into the fire and punished with his angels and the righteous rejoicing in eternity."

Many other things he told them, and on the third day he yielded up his spirit. And they saw the angels and the choir of martyrs and heard their songs of praise as they took up his soul and bore it into heaven.

Chapter LIX

THE LIFE OF ABBA HELLEN

There was another father called abba Hellen, who from an early age had lived a life of discipline. Time and again he would give quite fiery exhortations to the brothers who were with him, urging them not merely to be disciplined in their lives but to show results by increasing in virtue.

Once when he was by himself in the desert he was obsessed by a desire for some honey, when believe it or not he came across a honeycomb under a rock.

"Be off, you inordinate desire!" he cried. "For it is written 'Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfil the desires of the flesh'" (Galatians 5.16). And he left the honeycomb where it was and walked away.

After fasting three weeks in the desert, he found some fruits which had been scattered about, but he said, "I won't eat them, I won't even touch them, lest I shock my brothers, never mind do harm to my own soul. For it is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone.'" (Luke 4.4).

After fasting another week he fell into a heavy sleep and an angel came to him in a dream, saying, "Arise, take what you find, and eat." He got up, looked about him, and saw a spring which had made various plants grow in a circle all around it. He ate the fruits and drank the water, declaring that he had never tasted anything so delicious.

He found a small cave nearby and stayed there fasting for several days. When he needed food he prostrated himself and prayed, and immediately all kinds of food were placed before him, warm bread, olives and various kinds of fruit. He would sometime visit the brothers to give them instruction, after which he would hasten back to the desert, taking with him anything he needed. He saw some donkeys feeding, and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, one of you come and carry my parcels." And immediately one of them came. He put his sheepskin on it and sat on it, and arrived back at his cave after only one day. He left his bread and fruit outside in the sun, but when the wild beasts came to drink as usual at the spring they fell dead if they so much as touched any of it. On another occasion he went to visit some monks on a Sunday and asked them why they had not celebrated the synaxis. They immediately replied that it was because the presbyter had not come.

[Synaxis A Vigil service consisting of psalms and readings, beginning on the Saturday night and culminating in the Holy Eucharist on Sunday morning.]

"I will go and get him," he said.

"You won't be able to cross the river," they replied. "It's too deep. Besides, there is an enormous beast of a crocodile there which has eaten many people."

Without delay he got up and went to the crossing point, where the crocodile took him on its back and carried him across to the other side of the river. When he found the presbyter at home he begged him not to neglect the brothers. The presbyter looked at Hellen's clothing, all patched and tattered.

Chapter LIX, Hellen (continued) Book VIII
(Apelle begins further down page)

"Your clothing bespeaks great beauty of soul, my brother," he said. And in admiration of his humility and frugality he accompanied him to the river. There was of course no ferryboat there, but Abba Hellen called out to the crocodile. It came up obediently and offered his back.

"Get on it with me," Hellen asked the presbyter. But he moved away, overcome by fear. Awestruck, he watched the beast carry Hellen across the river, as did the brethren living on the other side. He then lured the beast towards him, and said,

"It is better that you should die, rather than continue to be condemned for killing people." And the beast fell down and died.

He remained with these brothers for three days, teaching them and bringing out into the open all their secret thoughts. This person he declared to be tempted by fornication, that one by vainglory, another by gluttony, another by anger. One he declared to be a gentle person, another a peacemaker. He made clear the vices of the one group and the virtues of the other. As they listened they wonderingly agreed that what he said was true.

"Prepare some vegetables," he then said, "for there will be some more brothers coming to visit us today." While they were still in the process of preparing them, the brothers arrived and they all greeted one another.

One of the brothers asked to be allowed to come and live with him in the solitude of the desert.

"You would not be able to withstand the temptations of the demons," said Hellen.

"I could withstand anything," he said, in a rather aggrieved tone of voice. So he took him with him and showed him a separate cave to live in. That night the demons came and first of all attacked him with filthy thoughts and then tried to suffocate him. But he ran and told Hellen immediately what was happening. Hellen came and signed the place with the cross (Lit. 'impressed a figure upon the place', *cum loco figuram impressisset*), and bade him rest

secure.

When the supply of bread ran out, an angel in the shape of a brother brought him food.

On another occasion there were ten brothers travelling through the desert to visit him who had been fasting for seven days when he met them. He invited them to rest in his cave, and when they asked him for some food he said, "I have nothing that I can offer you, but God is able to provide a meal in the desert."

They joined together in prayer and immediately a young man arrived in a boat and knocked at the door. They opened up to him and found that this young man was carrying a large basket of bread and olives. Thanking God they took and ate, and the young man immediately disappeared.

This and many other things Father Copres told us about. He treated us kindly and warmly, showing us into his garden where there were palms and other fruit bearing trees which he had planted himself in the desert, at the instigation of those farmers to whom he had said, "For those who have faith in God, the desert shall bring forth fruit."

"After I had been to see those who had sown seed in the desert and reaped a harvest I also did the same and followed him."

Chapter LX

THE LIFE OF ABBA APELLE

We also saw another presbyter in the more distant parts of the region called Apelle, a good man who used to be a coppersmith before being converted to the disciplined life. The devil once came to him in the shape of a woman while he was working his smithy for the monks. In his haste he picked up a red hot piece of metal from the fire and belaboured her face and body with it. The brothers heard her shrieking in his cell. From that time onwards he always picked up hot metal in his hand without being burnt. He greeted us kindly and warmly and told us about many famous men and friends of God who had been with him and some who still were.

Chapter LXI

THE LIFE OF ANOTHER JOHN

"There is in this desert," he said, "a brother called John, already quite

advanced in age, who excels all the other monks in virtue. He is quite difficult to find for he wanders about from place to place in the desert. He stood for three years under a cliff face in perpetual prayer, without sitting down, and not sleeping except for what sleep he could snatch standing up. He ate nothing except the Eucharist which a presbyter brought to him on Sundays. There came a day when Satan changed himself into the likeness of a presbyter and came quickly to him claiming that he would like to bring him the Eucharist. But blessed John recognised him and said,

"You father of all lies and deceit, enemy of all that is just, unceasing deceiver of Christian souls, will you also dare to insult the holy Sacraments?"

"I may not have come anywhere near dragging you down and casting you into the flames,' he said, 'but there was one other of your brothers whom I corrupted whose mind I disturbed to the point of insanity. Many righteous people prayed for him a great deal but were not able to restore him to a sound mind.'

"Having said this the demon departed.

"His feet had become sore through standing so long and had begun to fester when an angel came and touched him, saying,

"The real Christ will be your food and the real Holy Spirit will be your drink, but this spiritual food will be sufficient for you in the meantime so that you will not be given more than you can take (lit. 'lest being filled you vomit', ne repletus evomas). He then cured him and departed.

"After that, John wandered about in the desert, using wild herbs for food, but on Sundays he would always be in the same place to receive Communion. He begged a few palm leaves from the presbyter from which he made an animal harness. Anyone who was lame and seeking a cure from him was immediately healed the moment he mounted an ass and touched any harness which the holy man had made. Whenever he delivered any other kind of blessings to the sick, they were healed at once.

"Furthermore it was revealed to him that there was someone in one of the monasteries who was not living aright, and he wrote letters for the presbyter to deliver, specifying some who were lazy and others who were striving for virtue. What he said was always found to be true. He also wrote to the fathers pointing out which of them were lacking in care for the brothers and which of them were helping them as much as possible. He suggested suitable rewards and punishments accordingly. He urged others to move towards a state of perfection by relying not on what their five senses told them but on their own

interior knowledge (lit. 'he urged them to transfer themselves from sensible things to those things which are perceived by intelligence' (admonēbat ut a sensibilibus se transferrent ad ea quae percipiuntur intelligentia)

"It is time', he said, 'to spell out the purpose of such a life. For we ought not to remain childlike and infantile for ever. We should direct our thoughts into more perfect paths, develop in greatness of soul, seeking every possible virtue to the uttermost.'"

This and many other things Apelle told us about John. We haven't written them all down because they are so exceedingly miraculous that some people might not believe them, even though they are indeed true. We are quite convinced about these things, however, for we saw with our own eyes the many remarkable men who told us of them.

Chapter LXII

ABBA PAPHNUTIUS

We saw also the place where the anchorite Paphnutius lived, a great man famous for his virtues, who had died not long since in the region of Heracleotas in the Thebaid. Many people have said many things about him.

Chapter LXIII

TIBICINE (= flautist)

After living a disciplined life for a long time, Paphnutius asked God to show him whether there was anyone else among the holy people living an upright life who compared to him. An angel appeared to him and said, "There is a flautist in this region like you."

He hastily sought him out to find out how he lived and acquaint himself with everything he had done.

"The truth is," the flautist said, "that I am a sinner, a drunkard and a fornicator. It is not long since I stopped being a thief."

"But you must have done some things right," said Paphnutius, trying to examine him closely.

"I'm not aware of anything good in particular," said the flautist, "unless when I was a robber, I helped a virgin of Christ to escape from some robbers who were offering to molest her, and took her by night back to her home. There again, I once found a beautiful woman wandering about in the desert. She was

weeping copiously, fleeing from bailiffs and other court officials because of her husband's failure to pay his taxes, for when I asked her why she was weeping all she would say was, 'Don't ask. Don't pry into my misery. Just have me as your servant and take me where you will. It is two years now since my husband was shut up in prison and beaten because he owed taxes to the extent of three hundred gold pieces. And my three lovely sons were sold into slavery - so I have fled, wandering from place to place. Here I am now wandering in the desert. It has often happened that I have been severely attacked, and for three days now in this desert I have had nothing to eat.'

"Well, I took pity on her," said the robber. "and took her back to my cave, gave her three hundred gold pieces and took her back to the city where her husband and children were freed from all disgrace and shame."

"I can't point to anything like that in my own life," said Paphnutius, "but you have doubtless heard that I have some reputation for living the disciplined life. I certainly do not spend my time in idleness. It was God who revealed to me that you in your deeds were by no means inferior to me. So, my brother, if you have any great longing for God at all do not rashly neglect your own soul."

Immediately, he threw away the flute he had in his hands and exchanged the music of lyric poetry for a melody of the spirit by following Paphnutius into the desert.

For three years he followed this way of life to the utmost of his ability, completing his life in hymns and prayers, after which he departed for the heavenly realms, resting in peace with choirs of angels, and numbered in the company of the just.

Chapter LXIV PROTOMES

As soon as Paphnutius committed to God that man who had striven after excellence to the best of his ability, he imposed upon himself an even greater and stricter rule of life than before. And he then asked God if there was anyone else who could compare with him. Again he heard a divine voice, saying, "There is a community leader (protomes) in a neighbouring village who is as good as you."

Immediately he sought him out and knocked on his door. This man came out and offered him hospitality as usual, invited him in, washed his feet, set food before him, and urged him to eat. Paphnutius then began to ask him about

himself.

"Tell me, my friend," he said, "about your way of life, for God has told me that you exceed many monks in virtue."

"No, I'm a sinner," he replied. "I am not worthy to be compared with monks." But Paphnutius urged him more insistently, until he replied, "I feel under no compulsion to tell you about the things I have done except in so far as you say that God has sent you, in which case I will tell you about myself. It is thirty years now since I separated from my wife. I lived with her for only three years, and she gave me three sons who still assist me in my business. I have never refused hospitality to anyone right up to the present day. There is no one among my associates who can boast of being more hospitable than me. I have always seen guests and beggars on their way with plenty of food; no one has ever left my door with empty hands. I have never passed by any poor beggar without giving him enough to satisfy his needs. In any quarrel I have never been prejudiced in favour of my own sons, no stolen goods have ever entered my house, there has never been a legal argument in which I have not acted as mediator and peacemaker, no one has ever accused my sons of behaving dishonestly, my flocks have never grazed anyone else's pasture, I have not given priority to sowing my own fields, but declared them common to all and simply gathered up what was left over. I have never permitted the poor to be oppressed by the power of the rich. I have done no injury to anyone in my life. I have never pronounced an unfair judgment against anyone. This is the way, as far as I am aware, of how I have been following the will of God."

When Paphnutius heard the deeds of this man, he kissed his forehead and said, "'The Lord bless thee out of Sion, that you may see the goods of Jerusalem all the days of your life.' (Psalms 128.5) In all these things you have done well. One thing remains to crown your virtues, and that is knowledge of the wisdom of God in every part of your being, which you cannot find without great labour, separating yourself from the world, taking up your cross and following the Saviour."

Upon hearing this, he immediately followed Paphnutius out to his mountain, without even letting his family say farewell. When they came to the Nile they found there was no boat, so Paphnutius told him to wade through, which nobody was doing at that particular time because the river was high. The water came up their waists, but after the crossing, Paphnutius set him up in a certain place.

[That is, following the usual practice, he would help him build a cell, show

him how to weave mats and baskets and instruct him in psalmody and prayer.] After leaving him he asked God that this man should be seen to excel all others of this kind. Not long afterwards he saw his soul taken up by the angels as they praised God saying, "Blessed is he whom you have chosen and taken up on high. He will dwell in your courts" (Psalm 65.4). And the cries of the just responded, saying, "Great is the peace of those who love thy law and are not offended by it." (Psalms 119.165)." And then he knew that the man was dead.

Chapter LXV MERCATOR

Abba Paphnutius continued to worship God in prayer and fast rigorously. He again asked God to show him someone else like him. And again the divine voice came to him, "You are like a merchant gathering fine pearls. But get on your feet without delay, for someone similar to yourself is coming to meet you."

He came down from the mountain and met a certain merchant (mercator) of Alexandria worth twenty thousand gold pieces, a devout lover of Christ, coming down the Nile from the upper Thebaid with a hundred ships, giving away all his goods and chattels to the poor. Along with his sons he came and offered ten bags of vegetables to Paphnutius.

"What is all this about, my friend?" asked Paphnutius.

"These are the profits of my business," he replied, "which are offered to God by way of a fair return."

"How is it then," said Paphnutius, "that you have not yet enjoyed a reputation like mine?"

"But that is what I am earnestly seeking," he replied.

"Well how much longer," asked Paphnutius, "are you going to go on in your worldly business without getting any nearer to a heavenly reward? When you have given all you possess to other people, you will then be able to take to yourself something infinitely more valuable, that is, to follow the Saviour, and indeed to enter his very presence not long hence."

Without any argument he told his sons to give the rest of his things to the poor. He himself went up into the mountain, embraced solitude in a place where two others had laboured before him, and gave himself up to prayer. It was not long afterwards that he left his body and entered the kingdom of

heaven.

Having seen this person go before him into heaven he was ready to give up the ghost himself, as one who could labour no longer. And an angel came to him and said, "Approach hither now. Do you also, O blessed one, enter into the tabernacle of the Lord. See, the prophets are coming to welcome you into their choirs. You have not been told this would happen before lest you had become proud and stained your good record."

One day later, certain presbyters were led to him by a revelation from God. He told them all these things and then gave up his soul. And the presbyters praised God as they plainly saw him taken up among the saints and angels.

Chapter LXVI

THE LIFE OF ABBA APOLLONIUS

There was a certain monk in the Thebaid called Apollonius who shone with many virtues and worthy deeds. He had been blessed with the gift of teaching above many others famous for their virtues. At the time of the persecutions he inspired those who confessed Christ with the mind of Christ so that many of them became martyrs. At last he was himself arrested and imprisoned, where many of the more depraved among the gentiles came to revile him and attack him with curses and mockery.

Chapter LXVII

PHILEMON, AND THOSE WHO WERE MARTYRED WITH HIM.

There was a fluteplayer, a man with a bad reputation, among those who came to pour scorn upon Apollonius, declaring him to be a blasphemer, a fraud and cheat, an object of universal hatred and worthy of sudden death.

"May the Lord have mercy on you, my friend," replied Apollonius. "May he not hold against you as a sin what you have said."

On hearing this the fluteplayer, whose name was Philemon, was conscience stricken, so disconcerted was he by what Apollonius had said. He went immediately to the courtroom and stood before the judge in the presence of the people.

"You are acting unjustly," he said to the judge, "in punishing these religious and blameless men. Christians are neither evil speakers nor evil doers."

Hearing this, the judge thought at first that he was joking or speaking

ironically, but when Philemon persisted he said. "You must be mad. The balance of your mind has suddenly been disturbed."

"I am not mad," he replied. "You are a most unjust judge. I am a Christian."

The judge and all the people tried hard to make him change his mind, with many persuasive arguments, but when he remained adamant, the judge condemned him to suffer the whole range of tortures.

Apollonius too was seized, grievously abused, and put on the rack for being a cheat. But he cried out, "I could wish that you and all those present would agree with my so-called error."

Hearing this the judge ordered them both to be consigned to the flames in the presence of all the people. With the flames already licking around him, the blessed Apollonius cried out for the judge and people to hear, "'Deliver us not, O Lord, into the power of the wicked, but show yourself openly to us'" (Psalm 74.19). And immediately a brilliant, rain-bearing cloud appeared, hiding the men from view and putting out the fire.

"There is none like the God of the Christians!" everyone in the crowd shouted out, including even the judge himself. Some spiteful person reported this to the prefect in Alexandria, who got together a band of vicious heavyweights to act as bouncers and security guards (*protectores et apparitores*) and sent them to arrest both Philemon and the judge. Apollonius and a number of the other confessors were also arrested. While they were all on the way to Alexandria, Apollonius was given the grace to begin preaching to their guards. They too were all conscience stricken and believed in the Saviour, with the result that they too were all with one accord taken into custody. When the prefect became convinced that nothing would change their minds, he ordered them all to be taken out to sea and thrown overboard. This they accepted as being their baptism.

When their fellow Christians found their bodies cast up on the shore, they made there one single shrine for them all, where many powerful signs are now worked. For this man was so full of grace that the Lord honoured him by answering whatever he asked for in his prayer. We saw it ourselves and prayed there, along with others who were deeply moved by this martyrs' shrine. We worshipped God and paid our respects to this holy place in the Thebaid.

Chapter LXVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA DIOSCURUS, PRESBYTER.

We also saw another presbyter in the desert called Dioscurus, the father of a hundred monks. When anyone by the grace of God came to be with him, he would say to them: "See that you do not come to the Holy Sacrament if you have had fantasies about women during the night. None of you should have gone to sleep under the influence of visions and fantasies. It is a different matter if you have simply had a nocturnal emission of semen without any fantasies. They do not come to anyone by a deliberate act of will but involuntarily. They are a perfectly natural expulsion of superfluous matter, and there is nothing sinful about them. Visions and fantasies are something which are subject to your own free choice, and are symptomatic of a sick mind. It is incumbent upon a monk to transcend the laws of nature, to purify the body so that no weakness of the flesh be found in it, but rather to chastise the flesh until there is no superfluous matter to be found in it. Strive therefore to wear it down by frequent and severe fasting, so that we shall be less likely to be aroused by our appetites and desires. It is not right for a monk to be at the mercy of his mental desires. In this we are different from those in the world. Don't we often see such people abstaining from certain pleasures for health reasons, or some other such strange irrational impulse. How much more should a monk take care for the health of his mind and spirit.

Chapter LXIX

THE ANCHORITES OF NITRIA.

We also visited Nitria where we saw many great anchorites, some native born, some foreign. They rivalled each other in virtue, living their lives with great zeal, each of them trying to outdo the others. Some of them were given to contemplation, others to action. When any of them saw us coming afar off, some would run to us with water, others would wash our feet, others our clothes, some would offer us food, others would share their contemplation and knowledge of God with us. Each one was eager to do whatever he could for us. And what can we say about their virtues? It is impossible to do justice to them.

They live in this desert place at great distances from each other, so that none can be easily seen, heard or recognised by his neighbour. They live in complete quietness, each one shut up by himself. They meet each other only on Saturdays and Sundays when they gather together in the church. Many therefore often go at least four days without even seeing anyone else, until

they gather together. Some of them are so far apart from each other that they have to travel three or four miles to get to the meeting. They show a great deal of love among themselves, far more than other monks do, so that anyone seeking salvation in the company of so many like them is more than content to find that his own cell provides him with all the refreshment that he needs.

Chapter LXX

THE LIFE OF ABBA AMMON, AND THOSE WITH HIM.

We saw the father of those anchorites, a man called Ammon, who had a really splendid cell, with a large front room, a well and other necessary rooms. A brother wanting to save his soul came to him and asked him to find him a cell to live in.

"Stay here and don't go away till I have found you some little place," said Ammon, and leaving him in charge of everything, cell and all, he went and occupied another tiny little cell himself.

If a group of people came wanting to save their souls, he gathered the whole brotherhood together and organised some to bring building materials, some to fetch water, and in the space of one day new cells were ready. He summoned their future occupants to a welcome party in the church, and while they were all there rejoicing and relaxing, the brothers filled sheepskins and baskets with bread or other necessary things and left them in the new cells so that none of the newcomers would know who had given what, but found everything they needed when they came back to their cells at night. There were some who ate no bread or fruit but only wild intyba (herbs ?). There were some who did not sleep at night but sat or stood until dawn, persevering in prayer.

Chapter LXXI

THE LIFE OF ABBA ISODORE, AND THOSE WITH HIM

In the Thebaid we also visited the monastery of a certain Isodore, a great man, where there were a thousand monks. There were wells and gardens inside, providing everything necessary for the life, so that no one needed to go outside the monastery. There was a presbyter at the door who would not allow anyone out; nor allow anyone in unless he had an intention of staying there till death without going anywhere else. Some however who came in through the gate he offered hospitality in a small guesthouse, and having spoken kindly to

them next morning sent them on their way in peace.

There were two presbyters who were the only ones to go out, in order to sell what the brothers had made and bring back what they needed for their work. The presbyter who kept the gate told me that those inside were so holy that that they were all able to do miracles. None of them ever fell ill before death, but when the time for their departure had come they told all the others before lying down and falling asleep

Chapter LXXII

THE LIFE OF ABBA AMMON, PRESBYTER

There is another place of solitude in Egypt, in very difficult country near the sea not far from the city of Diolcos, where many great anchorites lived. We met there a holy and very humble presbyter called Ammon who had visionary gifts. Once when offering the sacrifice to God, he saw an angel standing at the right hand of the altar taking note of the brothers who came seeking God's grace and writing their names in his book. If anyone was missing from the synaxis, he saw their names being crossed out, and within three days they were dead. Demons often tortured him so badly that he was unable to stand at the altar to make the offering, but an angel came and took him by the hand and immediately gave him strength so that he was able to stand firmly at the altar. The brothers were amazed at the sight of his torments.

Chapter LXXII

THE LIFE OF ABBA JOHN

We saw someone else in Diolcos named John, the father of a monastery, who also was blessed with many graces. He had the clothing of Abraham and the beard of Aaron. He did many miracles and cures. Especially he cured many paralytics and those suffering from gout.

Chapter LXXIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA PITYRION, AND THOSE WITH HIM

We also saw in the Thebaid a high mountain overhanging the river, precipitous and fearsome. The monks lived there in caves. Their father was called Pityrion, who was one of Antony's disciples, and the third person to live in

that place. He showed forth many virtues and was an adept at driving out spirits. In succeeding Antony and his disciple Ammon, he deservedly inherited their gifts. He gave a great deal of teaching to us and many others with us, discoursing on the accurate discernment of spirits. He said that there were some demons associated with psychological patterns (*motus animi*), who were able to turn our desires (*affectiones*) into evil paths.

"So, my sons," he said to us, "anyone wanting to expel demons must first get his desires under control. The measure of being able to expel demons is the measure of being able to control your desires. Little by little therefore, you must conquer your desires so that you can drive out the demons associated with them. The demon loves gluttony. Anyone who overcomes gluttony drives out the demon of gluttony."

He himself ate only twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays. His meal was a little pulse without flour, which he had got so used to that he simply could not eat anything else.

Chapter LXXV

THE LIFE OF EULOGIUS, PRESBYTER

We saw another presbyter called Eulogius, who was given such a gift of knowledge when offering the gifts to God that he was able to read the minds of those monks who were drawing near. He frequently stopped monks from approaching the altar, saying, "How can you presume to approach the Holy Sacrament when your thoughts are so evil; you have been entertaining filthy thoughts of fornication last night. There is another who thinks that it doesn't matter whether you are a sinner or a righteous person in approaching the grace of God, and another who reasons that surely the mere fact of offering the gifts at the altar will sanctify him. Stay away from the Sacraments for a while, do penance that your sins may be forgiven and you will then be worthy of the communion of Christ. Unless you first clean up your thoughts, you cannot enter into the grace of Christ."

Chapter LXXVI

THE LIFE OF SERAPION, PRESBYTER .

In the Arsinoe area, we also saw a certain presbyter called Serapion, the father of many monasteries, making him the leader of a large brotherhood of about

ten thousand monks. He administered an extensive charity on behalf of the brothers, in that at harvest time they all handed over to him the profits received from the sale of their grain. Each one was able to supply twelve artabas (one artaba = approx 2 gallons), the equivalent of what we would call forty modii. He used this to help the poor, so that there was no one destitute in the surrounding region, and he even sent some to the poor in Alexandria. But throughout the whole of Egypt none of the fathers neglected this service, so that because of the labours of the brothers, they were able to send so many ships full of grain and clothing to Alexandria that there was scarcely any real poverty there.

Chapter LXXVII

THE LIFE OF ABBA POSIDONIUS

There are so many things about Posidonius of Thebes that it is difficult to tell of them all. He was very gentle, and very severe in his way of life, and there was an innocence about him such as I have never met in anyone else. I lived with him for a year in Bethlehem, in the place where Poemon had lived, and took note of all his virtues. Among other things, one day he told me the following:

"I lived in Porphyria for a whole year and saw no other human being for all that time, and therefore heard no sermons. I lived on wild herbs and ate very little bread except an occasional small portion. Once when I had completely run out of bread, I left my cave to go to a village, but having walked all day I covered no more than two miles. Looking about me I saw a horseman dressed in military uniform and wearing a helmet. I realised he was a soldier and I followed him to a cave where I found a container full of grapes both dried and newly picked. I accepted them joyfully and so returned to my own cave with two months food supply."

There is also this miracle which Posidonius did in Bethlehem. A pregnant woman was possessed of an unclean spirit which was tormenting her grievously when she came to give birth. Her husband, seeing her being attacked by a demon, came and asked that holy man to help. We went in to offer prayers, he prayed, then stood up, and after doing this twice the spirit was driven out. He stood up and said to us: "Keep praying. Although the spirit has been driven out, we need some sign to be quite sure." And as the demon went, he split the courtyard wall from top to bottom. The woman had not

spoken for six years, but after the exorcism, she gave birth and began to speak.

Chapter LXXVIII JEROME

From this holy Posidonius I also heard a word of prophecy about a certain Jerome. He was a presbyter who lived in this district, eloquently fluent in Latin writings and of a brilliant intellect, but so filled with a spirit of jealousy that his awareness of sound doctrine perished. Posidonius spent a lot of time with this man, and he said to me that . . .

Chapter LXXIX PAULA

A noble woman who looked after him, would be delivered from his jealousy only by dying before he did. He divined that because of this man, no holy person would be able to live in that area, but that his jealousy would affect even his own brother. And so it turned out.

Chapter LXXX OXYPERENTIUS

He drove the blessed Oxyperantius the Italian from this place...

Chapter LXXXI PETER

And Peter, another Egyptian...

Chapter LXXXII SIMEON

And Simeon. I knew all these men and they were admirable people. Simeon told me about Posidonius, who was a most abstemious person who practised all the virtues. He ate no bread for the last forty years of his life and to the day of his death bore no grudge against any injuries done to him.

Such were the struggles and miracles of the famous Posidonius, such was his spirit of prophecy, the greatest of all his virtues. This is the end of the life of this blessed and outstanding man.

Chapter LXXXIII

THE LIFE OF SERAPION SINDONITES

Serapion Sindonites was so called because he never wore anything except a sindon (a simple linen garment). He possessed no property and was totally unskilled, for which reason he was thought to be totally impassibilis (indifferent to all kinds of physical discomfort) Although unable to read, he nevertheless learned the Scriptures by heart. Even though he had nothing and meditated on the Scriptures he was one who found it quite impossible to stay quietly in a cell, but this was not because he was led astray by worldly desires, but because he was drawn to an Apostolic life. He travelled the world over, embracing the most demanding form of poverty, and developed his powers of endurance to perfection. He was born with this kind of nature - for even though all people share one humanity there are many different kinds of nature (*sunt enim naturarum, non substantiarum, differentiae*).

The fathers relate that when he was approached by someone who wished to learn from him how to live the disciplined life, he went instead into the city and sold himself as a slave to some non-Christian (*gentilibus*) actors for twenty *solidi*. This money he hid in a secret place and did not spend it. He continued to serve these actors who had bought him, eating nothing but bread and water, and speaking constantly of what he learned from Holy Scriptures, until he converted them to Christianity and turned them away from the theatre. First it had been the husband after quite a long time, then the wife and then the whole family. The saying is that even while they were taking no notice of him, he was spiritually washing their feet.

Both of them were baptised. Both renounced the theatre. They embarked on a new life, honest and devout, and held their slave in great respect.

"Come, brother," they said, "we are going to give you your freedom, since you have liberated us from a sordid way of life."

"It is God who has done it all," he replied, "you have cooperated with him. And so you have saved your souls. Now I will tell you the hidden reason for what I have done. I was moved with compassion for you because of your false way of life. I am a free monk (*liber exercitator*) of Egypt, and it was in this

cause that I sold myself to you and became your slave. Since it is God who has acted to bring your souls into safety, please take back the money you gave me, and let me go and bring help to someone else."

"But you are our lord and father. Please stay with us," they urged him again and again. But he would not be persuaded.

"Why not give the money to the poor - for it has been the cause of our salvation," they said.

"No, you give it to them," he said. "It's yours, after all, I can't give somebody else's money to the poor."

"Well at least come back and visit us next year," they urged him. And so he departed from them.

In the course of his various wanderings, he came at last to Greece, and stayed for three days in Athens without anyone offering him any bread. As for money, or a bag, or a sheepskin, or a staff, he had none of these things. He was dressed only in his sindon. By the fourth day he was very hungry, for he had eaten nothing all this time. Fasting which is forced upon you is a very serious thing, especially when you would not have believed it possible. He went to the place where the leading citizens were accustomed to congregate and stood up on the citizens' platform.

"Men of Athens, please help," he cried, with much weeping and urgent shouting. Some of the leading citizens (lit. 'those who wore the pallium and birrus') came up to him.

"What is the matter with you?" they asked. "Where do you come from and what's wrong with you?"

"I am an Egyptian," he said, "a monk by profession. Absent from my own true homeland, I have fallen in with three moneylenders. I have paid the debt to two of them and they have gone away; there is nothing else they can bother me with. But there is one that is still with me."

"Where are they then?" they asked, as they looked around impatiently in order to pay them off. "Who is it that is bothering you? Point him out to us and we will come to your assistance."

"It is Avarice, Gluttony and Fornication that bother me," he replied. "I have been delivered from two of them - Avarice because I have no money or anything else, and Fornication because I do not indulge in the kind of luxurious living which gives rise to it. But I can't get away from Gluttony, for it is now four days since I have had anything to eat, and my stomach attacks me vigorously, seeking payment of a debt without which I shall not be able to

live."

Realising that he was spinning them an allegorical tale some of those wise men then gave him a solidus, which he took into a bakery, picked up some bread, left the city and did not come back there again. They realised then that he was a man of great virtue and paid the miller the price of the bread so that they could have their shilling back again as a souvenir.

He travelled to a place near Lacedæmonia, where he heard that a principal citizen of that place was a Manichæan together with all his household, although he was a good man in every other way. So this best of monks sold himself to this man in the same way as he had done before to the actors.

Within two years he had converted this man from his heresy together with his wife and his whole family and brought them into the Church. They regarded him so highly that they no longer treated him as a slave but held him in as high honour as a brother or a father. Together they all praised God. He gave them a great deal of encouragement before giving back to his master the price of his freedom and leaving them.

He then went aboard a ship about to sail for Rome. Some of the sailors thought he had already paid his fare, others assumed he had sufficient money to cover expenses, all thought someone else had seen to his baggage, and they made no objection to his presence, without really going into the matter very carefully. When they had set sail and were about fifty miles from Alexandria, the sailors had a meal about sunset, followed by the passengers. On the first day they noticed that he ate nothing but put it down to seasickness. The same thing happened on the second, third and fourth day. On the fifth day they noticed him sitting quietly while everyone was eating and said:

"You're not eating anything, friend?"

"That is because I haven't got anything to eat," he replied.

So they began to ask questions about who might have taken care of his baggage or taken any money for his fare, and realised that nobody had. Indeed he had no baggage to take care of.

"What do you mean by coming on board without any money?" they said angrily. "How are you going to pay your fare? How are you going to eat?"

"I don't possess a thing," he replied. "So you will have to take me back and leave me where you found me."

"No chance of that," they said, "now that we have got a favourable wind - not unless you could give us a hundred gold pieces. So we will just have to accept it, and put up with what we can't change."

So he stayed in the ship, and they fed him until they arrived at Rome. There he began to enquire where the greatest ascetics, either men or women, were to be found.

Chapter LXXXIV

THE LIFE OF ABBA DOMNIO

Among these was a certain Domnio, a disciple of Origen, a most strong and ascetic person. Rumour accredited him with many miracles. After his death, his bed cured the sick.

Chapter LXXXV

A SILENT VIRGIN

Serapion profited greatly from meeting this man, as he was an exemplary person, learned, wise in speech and of unblemished life. He asked him whether there were any other local spiritual athletes, either men or women, and was told about a certain virgin practising quietness and silence, who had been enclosed in a cell for twenty-five years without speaking to anyone. He went to the place where he had been told that she lived and spoke to the old woman who served her:

"Tell this virgin that I must needs meet her," he said.

"She has not met anyone for many years," the old woman replied

"Tell her that I have come to meet her for God has sent me," he said.

But even then, the old woman would not agree.

After he had persisted in his request for two or three days, however, he did at last meet her.

"Why do you stay put here?" he asked

"I don't stay put," she said. "I am continually on the move."

"Moving where?"

"Moving towards God."

"Are you alive then, or dead?"

"I trust in God that I am dead to the world, for those who live according to the flesh cannot come to God."

"You would more readily convince me that you were dead to the world if you did what I do."

"Well, command me, and anything I can do, I will."

"Anything is possible for one truly mortified, as long as it is not anything sinful, so come out of your seclusion and walk outside with me."

"I've not been out for twenty-five years, so why should I go out now?"

"Go on! Haven't you said you are dead to the world? In which case it is obvious that the world must be dead to you. If that is really true, and those who are dead have no feelings, it can't make any difference to you whether you go out or not."

So she did come out and went with him as far as the church.

"If you really want to convince me," he said to her in the church, "that you are dead to the world and indifferent to what people think of you, do what I do and I will then know that you are truly mortified. Take off all your outer clothing as I have done, carry it over your shoulder, and walk through the middle of the town with me in front of you, dressed as I am in nothing but this sindon."

"That would be a terrible thing to do. I would offend many people, and they could accuse me of being mad or possessed by a devil."

"Why should you worry even if they did call you mad or possessed by a devil? You are supposed to be dead to their opinions. The dead have no worries. They can't feel anything whether they are praised or disparaged."

"Think of something else for me to do. I can't claim to have arrived at that measure of mortification."

"Well then," said Serapion, who had great powers of endurance, "cease from boasting and pleasing yourself, as if you were more pious and mortified than anyone. Even I am more mortified than you are, for I do this without any shame or mental hesitation."

And so he took leave of her, having dented her pride and pointed her in the direction of humility.

There are many other great and illustrious deeds illustrating the endurance of this great and pre-eminently virtuous Teacher of Christ, but the purity of his life will be evident from the few things which I have written down. He died in the sixtieth year of his life and was buried in the desert.

Chapter LXXXVI

EVAGRIUS, A FAMOUS DEACON.

I cannot pass over Evagrius, a distinguished deacon who lived like an apostle; I feel bound to write something, to the glory of our good Saviour and the

edification of anyone who might read it. So I give a full account of how he came to the monastic life and the worthy way in which he lived it. He died in the desert aged fifty-four, thus, in the words of Scripture, 'being made perfect in a short time he fulfilled a long time' (Wisdom 4.13). He was indeed a soul pleasing to God.

He was born at Ibora, in Pontus (near the Black Sea, c.346), the son of a presbyter, appointed as a lector by Saint Basil the bishop of Caesarea. After the death of the holy bishop Basil, he was ordained deacon by Basil's brother, Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa, who had taken note of his abilities. Gregory was a most wise man, worthy of being compared to the apostles, with a very serene temperament, and quite brilliant in expounding doctrine. He took Evagrius with him to the Great Synod of Constantinople (382 AD), and relinquished him to the blessed bishop Nectarius, who appreciated his skill in the art of summing up arguments in all kinds of subjects. (*omnium disserendi artis peritissimus*). He gained a reputation as a young man in that great city for refuting all kinds of heresies in public debates.

It came to pass, however, that this man, honoured by the whole city for his upright life, became lustfully obsessed by a portrait of a woman, as he told us himself in later life when he had been freed from such obsessions. And the woman also, belonging to one of the leading families, became obsessed by him. But Evagrius feared God and feared his conscience also. He kept before his eyes the public disgrace that could come from sin, and how much pleasure the heretics would take from the sins of other people. He humbly begged God to take away from him the prospects afforded him by this woman, fed by lust as he was and held captive by mad desire. But however much he wished to escape, he had no power against the insidious pleasures which held him in chains.

But a short time after his prayer, and before his desires could be carried into effect, he had an angelic vision in which he saw a military commander seize him and bring him before the judgment seat, carry out the sentence of imprisonment by putting an iron collar around his neck and fixing iron chains to his hands, while those who had followed him previously could say nothing in his defence. Pricked by conscience he felt that he deserved these punishments, and supposed that the woman's husband had brought him to this judgment. His mind in a turmoil, he came to this conclusion since he had been involved in similar trials debating the crimes of other people. His fear and mental anguish was intense.

And then the angel of the initial vision became transformed in his eyes into a kind and brotherly friend who was astonished and saddened by the shame of his being chained up with forty other convicted criminals.

"Why are you being detained so ignominiously among criminals, my reverend deacon?" he asked.

"Truly, I don't know," he replied. "But I suspect that N..... who is a high-up officer has organised my arrest in a fit of zeal beyond all reason, and bribed the judge to impose the greatest possible penalty."

"Take the advice of a friend," said the angel, still in friendly guise. "It would be best for you not to stay in this city any longer."

"If you can see me freed from this calamity back in Constantinople," Evagrius replied, "I swear I would accept that punishment, knowing that I deserve a much greater."

"If that is the case I will bring the holy gospels and when you have sworn an oath on them that you will leave this city and take thought for your own salvation, I will free you from your imprisonment."

"Please do that, and I will gladly swear the oath. Only get me out from under this dark cloud."

The gospels were brought, the oath was demanded, and Evagrius swore:

"I will not stay in this city longer than one day in which I can get my things on to the ship."

The moment he had sworn the oath he awoke from the dream which had come upon him that night.

"Even though it is only in a dream that I have sworn this oath," he said as he got out of bed, "I have nevertheless sworn."

And he conveyed himself and everything he possessed by ship to Jerusalem, where he was accepted by the blessed Melania of Rome. But being of a lusty youthful age, his heart was hardened by the devil again, like Pharaoh of old. He was full of doubt, of two contrary minds, though as yet he had not talked with anyone about it. The result was that he thought of changing back to secular dress again. In all this disturbance of mind, vainglory rapidly led to laziness, but the God who saves us from falling led him once more into a crisis, in that he first of felt feverish, then became seriously ill, so that he was incapacitated for the space of six months. He was unable to summon up any strength at all, and the doctors could not understand what was the matter with him and could offer no cure.

"I don't like this disease of yours," said the blessed Melania, "going on day

after day. Tell me what is going on in your mind. Bodily illness is not the real thing, is it."

So he confessed what had happened to him in Constantinople.

"Promise me as God is your witness," she said, "that you will embrace the monastic life, and sinner though I am I will pray to God for you that you may be given food for your journey and find a purpose in life."

He agreed, she prayed, and after a few days he got much better. She herself then clothed him in the monastic habit, and he went off to a far country, that is, to Mount Nitria in Egypt. He lived there for two years and went into solitude in the third.

After fourteen years in the region known as the Cells, he was eating only a pound of bread a day and a pint of oil every three months - and he was a man who had been brought up in the lap of luxury. He composed a hundred essays (orationes), marking them down each year as the only price he could afford in exchange for what he ate. He was a most elegant and speedy writer. A month into his fifteenth year, he was found worthy of being granted the gifts of knowledge, wisdom and discernment of spirits. He wrote three books for monks called Antihrrctica, that is, Refutations, outlining the means of fighting against the demons.

He told us that once when tormented by a demon of fornication he stood all night in a well, even though it was winter, in order to discipline his body with coldness. On another occasion, as he told us, when he was tormented by a spirit of blasphemy, he stayed outside for forty days, so that his body became like that of the wild beasts and broke out in scabs. And three demons dressed like clerics appeared to him. One of them accused him of being an Arian, the second of being a Eunomian, the third an Apollinarian, but he overcame them with a few words inspired by the spirit of wisdom.

One day the key of the church was mislaid, but he called on the name of Christ, made the sign of the cross on the crossbar, pushed it with his hand and it opened. It would be difficult to tell of all the beatings he had from demons and all the other torments they devised for him. He foretold to one of his disciples what would happen to him in eighteen years time, describing everything exactly as it was to happen (*omnia ei praedicens in specie*). He also said:

"Since the time I became a solitary I have not touched lettuce or the smallest particle of green vegetables, or anything fresh, fruit, grapes, lentils, meat, wine or anything cooked. All I have had is wild herbs and water." But in the

sixteenth year, without cooking since beginning this kind of life, weakness of body and stomach persuaded him of the need for his flesh to take in some cooked food. For two years he ate some bread, though never any cooked vegetables, except some barley-groats and lentils. By these means this blessed man wore down his body but brought life to his soul through the Holy Spirit. He communicated in church at Epiphanytide.

This wholehearted athlete of Christ also told us when on his death bed that it was only for the last three years that he had not been bothered by the desires of the flesh. So even towards the end of a life rooted in virtue, after immense labours, unwavering purpose and sober unceasing prayer the malicious demon, the enemy of everything good, could still attack this immortal soul. If that is the case what must the lazy ones suffer from that wicked demon through their own negligence?

Somebody once brought him the news that his father was dead, and all he said to the messenger was: 'Don't blaspheme. My father lives for ever.' He was, of course, talking about God.

Such was the way in which this amazing Evagrius lived his exacting and perfect life.

Chapter LXXXVII

THE LIFE OF ABBA PIOR

There was an Egyptian called Pior who renounced the world and left his family home while still a young man, at which time he promised God that he would not set eyes on them again. Fifty years later his sister in her old age learnt from someone that he was still alive and she became totally obsessed with the desire to see him. She could not venture into the emptiness of the deserts by herself so she asked her local bishop to write to the fathers in the desert, asking them to send him to her so that she could see him. A great deal of pressure was brought to bear on him, so at last, obedient to the fathers, he decided to go, taking one other person with him.

He told the brother to approach his sister's door and stand outside. When he heard the door being knocked and his sister coming out to meet him, he shut his eyes and called out

"N....., my sister, I am Pior your brother. Here I am. Come, look, gaze as much as you like."

Convinced it was he, she praised God and did all she could to persuade him to

come inside, but he simply said a prayer on the threshold and returned to his solitude, which for him was just as important as his own native land. He is also credited with this miracle, that he dug down in the place where he had built his cell and found water, which was however bitter. But he stayed there till his death, content with the bitter water he had found, so that the ability of this generous man to put up with things became widely known. After his death many monks tried to live in his cell, but were not able to manage it, not even for so long as a year. It was a terrible place, bereft of all comfort.

Chapter LXXXVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA MOSES OF LIBYA

Moses of Libya was a most gentle man, renowned for his great charity. He had been found worthy of being given the gift of healing. He told us this story: In the monastery once when I was quite young, I was digging a deep well, twenty feet deep. Eighty of us had been digging for three days and got to the usual water bearing level, but having seen it and gone into it for about a cubit's length we found no water. Greatly discouraged, we were thinking about giving up, and were in the middle of discussing it when Pior appeared out of the empty desert, dressed in his sheepskin. And this was at the hottest sixth hour of the day. After greeting us he asked,

"Why are you so downcast, you men of little faith? I knew yesterday that you were losing heart."

So saying he immediately put down a ladder into the well, said a prayer over them, took a rod and struck it three times.

"O God of our holy fathers," he said, "let not the work of your servants be a useless waste of time, but send them the gift of water."

And water immediately gushed forth, spraying over us.

"It is clear that this is the reason I have been sent to you," he said, after praying once more.

"Please stay and have a meal with us," we urged him.

"No, I can't do that," he replied. "I have finished doing all that I was sent to do."

Such is the admirable story of Pior, that famous pillar standing strong against all storms, and the reward of his virtue is that now, instead of his bitter-tasting water, he enjoys for ever a river of flowing sweetness in great exaltation of spirit.

Chapter LXXXIX

THE LIFE OF ABBA CHRONIUS

There was a certain man called Chronius who lived in the village of Phoenix on the edge of the desert. Counting out fifteen thousand steps on his right foot, he went out from his village, said a prayer and dug a well. He found good water at a depth of seven arms-lengths and there built himself a small hermitage (hospitium). From the day in which he thus began a monastic life, he prayed to God that he would never need to go back to the place where he used to live.

Not many years later he led a brotherhood of about two hundred men who had gathered around him, and it was then that he had the dignity of the presbyterate conferred upon him. In praise of his way of life it is said that for the whole of the sixty years that he served the altar in his priesthood he never left the desert and never ate bread that he had not earned with his own hands.

Chapter XC

THE LIFE OF ABBA JACOB

Jacob, known as 'Claudus' (i.e. 'lame'), from the same neighbourhood also lived with him. He was a man well known for the depth of his knowledge. Blessed Antony knew them both.

Chapter XCI

THE LIFE OF ABBA PAPHNUTIUS CEPHALA

Paphnutius Cephalas also came to him, a marvellous man who had the gift of knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, both old and new testaments, interpreting them all even though he could not read. He was a modest man, who did not make any show of his prophetic gift. It is said of him that for over eighty years he never possessed two tunics at the same time. The blessed deacons Evagrius and Albinus came with me to visit him, and we asked him about the details of some who fell away and lapsed into scandalous living.

Chapter XCII

CHEREMON

In those days it happened that a certain Cheremon fell away and was found dead sitting in a chair, with his work in his hands.

Chapter XCIII ANOTHER

There was another brother who was digging a well and was drowned in it.

Chapter XCIV ANOTHER

There was another travelling from Scete who died of thirst.

Chapter XCV STEPHEN, WHO LAPSED

We remember also Stephen who lapsed into disgraceful over-indulgence, and Eucarpus, Heron of Alexandria, Valens of Palestine and Ptolemy of Egypt, all of whom were in Scete.

At the same time we asked why it was that some who lived in solitude became mentally unbalanced while others lapsed into over-indulgence. They gave us the following answer, Paphnutius among them, a man well known for his great knowledge.

"Whatever happens falls into two categories. Either it is pleasing to God or else it happens with his permission. Whatever is done virtuously to the glory of God is pleasing to God. Whatever is damnable, dangerous and leads to a fall is done with God's permission. It is given to those who fall either because of their limited intelligence or because of their unfaithfulness. Those who live devoutly and think correctly cannot fall into disgrace or be deceived by demons. Those who make a show of attempting to be virtuous in the sight of other human beings, while living a defective life full of arrogant thoughts are the ones who fall. God allows this to happen for their own benefit, in that when they feel how much their life has changed because of their fall, they will correct their rule of life and act accordingly.

"Sometimes what is intended goes wrong because it is misdirected, as when excessive gifts are given to young people with an evil and corrupting end in

view, and even when the action seems morally justified, as in giving assistance to orphans or to monastic good works. For although it is a perfectly good thing to give alms to the sick, or the destitute, or the aged, it can be done grudgingly and sparingly. A good intention is thus translated into an unworthy act. Taking pity on the poor should always be done with joy and generosity.

"Many souls are given special gifts," he continued. "To some is given naturally pleasant personality, to others a capacity for asceticism, but they must be exercised disinterestedly and within the divine plan. If they do not ascribe their actions, their pleasant personality and their special gifts to God the giver of all good, but to their own free will and character and self-sufficiency, then they are abandoned by Providence, and fall into evil ways, falling victim to wickedness, depravity and disgrace.

"In this state of dereliction, through shame and humility they can somehow or other drive out little by little the arrogance which came upon them through doing what they thought was virtuous. They trust no longer in themselves, but by their own confession attribute all their benefits to God who is the giver of all things. There are those who are conceited, I say, carried away by their own pleasant personality. They don't ascribe to God their pleasant personality, nor the knowledge which comes with it, but think that it is either a natural gift or something which they have acquired by their own efforts. From them God withdraws the Angel who mediates the gift of providence.

"When this happens those who are obsessed with their own pleasant personality are overcome by the power of the adversary, and through their conceit fall into immoderate ways. Lack of moderation takes all credibility from anything they might say. Honest people reject any teaching that might come from such a source as they would a spring infested with leeches. And thus the Scripture is fulfilled which says, 'God says to the wicked "Why do you presume to talk about my justice or take my covenant in your mouth?"' (Psalms 50.16).

"Those who are imprisoned in vice are like various different kinds of springs. The gluttonous and winebibbers are like springs which are muddy; the greedy people always wanting more are like springs infested with frogs; the envious, who could be quite knowledgeable, are like springs where serpents drink. The light of reason is not always apparent in such people, so nobody wants to listen to them because their way of life is sour, their deeds have the smell of iniquity about them.

"David, taught by God, begs for three things, integrity, discipline and

knowledge (the reference is to Psalm 119, probably verses 33-35). Without integrity, knowledge is useless. But if anyone like this reforms his ways and renounces the cause of his fall, namely his arrogance, by cultivating humility and by taking full knowledge of what he has been doing, then he can be turned back to God. He will no longer set himself up as a critic of every one else, but will give thanks to God, and this knowledge of himself will be his witness. Spiritual speeches which lack honesty and moderation in equal measure are like chaff blowing in the wind, which look like grains of wheat but which have lost all power to nourish. The measure of every fall from grace, whether in speech or feelings or acts, is the measure of the arrogance that goes with it, and is caused by being abandoned by God, who yet has mercy on those who are abandoned. But even if the Lord acknowledges the pleasant personality of such people, when cleverness of speech is added to their lack of moderation, their pride makes demons of them all and they soil themselves by becoming self-opinionated.

"When you come across someone who is obviously perverse," these holy men and best of fathers went on to say, "but who have great powers of persuasion, remember the demon in Scripture who spoke to Christ, and also the text which says, 'The serpent is the most ingenious of all the beasts of the earth' (Genesis 3.1). But his ingenuity did him no good since there was no other virtue to go with it. It behoves a good and faithful servant then to think the thoughts given him by God, to speak according as he thinks, and to perform the things that he says. If his life does not agree with his words, he is like bread without salt, as Job says, which cannot be eaten (Job 6.6). If it is eaten it makes the eater sick. Eating bread without salt is like the taste of unprofitable and empty words which are not proved in good works. There are many aspects to disaster. Very often it is the occasion of hidden virtue being brought to light, like the virtue of Job to whom God said, 'Do not reject my judgments. Do not think that my answers have had any other purpose but to prove your righteousness (Job 40.8). You are known to me who know all things that are hidden and who search the depths of human thought (Job 34.21-22). Those who do not really know you suspect that you worshipped me simply because you were rich. It is for this reason that I have brought you to your present state. I have taken your riches away to show them the depth of your wisdom and how you walk in grace.'

"Paul also speaks of avoiding pride. For he was given over to misfortunes and buffetings, and cast down by all sorts of afflictions, as he says, 'I was given a

thorn in the flesh to buffet me lest I get conceited' (2Cor.12.7). Because of his miracles he could have taken things easy. With all the success in his dealings and the honour which he was accorded he could have succumbed to a diabolical and arrogant pride.

"There was a paralytic also, cast out because of his sins, to whom the Lord said, 'You have been made whole. Sin no more.' (John.5.14). Judas also fell because he loved money more than the word of life and hanged himself. (Acts.1.18). Esau also fell and lapsed into intemperance, in that he preferred a mess of pottage to his father's blessing. (Genesis.25.32). The blessed apostle Paul understood all these things. There were those of whom he said, 'They did not value the knowledge of God, so God gave them up to a reprobate mind to do things which are wrong.' (Romans 1.28). There were others of whom he said, 'They seemed to have a knowledge of God but their minds were corrupt and swollen with foolishness. They did not glorify God as God or give him thanks, so God gave them over to disgraceful passions' (Romans 1.28) From all this we can be certain that no one can fall into intemperance except he is abandoned by the providence of God. It is because of their negligence and carelessness that this has happened to those who have lapsed and fallen away.

Chapter XCVI

THE LIFE OF ABBA SOLOMON

I lived for forty years as a citizen of Antinoe in the Thebaid region and during that time I got to know all the monasteries there. About two thousand men lived in that country, working with their hands and striving spiritually. There were anchorites among them who lived in caves in the rock faces, among whom was Solomon, a most gentle and well ordered man, who lived for fifty years in his cave, supporting himself by the work of his hands. He learned the whole of the Sacred Scriptures by heart.

Chapter XCVII

THE LIFE OF ABBA DOROTHEUS

Dorotheus was a presbyter who lived in a cave, a man of blameless life and of great goodness. He was worthy of being ordained to the presbyterate, and ministered to the brethren in the caves. On one occasion Melania the younger,

granddaughter of Melania the great, whom I shall mention later, sent him five hundred solidi for him to share out among the brothers. He would only keep three of them, however, giving the rest to the anchorite Diocles, a man of the greatest perception, mentioned below.

"You are much wiser than I am, brother Diocles," he said, "and you can distribute these in a much more fair and faultless way than I could. You know better than I who deservedly needs help. These three solidi are enough for me."

Chapter XCVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA DIOCLES

This Diocles was educated at the Grammatica (i.e School of Rhetoric and Philosophy), and gave himself to the study of Philosophy, until at the age of twenty-eight, led by grace, he abandoned the liberal arts and turned to Christ and the philosophy of heaven. At thirty-five he went to a cave. He used to say to us that the mind of one whose thoughts depart from the contemplation of God becomes either demonic or bestial.

"How do you mean?" we asked him.

"The mind which departs from God," he replied, "of necessity is either captured by the demon of desire who drives you into lasciviousness, or by the malignant spirit of anger from which come all kinds of irrational impulses. Lasciviousness is bestial; anger is the movement of the devil."

"But how can a human mind be with God without intermission?" I asked.

"The soul is always with God whenever it is immersed in thoughts or deeds which are devoutly given to God's will," he replied.

Chapter XCIX

THE LIFE OF ABBA CAPITO

Near to him lived Capito who had been a robber. For fifty years he lived in his cave about four miles from the town of Antinoe, and never once departed from it even as far as the river Nile.

"I can't stand crowds," he said. "And up till now the common adversary has stood back from me."

Chapter C

THE LIFE OF AN ANCHORITE WHO WAS DECEIVED

Near them we also were aware of another anchorite who like them lived in a cave. He suffered from a sort of dreamlike frenzy of vainglory, feeding on air and chasing shadows. Anyone at all vulnerable to deception was easily deceived by him. And yet he kept a good bodily discipline, though perhaps that was just due to his age and circumstances, or even inspired by pride. It was however the vainglorious dissipation of his soul which corrupted him and eventually led to his abandoning of religious life.

Chapter CI

THE LIFE OF ABBA EPHRAEM, A DEACON

You have doubtless heard of Ephraem (in *Vitae Patrum*, Book I) who was a deacon in the church of Edessa (a Syrian city on the banks of the Euphrates). He was one of those who are worthy to be mentioned among the holy servants of Christ (died 373). After following diligently the way of the spirit without deviating from the right way, he was found worthy as a result of his theology of being given the gift of insight into natural things, a gift which leads to blessedness. He lived a life of quietness for many years building up those who came to him, until something occurred which made him leave his cell. For a great famine had struck the city of Edessa. Being full of compassion for those who were perishing from hunger he approached the rich people of the city. "Why do you not bring aid to all these human beings who are perishing," he asked, "instead of letting your wealth moulder away to the detriment of your own souls?"

"We don't know anyone we can trust, " they said in excusing themselves, "to distribute bread to the needy. They would all be interested only in profiteering."

"What is your opinion of me?" he asked. Now there was no doubt that he was genuinely regarded very highly by all.

"We know that you are a man of God," they said.

"If you have formed that opinion of me," he said, "trust me in this matter. See, I am offering myself to take care of looking after people."

They gave him money, and he built an enclosed place surrounded by a wall, provided three hundred beds, arranged for medical treatment to those who were ill, brought relief to the hungry, buried the dead, cured those for whom

there was still hope - in short from the money with which he was supplied he brought friendship and help in place of famine.

By the end of the year the crops were growing well again and everything returned to normal. So when there was nothing more for him to do, he went back to his cell. He died at the end of a month. God had given him in his last days this opportunity of crowning his life with glory. Besides, he left writings well worth studying which bear witness to his greatness.

Chapter CII

THE LIFE OF ABBA JULIAN

Someone in these parts told me that Julian was a man who practised very vigorously, who punished his flesh so much that he was just skin and bone. Towards the end of his life he was found worthy to receive the gift of being able to heal the sick.

Chapter CIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA INNOCENT

You have heard from many great people about Innocent the presbyter of Olivet. You will nonetheless hear more about him from me also, for I lived with him for three years and observed closely what might have escaped the notice of others. But indeed, whether it were I or they or ten other people it would be impossible to tell all the virtues of this man.

He was a transparently simple man. He used to have a high position in the court of the Emperor Constantius at the beginning of his reign. A married man, he renounced the world, even though he had a son called Paul, who served in the palace guards (*militabat inter domesticos*). This son committed fornication, and even though it was his own son Innocentius called down a curse upon him.

"Give him over into the power of a demon, O Lord," begged Innocentius, judging that it were better for him to have a demon to contend with rather than try to overcome his lust. And so it turned out. For right up to the present time he is in the Mount of Olives, waging war on and being harassed by a demon. And marvellous to relate, this father who heals others has had no pity on his own son who has been tormented all this time by a demon.

This Innocent was such a merciful person (I'm telling the truth, however much

you may think I am making it up), that it was often whispered about among the brethren that he was giving alms to the needy. He was indeed a simple and innocent person. He had been granted great powers against the demons. There was a paralytic young man possessed of a demon who was brought to us, and when I saw him I would have quite frankly discouraged his mother and the other people with him, as I thought he was beyond curing. But Innocent came along and saw her standing there, crying and shouting because of her son's appalling disability. This extraordinary man was deeply moved and shed tears. He took the young man with him into the chapel (martyrium) which he had built himself, in which were the relics of John the Baptist. He prayed with him from the third hour through to the ninth, and took the young man back to his mother, cured both of his paralysis and his demonic possession all in the same day. The illness had caused his body to be so twisted about that when he slobbered the spit ran down his back.

Here is another sign that he did. There was an old woman pasturing the sheep in fields near to Lazarius who came to him weeping because she had lost one of them.

"Show me the place where you lost it," he said to her, giving her his full attention. She led him to the place near Lazarius, where he stood and prayed. The young men who had actually killed the sheep earlier were whispering among themselves nearby, but none of them owned up to it while the holy man was praying. A crow suddenly flew down on to the stolen carcass which was hidden among some vines, snatched up a morsel from it and flew off. The blessed man noticed it and so found the slaughtered body, whereupon the youths flung themselves at his feet and confessed to having killed the sheep. They were compelled to pay up a fair price for the carcass, and were so fiercely punished that they never dared do such a thing again.

Chapter CIV

THE LIFE OF ABBA ADOLIUS

In Jerusalem I knew another person called Adolius who came from Tarsus. From the time when he first came to Jerusalem, he entered upon a way of life which was rather unusual. It was a new routine which he thought out for himself, not one which followed the multitude. It was such a superhuman way of living that even the wicked demons were terrified by his austerity, and were frightened of coming near him. It was almost as if you could think he was a

spirit and no man, such was his asceticism and vigilance. In Lent he ate only every fifth day, at other times every other day.

The extraordinary achievements due to his virtue were as follows. From Vespers until the time when the brothers met for prayers next day, he stood on the mount of Olives - that mount from which Jesus ascended into heaven - singing psalms, fasting and praying without intermission, without moving whether it rained or poured. At the accustomed time, he called the brothers to prayer by taking a mallet and knocking on their doors. At every part of the service he sang with them the psalms and one or two antiphons, prayed with them, and at last as day was approaching he retired to his cell. His clothing was often so wet that the brothers would divest him of them and give him others to wear. He rested until the third hour, then turned to his psalm singing again and concentrated on this until it was time for Vespers. This was the virtue shown by Adolius of Tarsus who lived out his life in Jerusalem and there entered into eternal rest and was buried.

Chapter CV

THE LIFE OF ABBA ABRAMIUS

There was a certain Egyptian called Abramius who lived a very hard and severe life in solitude. His mind became filled up with untimely delusions, so that he came into the church and started arguing with the presbyters.

"Christ himself has ordained me last night to the presbyterate," he said, "so take me into your fellowship."

The fathers took him out of his solitude into a more regular and ordinary sort of life, cured him of his pride, and led him to acknowledge his own weakness in being deceived by the demon of pride. By their holy prayers, he was restored to his former holiness of life.

Chapter CVI

THE LIFE OF ABBA ELPIDIUS

This Elpidius was a Cappadocian, and lived on Mount Luca, in the caves of the Amorites which had been built by those people fleeing from Joshua the son of Nun when he was laying waste the people of this foreign land. He was later honoured with the gift of the presbyterate to serve the monastery there. He was ordained by the excellent Timothy, a bishop of the Cappadocian

region.

Elpidius lived in a cave and gave evidence of such discipline in his way of life that he overshadowed everyone else. For twenty-five years he ate only on Saturdays and Sundays and stood singing the whole night through. As bees seek out their queen, so many others followed him and populated that mountain, though you would find among them many different ways of life. Elpidius (= "foot of God") lived up to his name on one occasion as a scorpion stung him when we were singing psalms with him one night. He lived with a sure hope and was willing to suffer for Christ's sake, so that he simply stamped on the scorpion without moving from where he stood. So great was his power of bearing pain that he took no account of the injury done him by the scorpion.

One day while still living in the mountain, one of the brothers gave him a bit of a twig, which the holy man stuck in the ground even though it was not the planting season. It grew so much and showed such vigorous life that it covered over the whole church.

Chapter CVII

THE LIFE OF ABBA AENESIUS

Along with this celebrated holy athlete of God was included the servant of God Aenesius, a man highly esteemed, and outstanding in his way of life.

Chapter CVIII

THE LIFE OF ABBA EUSTATHIUS

And his brother Eustathius was equal to him in honour, living out the battle of life with a keen and eager mind.

It was his example that Elpidius followed, punishing his body, ignoring the pain, so that his complete bone structure became damaged. In describing his virtues, his diligent disciples also recorded that for all of twenty-five years he never once looked toward the West, even though the mouth of his cave was situated on the top of the mountain. From the sixth hour when the sun was overhead, he never looked towards where it was going down into the West, and for twenty years, he never saw the stars which arise in the West. From the time that he went into the cave, this great patient athlete did not come down from the mountain until he was buried.

Such were the heavenly exploits of the victorious unconquered athlete Elpidius, who now rests in paradise along with many others like him.

Chapter CIX

THE LIFE OF ABBA SISINNIUS

There was a disciple of Elpidius called Sisinnius, a Cappadocian by race, a slave but a free man in faith. It is important for the glory of Christ to mention his origins, for it is Christ who exalts us from our origins, leading us to the truly blessed nobility which is indeed the Kingdom of Heaven. He spent a long time with the blessed Elpidius, a keen athlete in the way he trained himself in all the virtues. He learned the virtues of Elpidius for six or seven years, the fortitude of the way he laboured in his way of life, and then shut himself up in a tomb. He stayed there and prayed for three years, neither sitting down or lying down or going out. He was given power over the demons.

He has now gone back to his native land where he has been honoured with the gift of the presbyterate and has collected around him a company of both men and women. He bears witness to the virtue of developing the powers of endurance by the honesty of the way his life is lived, in that by practising strict continence he has expelled from himself both masculine avarice and feminine pliability, so fulfilling the Scripture, 'In Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free' (Galatians 3.28).

He was famed for his hospitality though possessing little, to the shame of the rich who shared little.

Chapter CX

THE LIFE OF ABBA GADDANA

I also knew an old Palestinian called Gaddana who for the whole of his life lived without a roof over his head near the river Jordan. When the Jews inspired by greed invaded with drawn sword the area around the Dead Sea, a great miracle was performed by this blessed hermit. For when a soldier lifted up his sword intending to kill Gaddana, the hand which held the sword withered and the soldier fell down insensible. Such was the protection given by God to the blessed Gaddana, which the blessed man enjoyed till the end of his life.

Chapter CXI

THE LIFE OF ABBA ELIAS

There was a highly respected monk called Elias living in a cave in the same area. His life was upright and above all religious. He lived his life in continence and prayer and had a ready welcome for all who came to him. One day several brothers arrived, making a stop with him on their journey, and he had run out of bread.

"I was very upset because I had no bread," he told us, swearing that what he had to say was true, "so I went into my cell in great perplexity of mind, wondering how I could possibly fulfil the duty of charity towards these arrivals, and I found that three loaves had just been put there, which I joyfully took and placed before them. Twenty of them satisfied their hunger and there was still one loaf left, which I found was enough for me for the next twenty-five days."

This was a gift from the Lord to the hospitable Elias, for whom the reward of his labours is laid up in the presence of the kindly Lord.

Chapter CXII

SABBATIUS

Sabbatius was a married man of Jericho, who was so friendly disposed towards monks that he would go the desert and the cells at night and leave outside every hermitage a portion of fruit and vegetables. This was all they needed, because those living this way of life in the Jordan ate no bread. This benefactor of celibate monks who saw to the filling of their larders came face to face with a lion one day when he was carrying some of the necessities of life to them. The lion had evil designs on him, an immense wild animal sent by the devil, the enemy of monks and their ministry, intent on destroying not only him but the source of the monks' food. He was about a mile away from where the monks lived when the lion saw him, stretched out his claws and threw him down. But he who bade the lions refrain from eating Daniel forbade this lion to devour this servant of those who served God, even though he was very hungry. He merely ate the donkey belonging to the man, and thus the donkey both bestowed life on him and satisfied the lion's hunger.

Chapter CXIII

THE LIFE OF THE PRESBYTER PHILOROMUS

We met the most devout presbyter and lover of God Philoromus in Galatia and stayed with him for a long time. He followed his way of life most strictly. He was the son of a slave woman though his father was free. But he gave such great and noble evidence of Christian virtue in his way of life that even the leading monks reckoned his life and the power of his virtues to be equal to that of the angels.

He renounced the world during the rule of that accursed Emperor Julian. Philoromos, that open-hearted Christian athlete, spoke his mind freely to that impious man, with the result that Julian ordered his servants to shave him and severely scourge him. He bore it bravely and magnanimously, and even giving thanks for it, as he himself told us.

He told us that to start off with he began a great battle against fornication and gluttony. Struggling against these tyrannous disorders he overcame them, like putting out a fierce fire with plenty of water, by striving for continence, by shutting himself up, by abstaining from meats and wheaten bread and all cooked dishes. He waged this war for eighteen years with great bravery and magnanimity, so that at the last, having conquered, he could sing a hymn of victory, 'I will praise you, O God, because you have sustained me and not allowed my enemies to triumph over me' (Psalms 30.1).

He persevered for forty years in the monastery, being attacked by the spirit of fornication from time to time.

"For thirty-two years," he told us, "I ate no fruit. But then I was attacked by a spirit of fearfulness, so that I daily felt afraid. So I enclosed myself for six years in a tomb, and by this means I won through, waging war through the power of endurance with the spirit who was endeavouring to enslave me. "

The blessed bishop Basil took a great interest in this outstanding man, admiring his austerity, his constancy, his diligent work. Up to the present day, aged eighty, he still keeps going at his weaving and his writing.

"From the time that I was brought into new life by water and the Spirit," this blessed man said, "right up to the present day, I have never eaten bread at someone else's expense, but only what I have provided with my own hands. And as God is my witness, I tell you I have given two hundred and fifty solidi out of my earnings to those handicapped and disabled who have not done anyone else any injury. I have journeyed on foot to Rome in order to pray at

the shrine of the martyrs SS. Peter and Paul and have even got as far as Alexandria in fulfilment of a vow to venerate St. Mark. I have also been found worthy of twice being able to go to Jerusalem on my own two feet to venerate the holy places and I have paid the expenses myself.

"I do not remember," he said, to give us something to benefit from him by, "ever having departed from God in my soul."

Such were the struggles of the blessed Philoromus in which he won an unblemished victory, and to him is given the reward of his blessed labours, a crown of undying glory.

Chapter CXIV

THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED SEVERIANUS AND HIS WIFE

In Ancyra Galatia it so happened that I was able to speak with a certain nobleman called Severianus and his wife, although I did not have any great intimacy with them. They placed all their good hope in a future life, to the disappointment of their children. They had four sons and two daughters, but they disbursed all the revenues of their estates among the needy, making no settlement upon any of them except in marriage settlements.

"It will all be yours after we are dead," they said to the other children. "For as long as we are alive we shall save our surplus earnings and distribute them to churches, monasteries, guestmasters and to anyone who is needy. Their prayers will bring the reward of eternal life to us and you and our family in exchange for the labours of this present time."

They also displayed notable virtue during a time of great famine when everyone was feeling hungry, for they opened up their storehouses on many of their estates and gave to the poor, with the result that many who were then heretics came back to the true faith. It was their otherwise inexplicable kindness which persuaded heretics to come back into agreement with the true faith, giving thanks to God for their simplicity and immense generosity.

They had another admirable practice. What they wore was very old and unpretentious, they were sparing in what they ate to a degree almost impossible to describe. They were simply content with enough necessary to support life. A wonderful devotion towards God went along with this. They spent most of their time in the country, avoiding the city and its vices, lest the excitement and confusion of city life draw them away from a truly joyful life and they should fall away from the commandments of God. All the good

deeds and upright life of these blessed people helped them to keep their eyes fixed on the eternal rewards prepared for them by the glory of God.

Chapter CXV

THE LIFE OF THE MONK ELEEMON

We met in this country a monk who had refused the offer of the presbyterate. He had decided this after a short spell of military service. After twenty years of living as a monk he began a different life in the service of the very holy bishop of that area. He was a kind and merciful person and he used to go about the city helping not only the needy but everyone, the guards, the hospitals, the beggars, rich and poor. He did good to everyone. If the rich were careless and lacking in pity, he spoke to them of mercy. He provided what was necessary for the needy. He reconciled those who were quarrelling. He clothed the naked. He supplied medicines to cure the sick.

As is usual in all big cities there was always a crowd of sick and disabled people on the steps of the church begging for their daily bread. Some of them were married, some not. It happened one day that the wife of one of them began to give birth - and it was wintertime. She began to cry out as she underwent intolerable pain, and the blessed man heard her as he was praying in the church. He immediately abandoned his accustomed prayers, went outside and saw what was happening. There seemed to be no one about who was able to help in this emergency so it was he who took upon himself the function of a midwife, not minding at all about the messiness of women in labour. In this most profound act of kindness he displayed as little concern as if he had been a woman.

The clothes that he wore could not have cost more than one obol. What he spent on food was even less. He owned hardly a single book - acts of mercy kept him away from reading. If any of the brothers gave him a book he promptly sold it and gave the money to the poor.

"Why are you selling this book?" some people would ask him.

"How could I possibly convince my master that I have thoroughly learned his teaching except by using his very teaching to put it into practice?" he would reply. He continued acting in this manner to such an extent that he left an undying memory of his name in the whole region round about. He is now given eternal joy in the kingdom of heaven, receiving a worthy reward for his blessed labours. He fed the hungry and clothed the naked and now enjoys all

manner of delights as a reward for his good works.

Chapter CXVI

THE LIFE OF ABBA BISARION

There was a compassionate old man living in poverty called Bisarion who once came into a certain town and saw a naked beggar lying there dead, while he himself was wearing a tunic in the gospel tradition and a small cloak. He possessed nothing else besides this necessary covering and a small gospel which he carried under his arm. This reminded him of the danger of not being always obedient to the voice of God and also gave him advice on how to act. So admirable was this man's life, more beautiful than any other, that he was like an earthly angel, pursuing a really heavenly path.

When he saw the dead body, he immediately took off his cloak and spread it over him. After going on a little further he saw a beggar, completely naked. He stopped and reasoned thus with himself:

"Here am I who have renounced the world and yet I still have clothes to my back, yet this my brother is stiff with cold. If I were to see him die, I would be guilty of my neighbour's death. What should I do? Take off my tunic and divide it so as to give him half? Or rather give it whole to this person created in the image of God? But what use would it be to either of us cut in half? Besides," he kept on arguing, "is any one ever condemned for doing more than the commandments require?"

Straightaway this generous athlete briskly beckoned the beggar into a porchway and sent him off clothed while he himself remained there bare, covering himself with his hands and squatting down with bended knees, keeping nothing save the gospel under his arm which made him rich. He was providentially recognised by an irenarch [a sort of local peacekeeper or constable], passing by on his own business.

"Look there," he said to his companion. "Isn't that abba Bisarion?"

"Indeed it is" was the reply. The irenarch got down from his horse.

"Who has stripped you naked?" he asked.

"This," he replied, taking the gospel out from under his arm.

The irenarch took off his own cloak and clothed this perfect soldier of Christ in it. He accepted it as a sort of little monastic habit and quietly slipped away from view, unwilling to be praised by someone who had brought his way of life out into the open, but looking rather for that honour which comes from

keeping good deeds secret.

Having fulfilled exactly all the gospel precepts, and with no worldly considerations any longer in his mind, he yet went on to an even more perfect obedience to the demands of God. For having seen a poor person in passing through the forum he thought for a little while and then went and sold his gospel. A few days later his disciple Dulas was with him and asked, "Abba, what have you done with your little gospel?"

The old man calmly replied with a beautiful saying, apt and deeply wise.

"Don't look so sad, brother," he said, "for I do believe that I have sold it in obedience to that word which bids me 'sell what you have and give to the poor'". (Mark 10.21, Luke 18.22)

There are many other things done by this great and virtuous father, with whom may we also be found worthy to have a share through Christ's grace. Amen

Chapter CXVII

THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED MELANIA

I have thought it necessary to mention in this book some strong and virtuous women to whom God has given rewards equal to those of the men who have lived virtuously, and who have been awarded the crown due to all those who please him. Their gentleness and tenderness should not be used as an excuse for labelling them as unenterprising, or lacking in the strength needed for the battle to develop a virtuous and honourable life. And I met many pious and religious women, and even more virgins and widows of great virtue, among whom was the most blessed Melania of Rome, the daughter of the consul Marcellus, and the wife of a man in a very important position whose name I cannot remember.

When she was widowed at the age of twenty-two, she was found worthy of being filled with the love of God. She found someone who would take care of her children, and without telling anyone (for this was forbidden at that time under the Emperor Valens), took with her what luggage she could and took ship for Alexandria, together with some servants and maids. There she realised her assets (*suas res vendidisset*) into small gold pieces (*aurum minutum*) and went into Mount Nitria where she met the holy fathers Pambo, Arsisius, Serapion the great, Paphnutius of Scete, bishop Isodore the Confessor of Hermipolis, and Dioscuros. She travelled around among them for about six months, visiting all the holy people in the desert.

Afterwards Augustus of Alexandria exiled to Diocaesarea in Palestine Isidore, Pissimius, Adelphius, Paphnutius, Pambo, Ammonius 'Parotius' or 'one-eared', together with twelve bishops, presbyters, clerics and anchorites to the number of a hundred and twenty-six. Melania followed them there, and defrayed out of her own money the expense of supplying the necessities of them all. I visited the holy Pissinius, Isidore, Paphnutius and Ammonius, and they told me that she was then prohibited from exercising this ministry, but she bravely dressed herself as a slave and continued to take some food to one of them. When the consul of Palestine heard of this, he arrested her in the hope of terrorising her and filling his own purse. He threw her into prison, unaware that she was a free woman. But she soon disabused him of this idea. "I am the daughter of Marcellus and was married to a man in a very important position," she said, "but I am now the handmaid of Christ. Don't be misled by the way I am dressed; I am perfectly at liberty to dress otherwise should I so wish. You can't terrorise me or take any of my money without unwittingly getting yourself into real trouble, which is why I am telling you who I am." Against stupid men it is sometimes necessary to act with a strong mind, like a hound or a bird of prey, and swoop down on their self importance. The judge believed her and apologised most obsequiously, and gave orders that she be allowed to visit the holy men without any hindrance.

Chapter CXVIII

THE LIFE OF THE PRESBYTER RUFFINUS

When the exiles were allowed back home, Melania built a monastery in Jerusalem where she lived for twenty-seven years with a convent of fifty virgins.

With her was the most noble and capable Ruffinus who was of a like mind with her. He was from Aquileia in Italy and was later found worthy of being ordained presbyter. You could not have found a more learned or more gentle man anywhere. So for twenty-seven years, they welcomed all those coming to Jerusalem on pilgrimage (*voti causa*, 'for the sake of a vow'), bishops, monks, virgins, married people, private citizens and those in public life, and they provided for them all at their own expense. They also took care of about four hundred men leading a monastic life who were followers of the schismatic Paul [of Samosata, a notable heretic of that time], and also heretics among the Pneumatomachi who played down the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They

persuaded them to come back into the Church. Without causing any offence to anybody, they transformed the lot of the local clergy by gifts of food, and indeed brought help to everyone from whatever part of the world they came. I have already talked briefly above about the wonderful holy woman Melania. I would also add a few words about her other gifts, especially what I can remember of her virtues. I could not begin to describe the generosity of this most religious woman. By her labours she has woven a blessed garment of incorruptibility, and by her almsgiving an unfading crown of glory for her own head, which she now wears since departing to the Lord, faithful to the end. Time fails me to say what I know, as I begin to tell of the deeds of this blessed woman.

Completely filled with love of God she expended so much material goods on the needy that I think that the bonfire could not be constructed big enough to consume them all. It is not only I who can say this but everyone from Persia to Britain and the distant isles. From East to West, from North to South, all benefited from the generous almsgiving of this immortal woman. For thirty-seven years she carried out this work of hospitality, using her money to help with the expenses of churches, monasteries, guesthouses and prisons. Let me say once and for all she never failed to share some portion of her wealth with everyone who came to her. She was supported by her family, especially her son, and by her stewards who administered her income as if they were providing oil to produce a shining light. Indeed, by lighting a flame of such burning brilliance she illuminated everyone by the generosity of her almsgiving.

And even as she persevered in her work of hospitality, it was not only an earthly reputation she was seeking. Not even the needs of her son could distract her from her love of solitude. Indeed, she did not make any distinction between the needs of her only son and her love of Christ. By her prayers, this young man became deeply imbued with Christian teaching which showed itself in the exemplary way he lived his life. He made a brilliant and distinguished marriage and was showered with worldly honours. He had two sons who were a living witness to how good his marriage was.

Many years later news came to her that a granddaughter of hers in Rome had married but wished to renounce the world in order to avoid falling into false teaching or heresies or an evil life. Although an old woman of sixty, she immediately took ship from Caesarea and after twenty days arrived at Rome. There she converted to Christ her niece Avita's husband Aproniamus, and

initiated him into the catechumenate. He was a gentilis (= member of the same gens or clan), a most blessed and lovely man of the highest reputation. She persuaded them to live in continence. She persuaded her granddaughter Melania and her husband Pinianus likewise, together with her daughter-in-law Albina to sell all they had and leave Rome with her and enter the haven of a tranquil and virtuous life. This plunged her into a bitterly fierce controversy with the order of Senators and their wives who were totally against the idea of anyone giving up to others their family shrines.

"My children," the handmaid of the Lord then said, "it is written that the last days will be upon us in forty years time. Why should you cheerfully want to stay any longer amidst the vanities of this life? The days of the Antichrist may soon be upon us when you will no longer be able to enjoy your possessions or the customs of your ancestors."

These words freed their minds and she was able to lead them into a monastic life. She gave a course of instruction to the younger son, Publicola, and took him to Sicily. She sold the rest of her possessions and took the money with her to Jerusalem, where she shared it all out. After forty days, she died serenely in a good old age. Her memory is venerated for the abundance of the legacy which she left to the monastery at Jerusalem and its upkeep.

After all those whom Melania had introduced to the catechumenate had left Rome a sudden barbarian attack fell upon the city, as had been prophesied. The bronze statues were ripped out of the forum, which was defiled by all manner of barbarian degradation. The Rome which for twelve hundred years had been the most beautiful and sought after of cities lay in ruins. It was a desert. As the Sibyl had said, it was now no longer Rome but Ru-me, that is, a village. Then all those who, without very much hesitation, had joined the catechumenate praised their God who had drawn them from unbelief into a changed life. Whereas all the other families were reduced to slavery, their family alone were saved as a sacrifice to the Lord because of the zeal of the blessed Melania. Along with those who turned with them towards salvation, they were protected from the punishment which fell upon the others.

Chapter CXIX

THE LIFE OF MELANIA THE YOUNGER

Since I have promised to tell the story of Melania's granddaughter, I must redeem my promise. It would not be right to have mentioned the life of a

younger Melania and pass over in silence the great virtues of this granddaughter of Melania the great, who surpassed many prudent and proficient people much older than herself.

Her parents then gave her in marriage without her consent to one of the leading men in the city of Rome, when she was still very young in years but old in piety and wisdom. Tales of her grandmother had so inspired her that she had not really wanted to get married at all. She gave birth to two sons but they both died. This so turned her against marriage that she complained to her husband, Pinianus the son of Severus.

"I know you are my lord and my whole life lies in your power, but if you want to continue living with me let it be in continence. As a young man you may find that hard to bear, but you have all my property for your own use. Just leave my body free that I may fulfil the longing which God has given me to be the inheritor of the virtue given by God to my grandmother, whose name I bear. If God has wished us to continue living in this world and enjoy the things of this world he would not have taken away our sons so prematurely."

They argued about this for a long time, until God at last had pity on the young man and inspired him with a religious eagerness to turn his back on all the material goods of this world. Thus was fulfilled what was written by the Apostle, 'Wife, how do you know that you won't save your husband?' (1 Cor.7.16).

She had been married at the age of thirteen and had lived with him for seven years, so she was twenty when she renounced the world. The first thing she did was to dedicate all her silken outer garments to the service of the altar (which is what the venerable Olympias did - see Chapter CXLIV). The rest of her clothing she cut up to make various other pieces of church linen. Her silver and gold she entrusted to the care of a certain Paul who was a presbyter-monk of Dalmatia. He took it by sea to the East, distributing ten thousand solidi to Egypt and the Thebaid, ten thousand to Antioch and the regions roundabout, fifteen thousand to Palestine. She gave money in person to churches in the West, and also to monasteries, guesthouses and the poor. She freed eight thousand of her slaves if they so desired; the rest who did not want freedom she left with her brother. She distributed the proceeds of the sale of her possessions in Spain, Aquitania, Tarraconensis and Gaul, but kept what she owned in Sicily, Campania and Africa in order to help monasteries and the needy. These are the wise things that Melania the younger did first of all. Her attitude towards money was one of great maturity.

The way of life she developed was as follows: She ate only every second day, though at the beginning it was only every fifth day. She was the means of bringing many of her maids into the way of salvation, turning them into athletes of God. She kindled a divine ardour in many of her relations, so that they sought God in the same religious way as she did. Such was the life of Melania the younger, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter CXX ALBINA

Melania had her mother Albina with her who lived in much the same sort of way. She also had given away her own money. They lived in the country, sometimes in Sicily, sometimes in Campania, with fifteen eunuchs, virgins and maids.

Chapter CXXI PINIANUS

Pinianus likewise, her former husband, is now of one mind with her in striving to acquire the virtues. He has thirty monks with him and studies the Holy Scriptures. He works in the garden as well as giving conferences. These monks honoured us greatly when we came to Rome to visit blessed John the bishop, giving us hospitality, providing us with food for our journey, and offering a picture of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the way this best kind of life is lived.

Chapter CXXII PAMMACHIUS

One of his relations was a man of the proconsular class called Pammachius, who after renouncing the world lived this best of lives. He gave part of his wealth away while still alive, and at his death left the rest to the poor.

Chapter CXXIII MACARIUS

There was another called Macarius, formerly Vicarius.

Chapter CXXIV CONSTANTIUS

Constantius also, who had been assistant to the prefects of Italy, was one of these eminent and learned men, who achieved the heights of piety and religion. I believe they are still at present alive, living the best kind of life imaginable, looking for the life of bliss and the avoidance of destruction.

Chapter CXXV PAULA OF ROME

Paula of Rome was one of this company, the mother of Toxotius and the wife of N....She was very highly advanced in a spiritual way of life, but Jerome of Dalmatia was a great hindrance to her. For she could have been a leader over many, not to say everyone, as she was very skilled and knowledgeable about leading the life of virtue. But for sheer envy Jerome prevented her, drawing her into his own sphere of influence.

Chapter CXXVI EUSTOCHIUM

Her daughter Eustochium also lives the life. I have not met her but she is said to be a most chaste woman with a convent of fifty virgins.

Chapter CXXVII VENEREA

I did meet Venerea, however, the daughter of Ballomecus of the imperial court. She gave away enough to break the back of a camel and so freed herself from the wounds which can be caused by material goods.

Chapter CXXVIII THEODORA

Theodora, the daughter of a tribune was another. She gave away so much of her possessions that when she died she was receiving alms, not giving them.

Chapter CXXIX

USIA

In the monastery of Hesycha, near the sea, I met a woman called Usia, who had lived an exemplary life for a very long time.

Chapter CXXX

ADOLIA

Her sister Adolia also lived a life of virtue, not in order to demonstrate the dignity of such a life, but to demonstrate with the exercise of all her strength that she lived in zeal for God.

Chapter CXXXI

BASIANILLA

I also knew Basianilla, the daughter of an army officer called Candianus. She sought after acquiring the virtues with a devout and eager mind, battling keenly from day to day.

Chapter CXXXII

PHOTINA

Photina was an exemplary virgin, the daughter of Theoctistus, a presbyter in Laodicea.

Chapter CXXXIII

ASELLA

In Rome I also met Asella, a most exemplary virgin of God, who lived to an unblemished and gentle old age in the monastery. She also conducted a school where I met several men and women whom she had recently inducted into the catechumenate.

Chapter CXXXIV

AVITA

I met also the blessed Avita, deserving of God, and also her husband Apronianus and daughter Eunonia. In all things they were pleasing to God, having been openly converted from a careless and voluptuous life to a life which was exemplary and continent. It was granted to them to fall asleep in Christ freed from all sin, having battled their way to perfection in unremitting struggles, held in precious memory by those from whom they have departed.

Chapter CXXXV

MAGNA

In the country of Ancyra there were many other virgins, up to about ten thousand of them, who lived disciplined lives and fought to develop all the virtues, women who were famous and well known everywhere for their ascetic customs, and the zeal with which they waged the heavenly battle. Among them all, the crown of devotion was held by Magna, a woman of probity and integrity.

I am not sure whether to class her as a virgin or a widow, for after her mother forcibly joined her to a husband, she contrived to avoid violation and retain her virginity intact, so her family says. She would put her husband off with various excuses for delay, and plead various bodily infirmities. Her husband died not very long into the marriage and left her the sole heir. She offered herself to God entirely, exchanging the concerns of this world for the concerns of God, and this she did for the rest of her life. Justice was her watchword in ruling her household, taking great care to order all things with due orderliness. She was very strict in her dealings with the community, so that even the most highly esteemed bishops stood in awe of her outstanding religious devotion. She possessed far more material goods than were necessary, but scorned them by living in poverty. Her surplus wealth she entrusted to stewards who distributed alms to monasteries, hostels for the homeless (ptochotrophiiis, those who care for beggars), guesthouses, churches, the poor, travellers, bishops, orphans, widows and anyone in need. She never ceased to nourish a hidden life of devotion both in herself and in her faithful slaves, attending church without fail, especially in the night vigils, conducting herself virtuously in everything for the hope she had of the true eternal life.

Chapter CXXXVI

THE VIRGIN WHO SHELTERED BISHOP ATHANASIUS.

I happened to come across this virgin in Alexandria when she was about seventy years old. All the local clergy could testify to the fact that when she was a very attractive young girl of about twenty, anyone seeking to be celibate kept away from her, because she was so beautiful that people might have suspected there was something going on.

Now at that time, the Arians were stirring up trouble for Athanasius the bishop of Alexandria. They not only slandered him but also accused him of various wicked crimes before Eusebius, who was then the governor under the emperor Constantius. He knew how biased that court could be in its judgment and also how useless it would be to try and escape from it by hiding with relations or friends or fellow-clergy or household slaves. When the officers of the governor suddenly appeared at the bishop's house looking for him in the middle of the night, he put on slaves' clothing and fled to no one else but this same virgin. She was naturally astonished and very frightened.

"I am being accused of terrible crimes by the Arians," said Athanasius, "and I have decided to fly rather than be publicly condemned and drag into the same condemnation anyone who might have sheltered me. God has revealed to me this night that I cannot possibly be safe with anyone else except you."

Being totally on the Lord's side, her fear was cast out and exchanged for joy. With willing and eager heart, she concealed that holy bishop for six years, for as long as Constantius lived. She washed his feet and emptied his chamber pot and provided for all his needs, making sure that he had plenty of books. For all those six years nobody in Alexandria knew where that blessed bishop was. When he heard the news that the emperor Constantius was dead, he dressed himself in his accustomed vestments and appeared in church one night. All who saw him were overcome with amazement, as if they were looking at someone who had risen from the dead. His friends were all asking him about the hiding place that nobody knew of or had been able to find.

"I did not flee to any of you," the blessed Athanasius said to his friends and relations, "so that you would truly be able to swear to your own ignorance in the event of your being interrogated. Instead, I sought refuge with one upon whom no suspicion could possibly rest, because of her beauty and youth. Two good things have resulted, one of which is her own salvation. For I have been able to give her some guidance, as well as providing for my own reputation and security."

Chapter CXXXVII

THE LIFE OF AMMA TALIDA

In the state of Antioch there was a monastery of twelve women, among whom I met Amma Talida who had been living the life for eighty years, so her sisters told me. There were sixty younger women with her who all held her in such great respect that there was no key to the main gate as there was in other monasteries. They were held there simply by love.

When I went in to see her and sat down, she came in and sat down beside me. She was so liberated from any kind of emotional instability that with great freedom and trustfulness she even put her hand on my shoulder.

Chapter CXXXVIII

THE LIFE OF AMMA TAOR

There was a disciple of Talida's in this monastery called Taor, who had been there for thirty years, so those who knew her told me. She would never wear new clothes, or a cloak or shoes.

"I don't need them," she would say. "That way no one can compel me to go out."

So when everyone else went to church on Sunday for Communion she stayed at home dressed in rags, hard at work. She was so dazzlingly attractive that even the most resolute might easily have been led astray by her beauty had she not had such a marvellous gift of self-denial that she was able in all honesty to turn away lustful eyes into reverence and respect.

Chapter CXXXIX

THE VIRGIN WHO RENOUNCED THE WORLD

There was another virgin who lived near me, following a strict religious rule, but whose face I never had seen. They say that she had never been outside since she first began this kind of life. When she had lived with her own mother for sixty years like this, the time came for her to leave this world. She saw in a vision Colluthus who had been named a martyr and who used to live locally.

"Today you are to go to the Lord," he said, "and you will see all the Saints."

Come then, and dine today with us in the martyrs' chapel."

Next morning when she awoke and got dressed, she packed some bread and olives and a few herbs into a basket and went out for the first time in all those years. She went into the chapel and prayed all by herself the whole time up until the ninth hour when she sat down and prayed directly to the martyr.

"Bless this food, O holy Colluthus" she asked, "and guide me along the way by your prayers."

After she had eaten her food and prayed for some time more, she went home at about sunset and handed to her mother her book on the prophet Amos by Clement Stromoteus.

"See that the exiled bishop gets this," she said, "and pray for me, for today I go to my Lord."

She died that same night. She had not suffered a long illness, her reason was unimpaired. She prepared for her burial herself and commended her spirit into the hands of God.

Chapter CXL

A VIRGIN WHO LAPSED AND DID PENANCE.

There was a certain virgin who had lived the disciplined life with two others for nine or ten years when she was led astray by one of the cantors and began a shameful affair with him. She conceived and gave birth to a child, with deepest compunction in her soul and the most intense hatred for him who had deceived her. She imposed a most severe penance on herself, being willing to die from hunger should she persevere in it.

"O almighty God," she prayed in tears, "you who bear all our sins and the infinite wickedness of the whole world, who do not will the death of sinners or those who fall into ruin (Ezekiel 33.11), but have mercy on every creature, it is your will that all should be saved (1 Tim.2.4). If it is your will that I who am perishing should be saved, pour out on me your loving kindness and show me your wonderful works. Command that this fruit of my iniquity be taken away and gathered up. It was conceived in lust and born in sin. This all makes me want either to hang myself or throw myself over a cliff."

Her prayer was heard and answered, for the child she bore died not long afterwards. Ever since that time she had nothing to do with the man who enslaved her, but with great determination gave herself totally to maintaining her chastity. For the next thirty years, she dedicated herself to caring for the

sick, the lame and the wounded, making such acceptable reparation to God that it was revealed to a certain presbyter that she was more pleasing to God in her penitence than ever she had been in her virginity.

I write this so that we do not condemn those who have grievously sinned and sincerely do penance from the heart. This blessed woman was one who forced herself to pour out her heart to the Lord in humility of life, and she is not least among those constrained by penitence.

Chapter CXLI

THE DAUGHTER OF A PRESBYTER WHO FALSELY ACCUSED A LECTOR (A MINOR CLERICAL ORDER), AND THE LECTOR EUSTATHIUS

There was a presbyter's daughter in Caesarea of Palestine who fell from grace and was urged by her seducer to implicate a certain lector. She was persuaded, and did put the blame on him, for when she was questioned by her father about her swelling waistline she named Eustathius. The presbyter was very upset and took the matter to the bishop, who, upon hearing this, summoned the lector to appear before a council of the priests. Questioned about the matter by the bishop the lector would not confess, for what could he say seeing that he had not done anything?

"You unfortunate and unclean person," said the bishop, in a distressed and stern tone of voice. "Won't you confess your fault?"

"Oh, please," replied the lector. "I've told you how it is. I have had nothing to do with the matter. I am totally free of blame. This thing had never even entered my head. But if you want to hear me tell a lie, then yes, I did it."

Hearing this, the bishop deposed him from the office of lector.

"My lord bishop," he said, falling at his feet, "seeing that you think I am guilty, in spite of what I have said, I am now stripped of my ecclesiastical position, and unworthy to be one of your holiness's clerics. Order that she be given to me as a wife from now on, for I am no longer a cleric any more than she is a virgin."

When the bishop and the presbyter heard this, the father handed the girl over to the lector, trusting that the young man was kindly affectioned towards her, and that in any case it would be impossible to keep them apart. Accepting her from the bishop and her father, he comforted her, led her away and took her to a monastery of women. He begged the one in charge of this brotherhood to

care for her until she gave birth.

Having left her in the monastery, the lector went away and shut himself in a primitive cell, taking upon himself a life of the greatest asceticism, approaching the Lord with a contrite heart and with many tears and groans. "You know my deeds, O Lord," he prayed. "You know everything. Nothing is hidden from you. There is no secret place where anyone may hide from your all-seeing power. You see all things before they even happen. You alone see into the depths of the mind. Every mental idea is discerned by you as if open to view. And since you know all hearts exactly, you judge justly. You bring help to those who are unjustly condemned. You cannot be wrong. You exonerate those who are oppressed by slander. Injustice is abhorrent to you. Yours is every weight going into the scales of justice, for light unapproachable is yours for ever, and every human deed is done in your sight. Just and unchangeable judgment belongs to you. Pronounce therefore your judgment on me."

As the young man went on praying purposefully and fasting diligently the young woman's birth pangs began. The just judgment of God began at that very hour, for that slanderer suffered the most bitter and intolerable pains, huge groan after groan, unspeakable birth pangs. Terrible visions of the punishments of hell beset this miserable wretch, and still the infant because of its great size would not come forth from the womb.

The first day and the second day came and went and still she suffered unbearable pains. The third day and the fourth day followed and her pains were more grievous than many births put together. The fifth, sixth and seventh were darker still, and the unhappy woman plumbed the depths of misery. In all this time she had eaten nothing and not had a moment's sleep. But after the hard heart of this false accuser had been so grievously given up to such severe torments and groans of agony, after all that, she was at last conquered by God. Into the midst of her groaning she brought to light things which had been hidden and confessed.

"Alas, what a wretch I am!" she sadly exclaimed. "I have brought myself into grievous danger of perishing. I have committed two serious sins, not only fornication but also slander. To the loss of my virginity, I have added defamation of character. It was somebody else who led me into sin, but I accused the lector."

Hearing this, the virgins of the monastery immediately told her father. But he was frightened of being implicated in the slander, and was reluctant to believe

what was being told him, so did nothing for two days. Meanwhile the wretched woman continued to be afflicted with grievous pains, hovering between life and death. While he did nothing, the eighth and ninth days struck her down into the deep darkness of unrelieved semi-consciousness. The convent realised she had stopped crying, and hastened to tell the bishop that this was now the ninth day and that she had confessed to accusing the lector unjustly, and that she was unable to give birth as a punishment for her calumny.

When the bishop had heard what the virgins had to say he sent two deacons to the lector to tell him everything and beg for his prayers that the miserable woman might be released from her plight. But the lector gave no answer and would not even open the door. From the day that he had gone into this cell he had not ventured out, but had carried on with his regular routine of fasting, and pouring out his prayers to God.

The father then changed his mind and took pity on his daughter. He went to the bishop and asked that prayers be said for her in church. But even when prayers had been said to the Lord by everyone she still was not released from her plight. The prayers to God of him who had been calumniated were preventing the prayers of the others from being heard. So the bishop himself went to the lector's cell, but he still would not come out. After the bishop had been outside for some time, with the lector inside, he ordered the door to be taken off. He went in and found the young man prostrate on the floor, praying without ceasing.

"Brother Eustathius, lector," the bishop said, "by the providence of God the calumny against you has been revealed and your prayers have been heard. Now have pity on her who sinned against you and who is suffering torments worse than being whipped. Have pity on the wretched woman. Rise up and loose what you have bound. She is suffering because of your prayers. Beg the Lord to allow her to give birth."

The lector and the bishop prayed fervently together and at once the poor woman was freed from her plight. The child was born. They all prayed that her sin should be forgiven through the prayers of that righteous man, whom from then on they famously held in as much honour as they would a martyr. Freed from the cloud hanging over him he attained to the highest possible level of the virtuous life which he had begun, so that he was found worthy of being granted spiritual gifts.

We have written about these things lest anyone else who slanders should be

embroiled in the snares of the enemy and suffer intolerable bodily pains such as I have described that befell this false accuser. Even after having been liberated from the body there is the danger of the pains of eternal torment from which there can be no respite. For God has nothing but anger for anyone who slanders. But let him who is unjustly accused bear it calmly and charitably, praying that all will be revealed and that God's judgment will be just, exactly like Eustathius who was crowned by Christ. Such a man is to be praised and had in honour and given an eternal crown. Let us also learn from this the unconquerable power of prayer, strengthening the faithful, bringing mercy to sinners, moving and turning the creator of all, crowning those who act righteously, and granting the kingdom of heaven to those who persevere.

Chapter CXLII

THE LIFE OF HOLY SILVANIA

At that time it happened that when we were sailing from Aelia in Egypt we had with us the blessed virgin Silvania, the sister of Ruffinus, the former governor.

Chapter CXLIII

IUBINUS

We also had with us Iubinus, at that time a deacon, but now the devout and learned bishop of the church in Ascalon. The heat was terribly severe, and when we went ashore at Pelusius, it so happened that Iubinus took a basin, washed his hands and feet in very cold water, spread his cloak on the ground and lay down. When Silvania noticed this, like a good mother correcting her own son, she admonished Iubinus for his softness.

"What are you thinking of," she said, "to pamper your miserable flesh like this, at your age, when the blood still courses freely in your veins? Are you not frightened of being condemned for this? Believe me, believe me, I am sixty years old, and apart from washing my hands before Communion, no water has touched my feet or my face or any part of my body, even when I have been ill. Even when urged by the doctor to take a bath, I have not allowed my mind to give in to the flesh. Nor have I ever used soft chairs or been carried in a litter."

She was very learned, filled with such a love of learning that she would burn

the midnight oil reading all the commentaries of the ancient writers, all of Origen's three hundred thousand lines, Gregory, Stephen, Pierus and Basil, two hundred and fifty thousand lines of other famous men of outstanding virtue. She did not merely skim lightly through them, but devoured each book carefully seven or eight times, in order to be carried away on high by the grace of their words, in good hope of becoming like a spiritual bird flying away to Christ and receiving from him everlasting rewards.

Chapter CXLIV OLYMPIAS

Olympias followed in Silvanus's footsteps by seeking after all the divine virtues of the spiritual life. She was someone to be revered for her integrity. With steadfast zeal she kept to the paths which lead to heaven, following the precepts of the divine Scriptures in everything.

According to the flesh, she was the daughter of a nobleman (comes) called Seleucus, but according to the spirit a true daughter of God. Her grandfather was Ablavius, one of the governing classes (praefecti), and for a few days she was married to Nebridius, one of the governing class of the city of Constantinople, although to tell the truth she was the wife of nobody. She is said to have slept alone as a virgin - effectively living with only the divine word as companion. Her husband was a completely humble man who sympathised with her and provided her with all her needs.

She shared her immense wealth with everyone, completely indiscriminating about whom she might help. Town, country or desert - no one escaped the generosity of this famous virgin. She helped build churches in place of shrines where sacrifices were made; she supported monasteries and coenobia and pilgrim hospices and guardhouses and exiles - in a word, she gave alms to all the corners of the earth.

[A 'monastery' might consist of only one cell or many. A 'coenobium' was a community of many monks.]

This blessed woman more than anyone else attained to the greatest heights of humility. There was no false glory in her life, she had no guile, she wore no make-up, she was physically fit, not given to boasting, with a mind free from arrogance, a peaceful heart, keeping sleepless vigils, not a meddlesome spirit, of immense charity, more than you could possibly grasp, wearing cheap and ugly clothing, completely continent, her thoughts always rightly ordered, her

eternal hope always in God, her almsgiving beyond reckoning, chief among all humble people, beset by many temptations from the one who of his own will is totally evil and without one shred of goodness, that is, the devil, who frequently attacked her. Floods of tears were a constant part of her life of compunction, her human nature completely subject to God, devoutly obedient to the holy bishops, respecting the presbyterate, honouring the other clerics, maintaining discipline, caring for virgins, helping the widows, comforting the bereaved, protecting the aged, visiting the sick, taking pity on sinners and leading those who have strayed back into the right path, showing compassion to all but especially the poor, bringing many deserted wives into the catechumenate, even helping them by providing them with food. She spread a reputation for generosity about her throughout her whole life.

She restored from slavery to freedom an innumerable crowd of slaves, fitting them out as splendidly as any of the nobility. To tell the absolute truth, they were a great deal better clothed than this holy woman. It would not be possible to find cheaper clothing than this woman wore. Even people dressed in rags would scorn this holy woman's clothing. So great was her meekness that she quite surpassed her own servants in simplicity of life. Her neighbours never had anything to complain about in this woman who was a living embodiment of Christ himself.

All her leisure time (*vita non vitalis*) was given up to compunction accompanied frequently by floods of tears. This noble woman would rather the summer heat dry up her own household water supply than that her eyes fixed on Christ should fail to pour forth tears. What else can I say? For the more I turn my mind to the story of her struggles and virtues, her rocklike solidity, the more I find that my words are nowhere near doing justice to the facts. And don't let anyone think that I have gathered up all this splendid and magnificent material by seeking for information at second hand about this most chaste Olympias. She was a precious vessel filled with the Holy Spirit and I witnessed with my own eyes her blessed and angelic life. I was her spiritual friend, more familiar to her than all her relations. It was I who distributed much of her money at her directions.

There is no more to say about her but that she was down to earth, subject to the governors, obedient to the powers that be, respectful to the presbyterate, holding all the clergy in honour, valiant for truth having been found worthy to suffer various unjust accusations. The faithful in Constantinople regard her as a Confessor, and venerate her almost as they would Christ's mother, for she

was tried and tested in all the struggles she endured for God's sake. For these things she has been given the blessing of glory after her death. Crowned in eternity she lives in splendour, dwelling in everlasting mansions with saints like unto her, where no ruin or evil may have place, receiving from Christ the due reward of her faithfulness and good works.

Chapter CXLV CANDIDA

After Olympias there was the blessed Candida, living for the Lord in the same way. She was the wife of Trajan, an army officer, and had become a person of the highest integrity. She gave suitable alms to the churches, venerated the bishops for their privilege of administering the Sacraments of Christ, and gladly honoured all the Christian clergy. She gave her own daughter, the fruit of her womb, to Christ as a dedicated virgin. Later she followed in her daughter's footsteps. She was temperate, chaste and generous with her money. I saw how this wonderful woman toiled and travailed all night making bread for the altar with her own hands to use up her bodily energy.

"Fasting isn't enough for me," she said. "I take part in this laborious vigil as well, in order to break down the Esau in me, that is, to weaken my lascivious desires."

She abstained from eating all living creatures, except that on feast days, and only then, she might eat some fish with oil and vegetables. At all other times she was content with dry bread and oxycraturum [a mixture of vinegar, warm water and eggs]. After this austere life, this blessed woman fell asleep into blessed rest, and now enjoys those eternal good things prepared for those who love the life of striving after virtue.

Chapter CXLVI GELASIA

Gelasia, the daughter of a tribune, is worthy of being esteemed among the greatest. Inspired by the zeal of that good woman, Candida, she also entered into the way of truth and took on the yoke of virginity. Her greatest virtue was that she never let the sun go down upon her wrath, towards slaves, maids or anyone. This blessed woman did not walk in the way of those who never forget injuries done to them. That leads to eternal death. She avoided this

snare of the devil, hatred and rancour. She wanted sins to be eternally forgiven, so she overlooked the smallest peccadilloes in the hope that she would be forgiven for even the greatest.

Chapter CXLVII

JULIANA

Juliana was a most learned and faithful virgin in Caesarea of Cappadocia. She took the writer Origen in when he was escaping from the persecutions of the state. She hid him for two years, supporting him from her own income and with her own personal ministry. I discovered this while I also was being hidden by Juliana. It was in an ancient book of verses belonging to Juliana, which had been written in by Origen's own hand, though he himself used to say that he had been taken in by Symmachus the Jewish interpreter. I have thought it right to put on record the virtues of these women as being not incompatible with the virtues of monastic life. We can be enlightened by all sorts of different circumstances, if we will.

Chapter CXLVIII

A NOBLE WOMAN WHO RETAINED HER VIRGINITY

In another ancient book written by Hippolytus, who knew the apostles, I found the following story:

There was a certain noble and very beautiful virgin in Corinth who was living the life of discipline. She was accused of being someone who had cursed the policies of the Emperor and his statues, and was brought before someone who was a persecuting judge at that time. Filled with the lust that always threatens danger to women, her accusers who were brothel keepers brought her in all her beauty to this corrupt judge. He was a man who not only had little inclination to listen impartially (*equinis auribus*, lit. 'with the ears of a horse'), but was of an habitually lustful cast of mind. He accepted their accusations when she was brought before him and became even more powerfully governed by lust. He showed this brave woman of God all the instruments of torture, and when this did not persuade her to submit to him he proceeded to use some of these instruments against her. But this could not persuade her to do what he wanted either, for by no means would she deny Christ. Instead then of handing her over to be crucified by the torturers, inflamed with cruelty

he sent this chaste and temperate woman to the brothel.

"Take this woman," he said to the owner, "and I want three solidi a day for what you can get out of her."

The owner needed to profit from this wicked deed, so he immediately offered her to anyone who wanted her in that factory of disgraceful obscenity. Those who habitually lusted after women came flocking around to this wicked factory of destruction when they heard about her, offering the usual price for their intended wicked act. But this most upright woman, whom we should venerate above all others, resorted to a little deception.

"I have got an ulcer in my private parts," she said, "which gives off a rather horrible smell. I'm afraid you would reject me and revile me because of this ulcer. Give me a few days and then perhaps you can do what you want with me."

By this means the blessed woman persuaded those lusting after her to desist. Her fervent prayers were pleasing to God and he had mercy on her for her compunction. God who knows all our thoughts was with her, and he provided for her salvation in proportion to the whole-hearted care she had taken to preserve her chastity.

Chapter CXLIX MAGISTRIANUS

There was a young man called Magistrrianus, of handsome appearance and devout frame of mind, to whom God had given a burning spiritual zeal that was more important to him than death. Pretending a lustful desire he went to the brothel after dark, went in and gave the owner five solidi.

"Let me be with this girl tonight," he said. Together they went into a private room.

"Take my clothes," he said, "and save yourself. Put on my tunic, shoes, cloak, and all the rest of my male garments, and when you go out muffle yourself up in the cloak."

She did as she was bid, signed herself with the cross and went out from that place completely unpolluted and incorrupt. She was freed by the grace of Christ and the sacrifice of this young man, who by his own blood saved her from a horrible fate.

The affair came to light the following day and Magistrrianus was brought before an exceedingly wrathful judge. Having interrogated this bold athlete of

Christ and got all the details out of him, he ordered him to be thrown to the beasts, thus covering with confusion even the evil-minded demon. For he thought that by this punishment he was subjecting the young man to disgrace, whereas in reality he was the cause of a two-fold witness to Christ. For not only had the young man fought bravely for the honour of his own soul, but by his labours he had given that blessed woman the means to persevere. For this double honour Christ in his kindness found him worthy to be given a double crown.

Chapter CL

THE SENATOR'S WIFE

I have thought of another story which it would be a shame to omit. There was a gang leader [insurrector] who was in the habit of having pornographic sessions [consuetudo stupri] with many different kinds of people. He took it into his head to try this on with Christians. But they would rather die than take part in such shamelessness. He took a fancy to the wife of a government senator in a certain town he came to.

"Have her, by all means," said the senator, paralysed with fear.

Armed men came to get her.

"Just give me a few moments to put on my make-up as usual," she said.

She went into her bedroom, took a sword, and drove it into her stomach.

Hear this and blush, all you virgins who profess that Christ is your spouse and turn from him to lechery! May God grant that each one of us may serve the cause of virginity and shout in joy with the Psalmist, 'Let me fear you that my flesh may be subdued' (Psalms 119.120). St Paul said, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me,' (Galatians 2.20), and let it be agreed that as you thoughtfully say to yourselves, 'My cousin (patrueus) is mine and I am his' (Song of Songs 6.3) you interpret 'cousin' sometimes as meaning 'brother' and sometimes 'spouse', to avoid any suspicion of carnality. If you understand the meaning to be 'husband' and 'bride', it is the spiritual union with the Father which is intended.

We visited many other fathers and monks throughout the whole of Egypt who did many signs and displayed many virtues. There are so many we can't record them all, but we give a selection on behalf of the many. What can we say about the Upper Thebaid beyond Syene, where there are an infinite number of praiseworthy monks? We believe that there is no one who has undertaken that

kind of life who has not begun to live in a superhuman sort of way. Raising people from the dead and walking on water like Peter are commonplace occurrences. They do everything in our time that the Saviour did through the holy apostles.

We were not bold enough to go beyond the river Lycos because of the great danger of being attacked by robbers. But even visiting the fathers we have mentioned was not without danger, and it was very difficult getting to see those holy women. We had to suffer a great deal and go through many dangerous places in order to visit them. 'Seven times our lives were in danger and on the eighth time we suffered no evil for the Lord was with us.' (Job 5.19)

Once we walked for five days through the desert almost perishing for lack of food and water.

Again, we had to walk through dreadful prickly thorn marshes, which cut up our feet. This was exceedingly painful, besides which we were almost dead with cold.

Thirdly, we got stuck in mud up to our loins with no seeming way of escape and we shouted aloud the words of the blessed David, 'Save me, O Lord, for the waters are come in even unto my soul. I am stuck in a deep bog where there is no solid ground. Save me from the mire lest I am stuck for ever' (Psalms 69.1 & 14).

Fourthly we had to wade for four days through deep waters and half submerged doorways when the Nile was in flood. We cried out, 'Let not the stormy waters overpower me nor the deep swallow me up.' (Psalms 69.15).

Fifthly, we fell among thieves on the sea coast as we were coming in towards Diolcos. They followed us for ten miles trying to catch us until we had hardly any breath left.

Sixthly, while sailing on the Nile we were overturned and nearly drowned.

Seventhly, when we were in the marshes of Mareotis where the papyrus comes from, we were cast upon a small desert island. We remained there out in the open for three days and nights in heavy rain and cold. It was Epiphanytide.

It is almost superfluous to mention the eighth time, though it does have its points. It happened when we were crossing a certain part of Nitria, where there was a large hollow place in which a number of crocodiles had been left behind after the floods had receded. We went to have a closer look at three of them near the edge of the hollow, We thought that they were dead but they

immediately charged us. We cried out loudly to the Lord, 'Christ save us!', and the beasts threw themselves back into the water as if turned away by an angel. We continued with our long journey through Nitria, meditating on the words of Job where he says, "Seven times our lives were in danger and on the eighth time we suffered no evil for the Lord was with us." (Job 5.19)

We give thanks to God who has defended us in such great dangers and shown us such marvellous things.

Chapter CLI

THE LIFE OF THE BROTHER WHO TRAVELLED WITH PALLADIUS

I will finish by saying something about the brother who came with me from his youth up to the present day. I have known him for a long time. He was never greedy about his food. He was not distressed by fasting, for he was one who had conquered his emotions. There was never a trace of avarice in him, he was content always with the present moment, he dressed simply, rejoiced when spoken ill of, willing to undergo danger for the sake of his friends, more knowledgeable about the wiles of the demons than thousands of others.

One day the devil tried to make a pact with him.

"Make peace with me," the devil said, "and sin just once, and I will give you whatever you ask for in this life, whether status or riches."

And again, he fought with him and trampled him underfoot for fourteen nights, so he told me.

"Stop worshipping Christ, and I will leave you alone," he said.

"I will worship him all the more," he replied, "and glorify him in many more places. I will pray more often, since worshipping him bodes evil for you."

He stayed for a while in a hundred and six countries, and journeyed through many more. He had never known a woman, not even in dreams, except when fighting the demon of fornication during sleep. I know that an angel brought him food three times when he was hungry. Once when he was in the far desert without a crumb to eat, he found three freshly cooked bread rolls in a sheepskin, bread and wine on another occasion. And once a voice came to him, saying,

"I know you are short of food. Go to that man called N..... and he will give you some bread and oil."

So he went to this person.

"Are you the monk in question?" he was asked.

"I am," he replied.

"The head of the family has told me to give you thirty rolls of bread and twelve measures of oil."

There are other sides to his nature which I can describe and glory in. I have known him shed tears over those who had to work very hard for hardly any reward; he would share with them whatever he had apart from selling himself into slavery. I have known him shed tears over those who have fallen into serious sin, and I have seen his tears move sinners to repentance. He once said to me, 'I have begged God that no one, especially if they are rich and respectable, need ever find me such an object of pity that they felt obliged to provide me with the necessities of life.'

For myself it is sufficient that I have been found worthy to commit to writing all I could remember. It could not have been done without the help of God who inspired you to encourage me to write this book of the lives of the holy and blessed Fathers.

And you, Lausus, most faithful and venerable servant of Christ, my most dear and closest friend, as you read this book, may you find it is an aid to your immortal soul in the resurrection of the just. May you cherish the way of life followed by these famous athletes, their labours, and the manner in which they endured the pains of living in such an austere way. Use these things as an example for yourself, sustained by an imperishable good hope, realising how short are the days that have already passed by, and pray for me as you keep yourself free from evil and maintain your integrity, as I know you have done consistently from the time of the consulate of Tatian right up to the present day. Your personal character has now been rewarded by being given the post of the Emperor's personal private secretary (*praepositum pii cubiculi*).

Although you have been given such a high dignity, with all the many great dangers which come with such great power, you have not acted otherwise than the fear of God demands.

"All these things I will give you if you fall down and worship me," (Matthew 4.9) is what the man dedicated to God hears the devil say. But the Lord gives him the grace to be able to say, "Get thee behind me."

Do you, therefore, walk in the same path. Care not for riches or the fragile glory of this present world. Strive after the immortal life of heaven, the eternal kingdom, the everlasting glory, and those hidden good things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and which have not entered into the human heart, which God has stored up for us along with the holy patriarchs and prophets,

the apostles and martyrs and those whose memory we have celebrated in this book through the grace of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

End of Book VIII

De Vitis Patrum, Book IX

By Theodoretus, bishop of Cyrus

Translated into Latin by Gentianus Hervetus

Prologue

It is a beautiful thing indeed to read about the battles of those exemplary men who famously strove to acquire virtues. Such feasts for the eyes are of great benefit to us, for to understand them is to realise they are worthy of emulation. They stand out as examples to be embraced and imitated, compelling the readers to measure up to them. Those who know the stories of such great and virtuous deeds can bring no greater gift than this to the ears of those who have never heard of them. Some say that these stories are for the ears of the faithful only, but from hearing comes faith, (Romans 10.17) as long as the narrators are trusted to be telling the truth.

Just as the tongue and the palate can be relied upon to make a judgment and form an opinion on bitterness or sweetness or other such qualities, so the power of understanding speech is committed to the ear, which knows how to distinguish between things beneficial and things harmful. And as long as these useful narratives remain whole and incorrupt in the memory, and if a veil of darkness does not scatter them, causing them to vanish from the mind, it might seem to be superfluous to write them down, for whatever benefit there is in them can be conveyed to others fairly easily. But it seems to me that in time, as the body declines towards old age and death, great and virtuous deeds fall into oblivion, and the memory of them is lost. So therefore, let no one rebuke us for being eager to write down the way that devout men, lovers of God, lived their lives.

Those to whom is entrusted the care of our bodies prepare medicines to fight against disease and bring help to those who are suffering - just so do those

who busy themselves in writing these stories provide wholesome medicines, so that things which were threatened with oblivion may be kept in mind. Poets and writers quite normally celebrate the brave and famous things done in war, playwrights in their tragedies offer to the public calamitous events which would otherwise have remained hidden, some of the others produce works of comedy and suchlike trivial affairs, so should we then allow oblivion to be the fate of those men who in their mortal passionate flesh achieved passionlessness by striving after a nature which was not of this world? What punishments should we not deservedly incur if instead of remembering those deeds worthy of admiration we neglect them as being of nothing worth? If the memory of those who in old times strove after the highest teachings of the saints has been preserved not in speech or writing but in lifelike pictures and statues which express all their virtues, what blame would deservedly be given to us if we did not pay due honour to their outstanding lives in writing also? The athletes and contortionists who compete at the Olympics are honoured with statues, even the charioteers in the races are given the same distinction. Not only this, but there are men and women - as well as effeminate people whose gender is uncertain - who delight in making spectacles of themselves, who get themselves into the record books, forever striving to keep their fame alive for as long as possible, even though the memory of them is not beneficial to the soul but debilitating. So then, those worthy of admiration are honoured by one sort of picture, those who can only bring harm by another. And since death brings destruction to every mortal nature, they think that by producing judiciously coloured pictures of themselves their fame will last longer than a long life.

We, however, shall be writing about lives governed by a love of wisdom ['philosophia'], ways of life directed towards the heavenly, worthy of imitation. We shall not be describing bodily features and faces, nor shall we be offering anything from anyone who speaks from ignorance, but we shall be outlining the working of souls which is not normally open to view, and we shall lay bare hidden battles and conflicts which are not outwardly apparent. This was the armour with which Paul, the general of his army and leader in battle, clothed his troops: 'Put on', he said, 'the armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand.' And again, 'Stand therefore with your loins girded about with truth, wearing the breastplate of justice, your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, at all times taking up the shield of faith, with which you may quench

all the fiery darts of the wicked. And put on the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.' (Ephesians 6.13-17). And having clothed them in this armour he sent them forth to battle. The nature of the enemy is incorporeal, difficult to discern, obscurely invasive, secretly insidious, suddenly attacking when least expected. Our general gave the same instructions to his troops, saying, 'Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world and the darkness of this age, against the spirits of wickedness in high places.' This band of saints had a great number of enemies like that; each one of them was surrounded by many powerful enemies (not that they all attacked at once - some of them attacked now one lot, now another), so their victory was all the more famous when their adversaries fled. And when they had been put to flight and scattered, the flag of victory could be raised without any possible objection from anybody.

It was not mortal human nature, full of countless contradictions, which won them that victory, but the divine grace which filled their souls. For they burned with love for the divine beauty, and were resolved to do all things and suffer all things for the sake of him whom they loved. With a strong and generous spirit they bore the attacks of their own contradictions and agitations, they repulsed the violence of the devil with the sort of javelin which in apostolic terms consists of 'punishing the body and bringing it into subjection' (1 Corinthians 9.27). They quenched the fires of anger, they compelled raging greed to be still; by fasting and staying quietly at home they settled their troubled states of mind and banished all exaggerated flights of fancy, and compelled their vile bodies into harmony with their souls, thus winning the battle against their inborn nature. Once peace had been established in all these things, they were able to expel the whole crowd of adversaries, for they had no inner thoughts of which the devils might take advantage. Deprived of any help which the human senses might give them the demons were unable to carry on their war. For the devil makes use of our senses as his weapons; if we ignore the sights that dazzle and the tempting sounds we hear, if our sense of feeling is not titillated by luxurious softness, if our minds give no admittance to depraved devices, then their labour is in vain who prepare assaults against us.

No enemy can capture a city built on a hill, fortified with strong defences and surrounded by deep ditches, for as long as no one inside helps the enemy by opening the gates. Just so, it is not possible for the demons, who wage war

from outside us, to overcome a soul surrounded by divine grace, unless some slothfulness of thought opens some window in our senses which allows the enemy to enter in. Those whose praises we are celebrating learned this from opening the divine scriptures to hear God saying through the Prophet. 'Death has come up through the windows' (Jeremiah 9.21). So for them the laws of God served as bolts and bars to prevent their senses from straying, and they entrusted the keys to the rational mind; so that unless the mind gave the command, the tongue and lips did not open, nor was the eye permitted to range abroad; and the mind shut the door to all foolish and worthless voices as soon as they were heard approaching with threatening and vicious sounds. Only such voices as the mind approved of were allowed in. And thus they taught that the sense of smell should not hanker after sweet perfumes whose inbuilt nature was softening and relaxing. They taught that the stomach should not be fully satisfied but be fed of practical necessity not for pleasure, and never given more than what was sufficient to keep them from death by starvation. Likewise they defeated the sweet tyranny of sleep; they escaped from being the slaves of their eyelids, and for servitude substituted domination, in that they made use of sleep not when sleep overcame them but when they briefly summoned sleep in order to satisfy the needs of nature. So then, having taken care to guard the gates and walls and bring harmony to their inner thoughts, they could laugh at the invading adversaries outside, who were unable to get in by force because the grace of God overruled them, nor was any traitor to be found who was willing to let them in. Even though these enemies were by nature hidden from sight, they still had no power over a visible body subject to the needs of nature. For the mind, the governing charioteer of this body, skilfully and harmoniously holding the reins, directed the horses accurately and well; it continuously plucked the strings of the senses, producing elegant and agreeable harmony in every part; by its skill in handling the rudder it withstood the pounding of the waves and broke the force of the winds.

These men therefore entered into life through countless labours, they subdued the body by hardships and sweat, they knew no laughter or relaxation, their whole life was one of tears and mourning, they reckoned their fasts as Sybaritic delights, their protracted vigils as the sweetest of slumbers, the hard ground as the gentlest of bedding, a life of praying and singing psalms as the greatest and most inexhaustible of pleasures. Who can fail to admire these men who embraced every kind of virtue? Who will not praise and celebrate

their worthiness? I know indeed that no speeches can adequately portray their virtues; nevertheless we can but try.

They had an eager longing for their love of true wisdom to be perfected, but it would not nevertheless be right to neglect the praise of lesser lights. So I shall not assign one common measure of praise to all in what I write, for the gifts God gave them were varied, as the blessed Paul taught: 'To some is given by the Spirit a word of wisdom, to others a word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to others faith by the same Spirit, to others gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to others the working of miracles, to others prophecy, to others the gift of tongues, to others the interpretation of tongues.' (1 Corinthians 12. 8-10).

And in order to show the origin of them all, he adds, 'But at work in all these is one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one separately how he will.' Since therefore the gifts they have been given are all different, it is right that I should make a separate story out of each one of them. I shall not itemise every single thing that they did, for a whole lifetime would be needed to do that, but to illustrate their manner of life I shall tell of a few things that each one has done. Having outlined just a few things illustrating the character and shape of the life of each one, I shall then go on to the next.

I shall not try to put into writing the history of every holy person who ever existed, and not even those whose fame we know to have been universally acknowledged, for it is not possible that one man could write about everyone. I shall describe only the lives of those who were like lights shining in the East sending out their rays to the ends of the earth. But let my storytelling issue in prayer; judge it not by the laws of eulogising, but gather from it a few things that are true. This is a religious history, or description of monastic discipline (call it what you will, as long as you do not give less credence to the stories because you read of things which are beyond your own capabilities). And I beg whosoever lights upon it not to weigh its virtues up against what they themselves are capable of, but to recognise clearly that it is God from on high who measures out the gifts of the most holy Spirit on the souls of the devout, and more abundantly to those who are closer to perfection. I say this for the benefit of those who are not yet fully initiated into the mysteries of divine things. It is the priests of the inner sanctum of the Spirit who know the glory of the Spirit and recognise the miracles which he performs among human beings through the ministrations of human beings, drawing the unbelieving towards the knowledge of God. It is clear that whoever does not believe the things which I am about to relate would not believe what Moses did either, or

what Joshua did, or Elijah or Elisha, and holds as fables the deeds of the holy apostles. But if they do accept those things to be true, let them also give credence to these things. For the grace that worked in them is the same grace which enabled these others to do what they did. Grace is eternal, and chooses those who are worthy of it, passing over some, but pouring out over others the fulness of its working.

I witnessed myself many of the things I shall tell about, and what I did not witness myself I heard from those who did, men who loved virtue and were found worthy to be their witnesses and profit from their teachings. Matthew and John are first and foremost among the Evangelists, for they actually saw the Lord's miracles, but Luke and Mark are also trustworthy gospel writers. They were taught by those who were from the beginning 'witnesses and ministers of the Word', (Luke 1.2) passing on accurate knowledge of what the Lord suffered and did, and what he constantly taught. And so although the blessed Luke did not actually see the Lord, he made it quite clear in the beginning of his gospel that he was telling of those things which had been delivered unto him. So then we also, if we have listened to someone who did not actually see what he is talking about but learnt about it from someone else, are able to give no less credence to him and to Mark than we do to Matthew and John. The narrative of one as well as the other is worthy of belief for they learned from those who were there.

We therefore shall tell of some things which we actually saw, and other things trusting in the stories of those who did see, and who emulated them in their own lives. But I shall go into a bit more detail when I want to be convincing about the truth of what I am saying. And so, here I begin my story.

Chapter I

JACOBUS of Nisibis

Moses the divine lawgiver, who laid bare the bottom of the sea, caused water to flow in the barren desert and did many other miracles, wrote down the deeds of those saints who were of old. He was not prompted by the wisdom of the Egyptians, but by the splendour of grace given him from above. For unless he had been inspired by the all-knowing divine Spirit, how could he have learned about the virtues of Abel, Enoch's love of righteousness, the devout priesthood of Melchisedech, the calling of Abraham, and his faith, his courage, his meticulous attention to the duties of hospitality, the sacrifice of his son for the benefit of the world, and the whole catalogue of all the other

deeds which he performed? I likewise need help in this present work, trying as I am to describe the lives of those holy people who shone both in our own times and in the times a little before us, and whom I would wish to portray as examples for those who would wish to emulate them. I beg your prayers for this, and so I begin my tale.

Nisibis is a state on the borders between the Romans and the Persians. At one time it was subject to the Romans and paid taxes to them. This is where the great Jacobus came from to embrace the quietness of a solitary life. He chose the peaks of the highest mountains as his abode. In summer and autumn he frequented the woods, with only the sky for a roof over his head; in the winter he made use of a cave, which gave him some sort of shelter. His food was not such as is laboriously sown and cultivated, but what grew naturally; he gathered the fruits which grew of their own accord on the trees of the woods, and edible herbs which served him as vegetables. He ate them raw, providing his body with sufficient to preserve life. He found it quite unnecessary for his clothing to be of wool; he used instead the prickly hair of goatskins, from which he made a tunic and simple cloak.

By afflicting his body thus, he was able to feed his body with spiritual food, by contemplation he purified the faculty of thought, wherein as in a clear mirror of the divine Spirit, with open face looking to the glory of God, he was transformed into the same image from glory unto glory, as by the spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3.18). Hence, his trust in God which came from God increased daily, and asking from God only what it was right to ask, he immediately received what he asked for. As a result he was able to see the future prophetically, and by the grace of the most holy Spirit received the power of doing miracles. I shall tell of some of them, and make known the brightness of his apostolic splendour to those who were previously unaware. An insane attraction to idols was flourishing among people at that time, the cult of worshipping inanimate statues was being promoted, and many neglected the worship of God. Anyone who did not wish to join in their drunkenness was held in contempt, but those given above all to the pursuit of virtue saw things as they really were, and mocked the senselessness of idols while worshipping the maker of the universe.

He had travelled into Persia at that time in order to see the new signs of true religion there, and what was equally important, to bring them some pastoral care. He happened to be passing by a pond where some girls were washing clothes by pounding them with their feet. Far from showing the respect due to

him not only as a stranger but as one wearing the habit with modesty and dignity, the girls shamelessly cast burning looks and impudent glances at the holy man, nor did they cover their heads or let fall the garments which they had tucked up round their waists.

This made the man of God angry, and he called down a curse upon the pond, choosing this opportune moment to make manifest the power of God, and by performing a miracle to drive out wickedness. The pond immediately dried up. He also cursed the girls and punished their youthful impudence by turning their hair prematurely grey. The lesson he drew from this was that the changed colour of their hair was like what had recently happened to the trees, which were now crowned with autumn leaves. The girls watched the waters drying up and stared at each other's heads. They knew these sudden changes were their punishment, and they fled back to the town to tell of what had happened. The townspeople ran out and soon met up with the great Jacobus, whom they begged to restrain his anger and remove the punishment. Jacobus did not keep them waiting long, but prayed to God and commanded the waters to flow once more. They immediately began to gush up out of the depths again, obedient to the holy man's command. Having made that request they then begged that the colour of the girls' hair should be restored. He granted this even though the girls had not returned, for he sought them out and lifted the punishment from them. This was a lesson to them that they should in future be temperate and well disciplined, and remember always how divine power had been shown forth on them.

Such was the miracle of this latter-day Moses, performed not by striking with a rod, but by making the sign of the cross. Quite apart from the miracle I am astonished at his gentleness. For unlike the great Elisha he did not hand those impudent girls into the power of savage bears, (2 Kings 2.24), but shamed them by means of a fairly harmless punishment, and at the same time taught them to be respectful and restrained. I say this, not to condemn the prophet for savagery (far be it from me to be so presumptuous!), but to demonstrate how Jacobus possessed the same sort of power, but used it in a manner compatible with the New Testament and the greatness of Christ.

On another occasion he was present when a Persian judge handed down a judgment which was manifestly unjust, so Jacobus laid a curse on a large rock nearby, ordering it to be broken into fragments, showing by this how worthless the judgment was. All those present were terrified at seeing the stone shattered into a thousand pieces, and it was such a shock to the judge

himself that he overturned his previous judgment and issued a just one. In this likewise Jacobus was imitating the Lord, who when wishing to show that he was going cheerfully to his passion of his own free will, refrained from punishing his persecutors but showed that he had power to do so by withering the fig tree (Matthew 21.19). In imitation of such clemency Jacobus did not punish the judge, but by destroying the rock induced him to judge justly. His deeds became known, and made him so loved and respected by all that he was elevated to the bishopric of his own country. So through no desire of his own he was thrust into a very exalted way of life and social position. But he did not wear any different clothing or change his diet; his circumstances may have changed but his rule of life was not modified in the slightest. His labours increased, and were much greater than they were before. He was already fasting, sleeping on the ground and wearing rough clothing; to these labours were added the care of the poor, the widows and the orphans, and he also opposed those who dealt unjustly while supporting those who had suffered injustice. But what a task it would be to enlighten all those who are unaware of the benefits received by those he cared for! His great distinction is that he went about his work as one who above all feared and loved him who was the master of his sheep.

The greater his acts of kindness grew in number, so much the greater was the grace given to him by the most holy Spirit. On one occasion he was travelling through some village or town (I'm not quite sure where), when some poor people approached him carrying one of their number who they said was dead. They humbly begged him for money to pay for his burial, but he simply prayed to God to forgive him the sins he had committed in life and count him worthy to be admitted into the company of the just. At the very moment when these words were being spoken, the soul departed from the man pretending to be dead, while Jacobus gave them money for a shroud.

As soon as this admirable man had gone a little further on his way the perpetrators of this deed told the recumbent form to get up. Receiving no response they suddenly realised that what they had been pretending had come true, the playacting had become real. They rushed back to Jacobus and threw themselves at his feet, protesting that it was poverty which had driven them to do what they had rashly done. They humbly begged him to pardon their transgression and restore the dead man to life. And in imitation of the mercy of the Lord, he did offer prayers and perform a miracle, so that as life had been taken through prayer even so life through prayer was restored.

This all seems to have certain similarities to the miracle performed by the great Peter, who handed over to death those thieves and liars, Ananias and Saphiras (Acts 5,1-10), for Jacobus also brought death to him who murdered truth and traded in lies. But whereas Peter inflicted the punishment having become aware of the theft by the Spirit, Jacobus knew nothing of what those men were trying to achieve, but simply offered the prayers which brought about the pretender's death. The divine Apostle did nothing to snatch back the dead from their fate, because he needed to inculcate some fear before he could begin to preach salvation. Jacobus, overflowing with apostolic grace, brought about an opportune punishment, but also later remitted the punishment, for the need here was to bring enlightenment to the offenders.

But we need to move on to other matters which should be briefly mentioned. After Arius created uproar and confusion in Egypt, the great Emperor Constantine gathered all the leaders of the churches together at Nicaea. Arius was the father and instigator of curse and blasphemy against the only begotten Son and the most holy Spirit, whereas Constantine was like a Zorobabel to our flock (Zorobabel brought the universal captivity of the righteous back from exile and rebuilt the holy temple which had been razed to the ground [Ezra 3.2].) The great Jacobus was also among those who came to Nicaea, determined to stand up for revealed truth like the brave army-leader he was, for Nisibis at that time was a Roman dependency. When the gathering was over and everyone returned home, he too came back like a brave man who had won a victory, rejoicing that true devotion had prevailed.

Some time after this, that great and highly regarded Emperor departed this life acknowledged by all to be a saint [lit. with crowns of piety], and his sons inherited the rulership of the world. But Saporesh, the king of the Persians, had no respect for Constantine's sons, deeming them to be nowhere near as powerful as their father, and he sent a great army of cavalry and infantry, together with a great number of elephants, to war against Nisibis.

He deployed his army to besiege the city and completely surrounded it. He brought his siege engines forward, built towers and dug ditches, barricaded the space between them with hurdles built out of branches, and ordered his soldiers to build mounds so that his towers would rival those of the city. He then placed his archers in them, ordering them to direct their fire on those manning the battlements. He ordered others to dig below and undermine the walls. But all these plans were of no effect and a waste of time, for they were all brought to naught by the prayers of Jacobus, that divine man. At last,

however, Saporesh came to a bold decision [lit. forbade weakness] and, confident that the numbers of his men were like a river in flood, built earthworks and constructed retaining barriers so that he was able to divert a real river of great quantity which he directed against the fortifications. It proved to be a most mighty device, for the walls were unable to withstand this attack and were struck with such force that at that point they began to crumble from beneath. A great shout went up from the besieging army, for now the city was on the point of being taken. They did not fully realise, however, the wall of defence which the citizens of that city still possessed.

For a time they deferred entering the city, unable to approach it because of the waters. They moved back some distance and thinking that their labours were almost over, they relaxed and took thought for their horses. But those who lived in the city turned to prayer, with the great Jacobus as their intercessor. Every able-bodied person worked as hard as they possibly could to rebuild, not worrying about whether the structure would be pretty and pleasing, but piling everything up at random, stones and bricks and whatever anyone could carry, to such effect that in the space of one night they had built high enough to prevent an attack by cavalry, and by infantry unless using ladders. They then all begged the man of God to show himself on the walls and hurl the weapon of cursing at the enemy. In response to their request he went up, and as he looked out over the multitude of them he begged God to send a cloud of mosquitoes and gnats upon them. Even as he spoke God responded, answering the prayer of Jacobus as he did the prayer of Moses. Men were pierced by these spears from God, horses and elephants broke their chains, bolted and scattered hither and thither, unable to bear the stings.

The wicked king realised that all his stratagems had failed; the flooding with water had achieved nothing, for the wall which had been destroyed had been rebuilt. His whole army was worn out by their labours and was under the curse of God, plagued by the snares of God. He saw the man of God walking upon the walls and thought it must have been the Emperor who had been in charge of all the work, for Jacobus seemed to be dressed in purple and crowned with a diadem. He was therefore enraged with those who had urged him into this battle, deceiving him by telling him that the Emperor would not be there. He condemned them to execution, dismissed the army and returned to his own kingdom as quickly as possible.

These miracles are in no way inferior to those which God performed through Hezekiah (2 Kings 19.35) - even greater, it seems to me, in that the city was

not taken even though the walls had been undermined. But what I admire even more than that is that when he had recourse to cursing he did not call down thunder and lightning from heaven as the great Elijah did when each captain of fifty with his fifty men advanced towards him (2 Kings I.14). For Jacobus had understood what the Lord said to James and John when they wanted to do this: 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of' (Luke 9. 55). So he did not ask for the earth to swallow them up, or that they should be consumed by fire, but just that they should be plagued by insects. Knowing the power of God he understood that discipleship had to be developed into the true way of worshipping God. Great indeed was the trust which this divine man had in God, great was the grace given him from above. His face was ever turned heavenwards, and having grown daily in the knowledge of God he at last laid down his life with great glory and departed from our midst.

Some time later, this city was handed over from its then rulers to the kingdom of Persia. Those who used to live there had to leave, but they took with them the body of their prince and defender, grieving and scarcely able to bear having to be exiled, yet singing and celebrating the power of this great conqueror. For if he had lived they would have had but a small chance of falling into the hands of the barbarians.

I have now come to the end of my account of this divine man, and so move on to another story, praying that his blessing may follow me.

Chapter II

JULIANUS SABAS

Julianus lived in the region formerly known as the land of the Persians, but latterly of the Ofroeni, where he set up a little dwelling-place in which to follow the monastic life. The local people honoured him with the name Sabas, which means presbyter in Greek, or senis in Latin. On one side, to the West, his cell was bounded by the banks of the River Euphrates; on the other, towards the rising sun, lay the border of the Roman Empire. Assyria conquered the Persians, and the western border of the kingdom of the Persians was called Adiabenis by those who came after. In this country there were many great and populous cities, and a great part of the country was inhabited. But there was also a great deal of uninhabited desert.

This divine man went to the furthest parts of this solitary place and found a naturally formed cave, which although not very beautiful or commodious,

nevertheless provided some barely sufficient shelter for those who came to him. He was perfectly happy to live here, reckoning it to be more magnificent than kingdoms glittering with gold and silver. He settled in there, eating only once a week, his food, bread made from barley, and that of the bran only, his only relish salt, his drink the purest water which flowed from a natural spring [lit. drink however the most pure, waters of floods by themselves natural], which he did not use to excess but only according to a predetermined measure. But he enjoyed the unmeasured delights of an unlimited banquet in the shape of singing the psalms of David, and having constant converse with God. He made use of them constantly, he could never get enough of them, he was always full of them, he was forever crying, 'How sweet are your words to my tongue, more than honey and honeycomb to my mouth' (Psalms 119.103). And again he heard these words of the blessed David, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves, more to be desired than gold and many precious stones, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb' (Psalms 19.10-11). And again, 'Delight in the Lord and he will give you your heart's desire.' And again, 'Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.' And 'Let my heart rejoice that it might fear your name'. And, 'Taste and see how gracious the Lord is.' And, 'My soul thirsts for the living God.' And 'My soul longs after you'. And he grafted into himself the love which inspired the writer of all these words.

This is how the great David by his songs taught him that he would build up many companions who would rival him in the love they showed for God. His hope for this was not in vain. For not this man only but countless others were thus pierced by the love of God. He was consumed by such a great fire of love, he was so intoxicated by desire, that he ceased to have any care for anything of this earth. He dreamed only of his beloved by night and sought only the sight of him by day. And many people heard about his exceptional quest for wisdom [philosophia], and came to him from far and near. As his fame spread everywhere abroad, so they ran to him begging to benefit from his training. They came to him as to a master trainer, to be a family of children who would live on after him. Just as singing birds are used in hunting to call others of the same breed in order to catch them in nets, so do human beings chase after other human beings, sometimes for the purpose of destroying them, but sometimes in order to be saved. So very soon there were ten others with him, then twice and even three times more than that. Although there were so many of them the cave accommodated them all. They learned from the old

man how to care little for the comfort of the body, they dressed alike as children of the same family, sustained by barley bread and salt.

Later on they collected wild herbs and mixed them in dolia [i.e. large globular water jars] with a sufficient amount of salt brine, to be used as remedies for those who were ill. The place where these herbs were stored was extremely damp and it eventually happened that they followed their natural inclination to develop mould and rot, for the cave was very damp in every part of it. So the brothers asked the old man if he would let them build a little shelter big enough to take the vessels containing these remedies. At first he was very unwilling to accede to their request, but was eventually persuaded by St Paul not to seek his own (1 Corinthians 13.5) but to make concessions and accommodate himself to the humble. He therefore specified the measurements to which a small shelter might be built and left the cave to offer up his usual prayers to God. (For he was accustomed to go off into the desert, often for 50 stadia [= 5.7 miles approx] but sometimes for twice as far, to cut himself off from all human company, retire into himself and there to meet and converse with God and gaze upon his divine and ineffable beauty.)

As soon as they had time, the men whom the old man had considered capable of seeing to this matter began to build a little shed of a size compatible with what it was to be used for, but bigger than they had been told. And on the tenth day, like Moses coming down from the mountain and from such contemplation as cannot be expressed in words, the old man saw this building, much bigger than he had allowed.

"I fear," he said, "that you men may be so attached to earthly buildings that you lose the heavenly. For the earthly are but for a time and are of use to us for but a moment, whereas the heavenly are for ever and cannot come to an end." And this he said to lead his group of people into a knowledge of the more perfect way, while yet bearing in mind the voice of the apostle saying, 'I seek not after what is profitable for myself but for many, that they may be saved.' (1 Corinthians 10.33)

He also taught them how to offer heartfelt hymnody to God in common. Two of them should go off together into the desert at dawn; one of them should prostrate himself to give the Lord due adoration, the other should stand and sing fifteen of the psalms of David. This done they should change places; one of them to get up and sing, the other to prostrate himself and adore. And they should continue doing this attentively from morning till the evening. Before sunset they should rest for a little while in the cave, some here, some there,

but all should then come together from wherever they are in the cave to offer the vespertide hymns to God together. The old man was accustomed to choose one of the juniors to share the duties of leading the prayers.

One of his more assiduous followers was a man of Persia, a big man with a beautiful body, but whose soul was even more beautiful still. His name was Jacobus, who continued to shine with every virtue after Julianus' death. He was famous and respected not only in Persia but also in the Syrian monasteries or schools of philosophy, where he ended his life at the age, it is said, of a hundred and four. He often accompanied Julianus, that great old man, into the desert, but was always kept at a distance. The master did not allow anyone to come too close to him lest some possible occasion of disagreement arise between them, for conversation takes the mind away from the contemplation of God.

One day as Jacobus was following on behind him, he saw an enormous wild beast [draco] in the path ahead. He looked at it wondering whether he dared go on any further. At first fear urged him to avoid the beast, but then he summoned up his courage. He bent down and picked up a stone, which he threw, but found that the beast stayed still, unable to move at all. He realised that the beast was dead and wondered whether that was not the old man's doing. They continued on their routine, and when they had finished their routine of prayer and singing the old man sat down for a time of quiet, telling Jacobus also to be silent for a little while, which he did until the old man with a smile began some gentle conversation. Jacob then asked for enlightenment upon a point about which he was ignorant.

"You may ask, if you wish," the old man said.

"As I was coming along the path," said Jacobus, "I saw an enormous wild beast lying there. I was very frightened at first, thinking it was alive, but then I saw that it was dead, and I was able to keep on going in safety. Tell me, father, who killed it? You had been ahead of me, and no one else had passed by."

"Stop being inquisitive about such things. You won't be any the better off for knowing the answer."

But Jacobus is to be admired for abating not one whit in his desire to know the truth. The old man tried for quite a while to keep his counsel but in the end could not bear to keep his companion in suspense any longer.

"Well, I will tell you, if you really want to know," he said at last, "but only on one condition, that you tell nobody else as long as I am alive. For anything which might encourage pride and arrogance should always be kept secret. But

after I have departed this life I shall be free from such spiritual temptations, so I would not entirely forbid you to reveal it, at least as a proof of the power of divine grace. So then you should know that this beast met me as I walked along the path, looking as if it was going to devour me, but I called upon Jesus and made the sign of the cross at him, completely free from fear. Immediately I saw the beast fall to the ground, and with a commonly used prayer of praise for the Saviour I jumped over him." And having spoken thus he returned to the cave.

On another occasion there was a nobly born young man, rather delicately brought up, whose confidence in his own willing eagerness of spirit was not matched by his physical strength, for he begged the old man to let him be his companion as he journeyed into the desert, not merely for the one-day visit that everyone did, but for the longer journey which often lasted for eight to ten days. This man was the famous Asterius. The divine old man discouraged the youth, pointing out that the desert was scorching hot and waterless, but he persisted in begging for his request to be granted.

His pleadings eventually persuaded the old man, and he did indeed follow the old man out. He was quite vigorous at first, but when the first day, the second day and then the third day had passed, he began to feel dried up by the rays of the sun, and to suffer continually from thirst. (It was summertime, and of course the flames of the sun are even stronger at the height of summer.) At first he felt ashamed to admit to suffering any discomfort, turning over in his mind what the old man had said to him beforehand. At last however he gave in, and in a state of near collapse begged the old man to have pity on him. But the old man simply reminded him of what he had already said, and told him to go back home.

"But I don't know the way back to the cave," said the youth. "And even if I did I couldn't manage it. My strength has almost vanished because of thirst."

The old man then took pity on the young man's condition, realising how weak his body was. He prostrated himself and prayed to the Lord. He watered the ground with hot tears and begged for the young man's safety. And he who answers the prayers and fulfils the desires of those who fear him took the teardrops falling on the sand and turned them into a fountain of water. The young man was revived by this flowing water and the old man urged him to keep on going. The spring is still there to this day, a witness to the Mosaic power of the old man's prayer. For just as Moses of old struck the bare rock with his rod and produced an abundant flow of water sufficient to satisfy the

thirst of thousands of people (Exodus 17.6), so did this man produce a flowing fountain by watering the driest of sand with his tears, not for the sake of many thousands, but to satisfy the thirst of one single youth. Inspired by divine grace he foresaw the future perfection of this youth, who many years later, spurred on by divine grace to lead many others into the same state of grace, built a monastic school of excellence near Gendarum, the city next in size to Antioch. Here, he attracted to himself many other athletic lovers of wisdom. One of those drawn to him was the great Acacius, an outstanding man in my view, and justly famous. He was exceptional in his monastic life, and shone with such splendid virtues that he was held worthy to be made a bishop and given pastoral care of Berhoea. During the fifty-eight years he cared for his flock, he never relaxed his monastic routine, but combined the best qualities both monastic and secular. In his monasticism he continued in the search for perfection, in his civil life he administered the affairs of a large household, thus combining things which in themselves were very different from each other.

Asterius also strove to practise this kind of virtue. He had such a great affection for the great old man Julianus that he would visit him sometimes twice a year sometimes thrice. He would come with three or four beasts of burden laden with dried figs for the community (*sodalibus*), and put together two measures of them which he carried on his own shoulders, enough to last the old man a year. He called himself a camel-driver, and so he was. And he carried this load not just for a mile or two, but for a seven day's journey. Once when the old man saw him struggling along, loaded up with dried figs on his shoulders he said that he should stop bringing this food to him.

"It is not right that you should undergo all this labour," Julianus said, "so that I can profit in luxury from your sweat."

"I won't unload anything at all," said Asterius, "unless you agree to take a share in this food that I have brought."

"I'll do as you ask," he said. "Only please put that burden down as soon as possible."

In this he was like the chief of the apostles who demurred at first when the Lord offered to wash his feet, loudly asserting that that would never happen (John 13.8). But then as soon as he was told that unless he agreed he would be parted from fellowship with the Lord, he begged that the Lord would wash not only his feet but also his hands and his head. Likewise, this divine man was worried that he should enjoy the fruit of someone else's labour, but

recognizing the burning eagerness of his disciple's soul, he abandoned his objections in favour of accepting his ministry.

People who take pleasure in other people being blamed, and who have learned only how to laugh at all things honest, may well say that this story was not worth remembering. But I think it is a profitable story, and have included it in the account of this man's miracles not only to show how his piety was typical of all great men, but also to demonstrate what an attractive and reasonable man he was. For his great virtues were of such a kind that he considered himself to be unworthy of even the slightest honour, so he therefore rebuffed [Asterius' offering] as being quite inappropriate. But later he accepted him, to signify his support for those who do such things.

It was obvious that the more he tried to distance himself from everyone, the more his reputation attracted people who were lovers of all things wholesome and honest. So he escaped with some of his closer companions to Mt Sinai, without going into any of the towns or villages, but by journeying through the trackless desert. They carried their food with them on their shoulders, bread and salt in fact, and also a flask, a wooden ladle, and a sponge on the end of a line, so that if they came to a deep well, they would be able to lower the sponge, and squeeze it out into the ladle from which they drank. After many days' journeying they came at last to the long looked-for mountain, where they praised the Lord and remained for quite a long time, taking pleasure in the solitude and enjoying great peace of mind. On that rocky place where Moses, chief of prophets, was found worthy to see God (in so far as it is possible for anyone to see God), he built a church and consecrated a holy altar, which remain to this day. This done, he returned to his own place.

At this time his namesake, the wicked Emperor Julian, was threatening to destroy the Christians root and branch. He came into Persia, and those who thought as he did confidently expected to witness his return [in safety], but Julianus began to pray to God with great zeal and burning desire, which he kept up for ten days, until he heard a voice saying that that accursed and filthy pig had been removed. But he did not stop praying; he joyfully continued by turning his prayer into a song of thanksgiving to the gentle Saviour of his own people who were opposed to this powerful enemy. He had long been gentle and forbearing towards this wicked man, but at last his gentleness and tolerance of his crimes turned to anger, and brought down upon him the punishment he deserved.

When he had finished his prayer, he returned to his companions, and it was

obvious to them that he was in a tranquil and happy frame of mind, for the cheerfulness of his heart showed in the happiness of his face. They who knew him so well were astonished at this unwonted sight, for whereas he was usually solemn of countenance now he was seen to be smiling. They asked him what he was so happy about and he replied, "The present time, my brothers, is one of joy, for the wicked has been cast down, as Isaiah says (Isaiah 24.21), and the aggression he began has met with its just reward. He who defied the God who made and preserved him has been justly destroyed by the power of him who is the source of power. So I am gladdened to see the churches rejoicing which he had oppressed, and to know that the demons now infest him who used to seek their help, and no help now can he find." This was how he foresaw the fall of the wicked.

Valens took up the reins of Roman power after Julian, departed from the truth of the gospel and decided to impose the erroneous teaching of Arius. A great campaign against the Church began, the leaders were everywhere driven into exile, and replaced by hostile plunderers. I won't go into the whole course of that tragedy at present, but omit everything except just one event which plainly shows how the grace of the divine Spirit flourished in that old man. Now the great Meletius had been driven out of the church of Antioch, the pastoral care of which it was believed had been given him by the God of all. People of the same opinion as himself, professing belief in the one essence of the Trinity, together with some of the clergy, were also expelled from the holy churches. They came to a hollow in the mountains to celebrate the holy mysteries. They made the river bank an oratory, which at one time had been an army training ground in front of the northern gate. But the enemy would not permit these pious people to gather together all in one place, and infiltrated them with lying adherents of theirs who spread rumours among them that Julianus himself was in communion with those who held to this false teaching.

Now Flavianus and Diodorus, those blessed divine men, had the honour of being the priestly leaders of the people. Together with Aphraates, whose life I intend to give you an account of, if God wills, they persuaded the great Acacius (whom I have already mentioned) to make an approach to the illustrious Asterius, his teacher and, of course, the disciple of Julianus. Their aim was to go as quickly as possible to Julianus, that splendid example of

devotion and upholder of gospel teaching, to beg him to put aside his predilection for solitude and come to the aid of the thousands of people in danger from false teaching, in the hope that his arrival would be the means of extinguishing the flames of Arianism. Acacius hastened on his way, taking with him as requested the great Asterius, and came to Julianus.

"Tell me, father," he said after greeting him, "what are your reasons for all these great labours that you gladly undergo?"

"The worship of God," he replied, "is more precious to me than body and soul and life itself, than everything to do with life. So I try, as far as I am able, to serve him free from all stain and please him in all things."

"Let me put it to you," said Acacius, "that there is a way in which you can serve him even more greatly than you do at present. I shall not be giving you any logical argument, but simply put to you what I learn from the Lord's own teaching. For he asked Peter if he loved him more than the others (John.21.15), and then heard Peter say (what he knew already): 'Lord, you know that I love you.' The Lord then showed him what he must do to serve him even more. 'If you love me then' he said, 'feed my sheep, feed my lambs.' This also is what you must do, father. For the sheep are in great danger from the wolves, and he whom you love so greatly also loves the sheep. It is right for lovers to do things which, when done, are pleasing to the beloved.

Moreover, if you by your silence negligently allow the truth to be vigorously attacked, and do nothing to prevent the followers of truth being led astray, there is a great danger that all their many great achievements will be brought to naught. Your great name should be brought to the support of them in their persecution. For the leaders of the Arian abominations boastfully assert that you are on their side."

On hearing this, the old man cautioned them that although silence was to be cherished in its due context, nevertheless he would not steer clear of the noise of the city. And he set off to Antioch. After journeying through the desert for two or three days they came at nightfall to a farmhouse belonging to a rich woman. When she heard this holy band of people coming, she ran out to ask their blessing, fell at their feet and begged that they should refresh themselves at her house. The old man agreed, even though he had not enjoyed such accommodation for the previous forty years. While this admirable woman was emulating the hospitality of Sarah (Genesis 18.6), and ministering to the needs of these holy men, her only son aged seven fell into the well in the darkness of the evening. As might be expected he cried out loudly, but when his mother

heard she bade everyone not to worry about it but put a lid on the well while she carried on with her ministrations. She put the meal before the holy men, and the old man bade her to bring her son to receive a blessing. She said he was not feeling well, but the old man persisted that he should be brought in. At last the woman told him what had happened. The old man immediately left the table, ran to the well and lifted the lid. Having called for a light to be brought he could see the boy sitting on the surface of the water and splashing the water about childishly with his hand, thinking that it was all a game, when really he ought to have been dead. Ropes were brought and let down to him so that he could be lifted up out of the well, and at once he ran to the feet of the old man.

"I could see you below me in the water," he said, "lifting me up and preventing me from sinking."

What a reward the woman received from the blessed man for her hospitality! I won't say any more about what happened on their journey, but when they arrived at Antioch, people came running towards him from everywhere wanting to see the man of God, each of them seeking a cure for their ills. He was living in a cave on the side of the mountain where the divine apostle Paul is said to have lived in hiding. But no sooner had they realised that he was the man they were looking for than he was struck down by a violent fever. When the great Acacius saw how ill he was and then looked at the vast crowd of people who had gathered, he wondered whether they would all be worried about catching a disease from one who they hoped would be able to heal them.

"Don't worry," the old man said, "God will give me health if health is what is necessary."

Having said this, he straightaway turned to prayer, according to his custom, kneeling and touching the ground with his forehead. He begged God to restore him to health if that would be of benefit to those who had gathered there. He had barely finished his prayer when he began to sweat profusely, which extinguished the flames of his fever.

When he had freed many people from all kinds of diseases, he then went to a convent of religious, and as he was going through the gate a beggar who could only walk by dragging himself along on his buttocks stretched out his hand and touched the old man's cloak. By faith his illness left him, and he jumped up and ran about just as well as he could before he was disabled, imitating the lame man whom Peter and John had healed. (Acts 3.8). This deed caused the

whole population to gather together; the army training ground was crowded out. The liars and deceivers were covered in shame, while the followers of truth rejoiced with tranquil minds. And from here, those who had come seeking healing carried the light of truth back to their own homes. A man who held one of the most important public offices, that of signalling the beginning of each day, then sent Julianus a message asking him to come and heal him urgently of an illness. He went without delay, poured out his prayers to God and with a courteous word delivered him from his illness, adjuring him to give all his thanks to God.

After doing this and other such deeds he decided to go back to the monastic observances of his cell. As he was travelling through Cyrus (about two days' journey from Antioch), he turned aside to the church of the blessed martyr Dionysius. The people there were outstanding in the true and proper religion and worship of God, and they begged for protection from a calamity which had been foretold and which they were daily expecting. The people there were well known to be of the orthodox [recta] religion and true worship of God, but they could foresee that a disaster was about to come upon them and they were asking him to help them avert it. For they said that Asterius, who had joined the heretical faction, had succeeded in becoming bishop. He was well versed in the art of clever but false argument, was a vigorous advocate for erroneous teaching and was mounting vicious attacks on the truth.

"We fear," they said, "that many of the more simple among us may be deceived by the way he hides his lies beneath many layers of eloquence, and throws out a web of syllogisms like a net. This is the reason why those opposed to him have called for help."

"Don't worry," said the old man. "Join with us in beseeching God, and mingle some bodily mortification and eloquence into your prayers."

They all engaged in prayer, and on the eve of a popular feast day when that enemy of truth and defender of falsehood was planning to make a speech, he suffered a stroke, sent by God. Over the course of the day his condition worsened till he departed this life, doubtless hearing a voice saying, 'You fool, this day your life is required of you (Luke 12.20), and you will be ensnared in the coils and traps that you have prepared for others.' A similar tale is told of Balaam, who when summoned by the wicked Balak to utter curses against the people of God prophesied that he would instead be killed by the right hand of Israel (Numbers 24.17). So likewise Asterius, thinking to propagate his deceitful opinions among the people of God, by the God of the people was

deprived of his life. This deliverance was granted to Cyrus through prayer. It was the great Acacius who told me all these events which I have related, to my mind a truly divine story. He was acutely aware of everything that Julianus did.

He went away from there and returned to his companions, living among them for some time before moving on gladly and willingly to a trouble-free life of old age. As one who had prayed for passionlessness in this life he was looking forward to immortality of the body. But I shall now turn from him to someone else, standing in prayer and begging that all who read this tale will by their prayers obtain for me a blessing from heaven.

Chapter III MARCIANUS

So glorious was his life, how can I possibly have enough time to do justice to that celebrated Marcianus? For he along with Elijah and John and the like are to be reckoned among those who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being in want, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts, in mountains, in caves and in hidden places of the earth (Hebrews 11.37).

His native land was that Cyrus which we were writing about earlier. Later he lived in the desert. He has now departed from both native land and desert and has his dwelling in heaven. His native land gave birth to him, the desert nourished him and gave him the victory, and heaven accepted him as a crowned king who had held as naught his exalted family rank. For he came from a noble family of royal splendour, among whom he prospered, nature's handiwork having given him a magnificent bodily appearance and a mind adorned with the marks of genius. But he transferred all his love towards God and everything to do with him.

He cherished all God's commandments, he laid hold on the lifeline offered by solitude, and built himself a little shelter, barely big enough for his bodily needs, which he surrounded with a wall. There he purposefully shut himself up, cut off from all human intercourse, conversing however with the God of all, and listening for his sweet voice. For as he practised divine eloquence so he reckoned to hear the divine voice. He conversed with God in prayer and supplications, and although always enjoying great delights was always thirsting for more [lit. never accepted satiety]. For he listened to what the

great David sang about in his psalms: 'He who meditates on the law of the Lord day and night is like a tree planted by the waterside, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season and its leaves shall not wither' (Psalms 1.3). He longed for this fruit and joyfully embraced the work. His psalmody led on to prayer, and prayer led on to psalmody, and both led on to reading the wisdom of the divines. He ate nothing but bread, which he measured out exactly; and the amount he allowed himself would scarcely have satisfied a newly-weaned child. They say that he divided a pound of bread into four portions which he shared out over four days, one part to each day. His daily meal was at eventide. He never fully satisfied either his hunger or his thirst; he allowed his body only sufficient to support life. He used to say that to take food only after many days fasting meant that the work of God could not be properly performed during the time of fasting, and that when the time came to eat, a greater amount than usual was taken, weighing down the stomach, and making the mind less vigilant. So that it was better to eat daily, but never to satisfy the appetite fully. True fasting consists in perpetual deprivation. This divine man always kept to this regimen, and although he had a large body, and was the tallest and most handsome of all the men of his time, he survived on that small ration of food.

After some time he accepted two attendants, Eusebius who inherited his holy shelter, and Agapetus who introduced all these angelic rules into Apamea. There is a large and densely populated town there called Nicerte, where he established two schools of wisdom [gymnasia philosophiae], one of which is named after him, the other after the greatly admired Simeon who was a shining light of wisdom there for a space of fifty years. At the present day there are more than forty men living there, athletes striving after virtue, and lovers of the religion and worship of the one true God, and who are scaling the heights of heaven by their labours. Agapetus and Simeon were the legislators of this republic, establishing the laws which they had learnt from the great Marcianus. It would be difficult to enumerate the many settlements, founded in pursuit of the virtues, and governed by these same laws and institutions, which these two founded. But the founder of all these later ones was that divine Marcianus, for he who sows the goodliest seed may rightly be recognised as the author of the good fruits that spring from it.

At first, as I have said, he willingly lived alone in his prison, and when he admitted those other two, they did not live in the same cell, for it was hardly big enough for him alone, it was so small. It needed a great effort for him both

to stand up and lie down, for when he stood his head and neck touched the roof, and he could not stretch out his legs when lying down because the length of the cell did not match the length of his body. So he let them build another shelter and told them to live there and pray and sing hymns and read the wisdom of the divines by themselves. When even more wanted to share in this profitable way of life, he ordered another dwelling to be erected further off and bade those live in it who would. Eusebius was their leader, handing on the teaching of the great Marcianus. But when the divine Agapetus had become well trained and established, he went back home, as I have said, and sowed the seed which he had been given by that divine Marcianus. However, he became so well known and famous that he was held to be worthy of pontifical honour. Pastoral care was committed to his charge, the care of his native land was entrusted to his faithfulness.

Eusebius however, that admirable man, leader of a gathered flock, undertook the role of teacher, and alone was allowed the honour of visiting Marcianus as often as he wished, to consult him on whatever he wanted. One night he was bold enough to approach Marcianus' window, because he wanted to know what he was doing, and as he bent down to peer in, he saw a light of supernal beauty shining round the head of his guide, a light not caused by human hand but by God, teaching him how to understand the divine eloquence of the sacred Scriptures. For he was holding a book in his hand, searching for the most holy treasures of the will of God. This sight filled the admirable Eusebius with enormous awe and fear as he was being taught how grace was poured out upon this minister of God, and witnessed the good will of God towards his servants.

Once while the great Marcianus was praying just outside his door, a reptile [draco] crawled over the eastern wall and looked down from the top of the wall on Marcianus. It was hissing, and looked most horrible as it threatened to attack. Eusebius was standing some way off, terrified by this sight. Suspecting that his teacher was not aware of the beast, he shouted out a warning, and begged him to flee. But Marcianus rebuked him and told him not to be afraid, (for to be afraid was a most injurious defect). Then he made the sign of the cross with his finger, and blew with his mouth at the beast, and poured out upon it all the enmity of the ages. It sizzled up immediately at Marcianus' breath as if scorched by fire, and was blown into fragments like sparks among the stubble. See now how this servant of goodwill was imitating the Lord. For when the Lord was at sea in the disciples' boat, he saw how anxious and

troubled they were, and did not still the tempest before he had rebuked the disciples for their little faith (Matthew 8.26). Following this example, the admirable Marcianus first quelled his disciple's fear, then punished the beast. Such was the wisdom of the great Marcianus, and his performing of miracles and faithfulness towards God. But although he was honoured with such grace as to be able to perform great miracles, he tried always to conceal his power, ever wary of the tricks of that plunderer of virtue who might subtly sow the vice of arrogance in an endeavour to snatch away the harvest gathered with so much labour. But although he wanted to hide the graces given him, miracles flowed forth from him unbidden; the splendour of his deeds rightly shone out, and laid bare his hidden powers.

Sometimes, something like this happened:

There was a man of honourable estate, a military commander, whose daughter had for a long time been raving in her speech, driven mad by the attack of an evil demon. This man had already had some contact with the great Marcianus, and came out into the desert hoping that in view of his former acquaintance he would be permitted to meet him and ask for help. But it was a false hope. He was prevented from getting an interview by the old man who at that time had been given the task of serving Marcianus. So he asked this servant if he would just take a small flask of oil and put it outside the door of Marcianus' little cell. The servant repeatedly said he would not do it, and the request was just as often repeated, until at last he gave way. But when the great Marcianus heard a little noise outside, he asked who it was, where did he come from and what did he want. And the servant suppressed the truth, and simply said he had come to see whether Marcianus wanted anything. He had scarcely uttered the words before Marcianus sent him away.

Next morning the girl's father asked if he could have the flask of oil back. In some trepidation the servant went as quietly as possible, and tried to reach out his hand and pick up the flask without being heard. But Marcianus once again asked him what he wanted. But when he gave the same reply as he had given the evening before, the man of God would not accept it, seeing that it was quite unusual for him to come as often as that. He demanded to be told the truth. Realising that it was impossible to deceive someone so full of grace, the servant in fear and trembling told him who it was who had been seeking help because of this tragic disease, and showed him the flask. Marcianus was angry, because it stood to reason that he was unwilling to display his power. "If I hear of anything like this again," he threatened, "going against my usual

customs as you are, I shall take your ministry away from you." (For anyone who knew how to make money out of it, that would be a great loss.) He then dismissed him, telling him to return the flask to the owner. And he also issued commands: and the demon who was four days' journey away bellowed because of the power of those commands. For Marcianus was acting like a judge in Berhoea, and using some of his lictors against the demon. That wicked wretch was expelled, and the girl delivered completely from what was possessing her. The girl's father was informed about this as he returned. For while still a few miles from the city, a servant sent from the girl's mother came running towards him and told him that a miracle had occurred about four days earlier. Taking account of the time, he calculated that that was exactly when the old man had given him back the flask. It occurs to me to wonder what this great man might not have done if he had really set his mind to doing miracles. If such glory shone out when he was trying to conceal the powers that he had been given, what miracles might he not have done if really tried!

When he finally allowed people to visit him, on the day after celebrating the sacred passion and resurrection of the Lord, all were very eager to see him. The leading bishops gathered around him, the great Flavianus, whose faith was believed to have saved Antioch, the divine Acacius whom we mentioned earlier, Eusebius the bishop of Chalcedon, and Isodorus who at that time had charge of Cyrus, all of whom were men of great renown. Theodotus also joined them, he who held the reins of the church of Hierapolis, famous for his monastic discipline and gentleness. Many from among the judiciary also came, burning with faithful zeal. As they were all sitting around silently, waiting to hear his sacred voice, he also sat there for quite some time without saying anything, 'slow to speak, but swift to hear' (James 1.19). At last one of those sitting around spoke up. Marcianus knew him well for he had come to Marcianus for spiritual guidance, and was well known in other ways for his authority and worthiness.

"Father," he said, "all these divine fathers are hopefully thirsting for the sweet streams of your teaching. Please do not dam up the rivers of your kindness, but favour all those here with something of benefit to us."

He sighed deeply and then spoke.

"The God of all", he said, "speaks to us daily through his creation, and through the divine Scriptures he teaches what we need, and forewarns us; he alarms with threats of punishment, and encourages us by his promises; and yet we do not profit by them."

What was the purpose of Marcianus speaking like this, not only forbearing to be of use to others but also losing the benefits that others could have given him? He did it to encourage the other fathers to speak; but I feel it would be superfluous to bring what they said into my narrative. When they had all stood up to pray, they wanted to lay hands on Marcianus to ordain him to the priesthood, but they were apprehensive of doing so. They all urged each other to do it, but none of them was willing. And so they all departed.

I would like to add another story to the above, as an illustration of his divine prudence. A certain Avitus had gone into the desert earlier than Marcianus, and built a hut in which to carry out his monastic exercises. He had begun his labours at an earlier time than the great Marcianus, a lover of wisdom, and well trained in a hard ascetic life. When he heard of the virtues of Marcianus who was being talked about everywhere, he thought that such an example was very beneficial in the cause of silence and restfulness and set out to visit this attractive man. When the great Marcianus knew he had come he opened his door and welcomed him in, giving instructions to the admirable Eusebius to prepare some lentils and vegetables for him to eat. After they had satisfied their desire to have a conversation and learned about each other's virtues, they said the office of Nones together. Eusebius then brought in some bread for their meal.

"Come now, my most dear friend," the great Marcianus said to the divine Avitus, "Let us share this meal together."

"Indeed," said Avitus, "I don't know whether I have ever eaten before Vespers, and sometimes I go two or three days without eating at all."

"But for my sake," said the great Marcianus, "let your custom be relaxed today, for I have rather a weak body and I cannot wait until Vespers." But these words had no effect whatsoever on the admirable Avitus. Marcianus sighed and went on to say:

"I am vexed in spirit and take it very hard that you have gone to such trouble to come and see a man whom you thought to be such a hard worker and lover of wisdom only to be disappointed of your hope and find a petty innkeeper living in delicate luxury."

Avitus was cut to the quick.

"I would rather eat flesh," he said, "than to hear you say such things."

"Well, my friend," said the great Marcianus, "I too follow the same life as you do, and embrace the same code of behaviour, and prefer work to idleness, and fasting to feasting, and do not usually eat till nightfall, but we know that

charity is more important than fasting. Charity is prescribed by divine law, fasting is for us to make our own decision about. We must hold that the divine laws are more important for us."

And so they discussed these things among themselves, and took a little food, and praised God, and spent three days together before taking their leave of each other, knowing that they were united in spirit. How can anyone not admire the wisdom that governed everything this man did? He knew when it was a time for fasting and when for fraternal charity, he understood how one virtue differed from another, and which one should give way to the other and gain the victory in any given set of circumstances.

There is something else I can tell you to illustrate his perfect grasp of things divine. His sister came to visit him from their native land, bringing her son with her who was a leading citizen of the city of Cyrus. They brought an abundance of gifts for him to enjoy. He refused to see his sister, but seeing that it was at the time which he had definitely set aside for meeting people, he did admit the son, who begged him to accept the gifts they had brought.

"How many monasteries have you visited on the way," he asked, "and how much of what you bring have you shared out with them?"

"Nothing," he replied.

"Well, you can go, and take your gifts with you. I have no need of any of them, and even if I did need them I would not accept them, for you are doing this kindness simply because I am a relation of yours, and not with any intention of godly piety and service. You would not have singled me out for these gifts had you not had no care whatsoever for the general need."

And so he sent away his sister and her son, having given instructions that nothing which they had brought should be accepted from them. To act thus is of course contrary to nature, but he had been completely converted to a heavenly style of living. What more convincing evidence could there be brought that he was a worthy follower of God, conformed to the voice of God himself, who said 'For whosoever does not renounce father and mother, and sisters and brothers and wife and children is not worthy of me.' (Matthew 10.37)? If someone who renounces not is unworthy, someone who does renounce, especially in such exact and demanding terms, must obviously be considered worthy indeed.

Even more than this I admire how completely perfected he was in the matter of divine teaching. For he abhorred the infamies of Arius, who at that time was in the ascendant because of the power of the Emperor. He detested also

the madness of Apollinaris and strenuously opposed those who agreed with Sabellius that the three persons or hypostases were not individually distinct. He brought strong arguments to bear on the people called 'Euchitae', who, wearing monastic habits, were infected with Manichaeism. And he was so zealous for ecclesiastical regulations that he could undertake a justifiable dispute even against a man who was a greatly respected divine. For there was a certain Abraham in that desert, with silvered hair but even more silvery in prudence, well known for every virtue, and continually pouring forth fruitful tears of compunction. Endowed with a certain simplicity he had from the beginning kept up the earlier celebration of Easter. Unaware, it seems, of what the Nicaean fathers had decreed on this matter, he was happily keeping to the old custom. There were many others at that time who were unwittingly doing the same. But the great Marcianus brought many arguments to bear as he attempted to persuade Abraham (for so he was called by those who lived in that region) to come into agreement with the Church. When he continued to be disobedient, Marcianus excommunicated him. But as time went on that divine man threw off that stain on his character, and fell into line with the customs of the Church in celebrating this feast, singing 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord' (Psalms 119.1). Such was the effect of the great Marcianus' teaching.

There were many people building oratories in various places: Alypius, his sister's son, in Cyrus, Zenobia, a famous one in Chalcedon, which was noted for its power and very rich. And there were quite a few others who were competing with each other in making plans to snatch that illustrious athlete's body, once he had obtained the victory [i.e. 'died']. When the man of God got to know about that, he made the admirable Eusebius swear a terrifying oath that he would bury him in a place where nobody except the two companions who were living with him, would discover where his grave was until many years later. The admirable Eusebius fulfilled this oath to the letter. For when the end of this remarkable, victorious life came at last, and the chorus of Angels had translated his divine and sacred soul to the heavenly regions, Eusebius did not announce his death until with two companions he had dug a grave, put the body in it, and smoothed out the earth above it. For more than fifty years, many people came searching for his body, but his grave remained undiscovered.

Now one of the oratories which I just mentioned, dedicated to the apostles, received the relics of some other martyrs, thereby signifying that they were

inheritors of the teaching and worship of those martyrs. The sole survivor of the three who buried Marcianus then revealed the place where he was buried, and the members of the oratory placed the remains of his precious body in a stone coffin which they had prepared two years earlier.

The admirable Eusebius had long been emulating the virtues of Marcianus, and never ceased disciplining his body. He carried around on his body a hundred and twenty Roman pounds of iron, then added on first another fifty which belonged to the divine Agapetus, then eighty belonging to the great Marcianus. He had an oratory in a hollow, from which the waters of a lake had been drained. He carried on this way of life for three years.

I have digressed into talking about these things because I wanted to show how great and how many were the deeds meticulously and virtuously carried out, of which Marcianus was the instigator and inspiration. The fruit resulting from his love of wisdom was also recognised by that splendid man Basil, who much later built a monastery at Seleucobelum, a city in Syria. He was famous for all kinds of virtues, but especially for those things most pleasing to God, namely the possession of charity and the godly work of hospitality. But who could count up, without boasting, how many workmen there were who 'handled rightly the word of truth', as the apostle puts it? (2 Timothy 2.15). For the moment I shall pass over many who were worthy of praise, lest they make this story too long. I shall just make mention of one only:

There was one whom they called Sabinus who used to come to Marcianus regularly. He used to subject his body to many labours. He never ate bread, nor anything which usually went with it; his sole food was flour mixed with water. His custom was to mix enough for a month, and it became mouldy and stank. By this diet, he wanted to weaken the desires of the flesh, and make sure that the stench of the food saved him from taking any pleasure in it. [lit. enjoyment grew weaker through the stench of the food). This was his regime when on his own, but when any of his companions visited him, he would with complete simplicity and lack of fuss eat whatever it was they brought with them.

As an example of how blessed he was by God's grace, a certain woman of Antioch, very influential because of her wealth and family, came to him begging his help for her daughter who was vexed with a demon.

"I saw in a dream," she said, "someone telling me to come here so that the prayers of the top person of the monastery might heal my child."

"The top person of the monastery," said the gatekeeper, "is not in the habit of

talking with women."

But the woman persisted, weeping and howling and making a very loud noise until the prior [praefectus] came out.

"This is not the man," she said. "It was someone else that was shown to me in my dream, someone with a ruddy face and hard patches of skin on his knees." Then they knew who it was she was looking for, and they persuaded him to come out and see the woman. No sooner had she recognised his face than the evil demon went out of the girl with a loud cry. Such were the marvellous deeds done by the disciples of Marcianus' disciples; so many flowers did this best of gardeners propagate everywhere.

But here I must bring this story to an end, and I beg and pray that all these disciples may plead for me, and bring me help from heaven.

Chapter IV EUSEBIUS

In the tales that I have written so far I have shown how the sterile desert has brought forth fruits unto God, fruits ripe and beautiful, pleasing to him who made them grow, splendid and greatly to be sought after by people who are wise. Lest anyone should think that such virtue is circumscribed by place and that only the desert is suitable for bringing forth such a harvest, let us now go on to treat prayerfully of places which are inhabited and show that such places provide no impediment to developing a love of wisdom.

There is a high mountain to the east of Antioch and to the west of Berhoea, which is higher than all the other mountains nearby. The very top of it is shaped like a crown, called thus because of its height. People living nearby call it □□□□□□□ that is, vertex [= 'whirlpool, summit or crown']. At the highest point there was once a temple to the demons, held in greatest honour by the local people. But underneath it, to the South, a plain opens up, or rather, a valley, bounded on each side by gentle slopes. These slopes which are cut through on each side from south to North to provide footpaths, spread out to a road which can be ridden along on horseback. Country houses both large and small have been built here, near the mountains on each side. Hard by the edge of the highest part of the mountain there is a large, well populated village. The local people call it Teleda. Higher up still on the side of the mountain is a mountain valley, not very steep but gently sloping, facing the plain and the south wind.

Here a certain Ammianus built a school for lovers of wisdom [i.e, a monastery]. He was a man well known for his many virtues and surpassed all others in modesty, and sufficient proof of that lies in that he often had recourse to the great Eusebius in order to provide satisfactory teaching material not only for his fellows but for twice as many others as well. He begged and prayed that Eusebius would consent to be helper, trainer and schoolmaster for this establishment which he had founded.

Now Eusebius lived twenty-five miles away, shut up in his tiny little dwelling which did not even have any windows. It was Marcianus who had inspired him to this pitch of endeavour, Marcianus who had nurtured him, Marcianus the faithful servant of God, given the same name (1 Chronicles 6.49) as the Lord honoured the great Moses with. And once Marcianus had tasted for himself the divine love, he did not want to be the only one to enjoy such good things but caused many others to become his companions in this love. He attracted Eusebius to him and also his brother who accompanied him. For he thought it would be unreasonable to encourage people to be virtuous who were not related, if he did not treat brothers the same. He drew both of them into his little household, and trained them in living according to the gospel. But their training was interrupted when the brother fell ill, and death followed soon after. A few days after his brother had departed, the great Eusebius came completely to terms with the fact that his life had ended, and remained with Marcianus throughout his life, speaking to no one, hidden from public view, totally enclosed. He continued to embrace this life after Marcianus' death, until the admirable Ammianus came to him with many persuasive arguments. "Tell me, O best of men," said Ammianus, "Whom do you think you are pleasing by following this laborious, mean and squalid lifestyle?" "God," replied Eusebius, speaking to him as an equal, "for God is the lawgiver and guide to all virtue."

"If you love God," said Ammianus, "I will show you a way whereby you may burn with love even more, and serve him whom you love. For it seems to me that all your care and industry is directed towards yourself, and lays you open to the charge of too great a self-love. But the divine law bids us love our neighbour. This is the essence of the true gift of charity, however many works you undertake to perform (Romans 13.9-10). And Paul calls this the fulfilment of the law (Galatians 5.14). Indeed the Lord himself in the sacred Gospel urged Peter, who professed to love him more than the others, to feed his sheep (John 21.15). And he rebukes those who do not do this, saying through the

Prophet, 'You shepherds, is it not yourselves you are feeding, not the sheep?' (Ezekiel 34.2). It was on that account that he commanded the great Elijah to turn from the life of solitude and go among the ungodly (1 Kings 18.1), and following Elijah, he sent John, famous for so many works, to the banks of the Jordan, where he baptised and preached (Matthew 3.1). So then seeing that you too are an ardent lover of God who made you, bring on many others to be lovers of God along with you, for this would be greatly pleasing to the family of God. Moreover he also called Ezekiel to be a watchman and to testify to the wicked (Ezekiel 3.17); Jonah he commanded to hasten to Nineveh, and when he refused took him there under duress."

This and similar arguments softened the divine man's resistance. He abandoned his prison of his own accord, and Ammianus led him out and took him away and entrusted to him the care of his fellow-monks. I don't know which to admire more, the self effacing nature of the one, or the obedience of the other and the fact that he was willing to be persuaded. The one forbore the leadership, preferring rather to be among those who obeyed, avoiding the dangers of high position; the great Eusebius, who had turned away from mixing with the multitude, gave that up, and, conquered by the demands of charity, accepted the oversight of the flock and guided their common life. He did not need to make use of long speeches in his teaching; his look was often enough sufficient to restore quickly even the laziest to the path of virtue, for those who knew him say that he was always of a grave countenance, able to strike fear into those who confronted him.

He himself took food only every third or fourth day, but those living with him he bade to eat every other day. He urged everyone to pray assiduously to God and to fill every minute with this work. The set offices should be said in common, and in the intervening spaces of the day, each one should pray to God and seek for salvation, whether under the shade of some tree, or near some rock or wherever they might be, either standing up or lying down. And he taught that each part of the body should be trained to do only such things as were according to reason. To make this more obvious to everyone I shall just mention one story about him:

He and the admirable Ammianus would sit on a rock, and one would read out stories from the divine gospels while the other would explain the meaning of some of the more difficult bits. On one occasion Eusebius' attention was distracted by gazing at some farmers working in a field below. When Ammianus had read a portion of the gospel and asked for his comments,

Eusebius asked him to read it again.

"It's obvious," said Ammianus, " that you have been so taken up with looking at the ploughmen that you have not heard a word I have said."

From that time onwards he made a rule for his eyes that they should not gaze out over the fields, or enjoy the beauty of the heavens and the sight of the starry skies, but keep them directed to a narrow path, traditionally of only a handbreadth's width, which would be conducive to prayer. From then on he did not allow himself to stray from this path, and they say that he lived according to this law for the next forty years. In order to force himself to keep to this intention, he constructed an iron chain to put round his neck in addition to the chain which he already wore round his loins, so that weighed down by them he would carefully keep his eyes always directed to the ground. This was the punishment he inflicted on himself for gazing at those farmers.

Many more things besides were told me by those who knew him and understood his way of life. That great old Acacius whom I have mentioned before also told me that when he saw how curved his back was he asked him what was the point of never allowing himself to look at the sky or look out over the fields, and never to deviate from this narrow way.

"I started these things up against the machinations of the evil enemy," he replied. "I was trying to distract his attention towards things of lesser importance in order to prevent him from making war against me in the big things, such as trying to rob me of temperance and justice, stirring up anger in me, making me burn with lust, making me arrogant and swell with pride and anything else he might devise against my soul. For if he had conquered me in these lesser things it would not have caused me any great harm, but if he had been conquered it would have made him look the more ridiculous for not having been able to come out on top even in matters so trifling. I realised that this type of warfare was less dangerous, for I would not have been seriously damaged if I slipped up slightly. So I transferred to this type of warfare, as I would not be very greatly damaged if I did slip up and look at the fields or the sky; he could not strike me down or destroy me in such matters, there are not any death dealing weapons in them, lacking any sharp iron points as they do."

The great Acacius assured me he had heard Eusebius say all this, to the admiration of his wisdom, warlike virtue and experience. Therefore he repeated it to anyone who wanted to learn about such things, as being something admirable and worthy of being committed to memory.

His reputation spread into all parts and attracted many lovers of virtue to him,

especially Agrippa and Jacobus Persa, outstanding leaders of the flock, divine men who succeeded the old man Julianus whose story we have told above. After Julianus came to the end of this life and passed to the life above, they hastened to the great Eusebius, rightly considering it better to be ruled than to rule in a position of superiority.

In what I have already said about Jacobus I briefly summed up his virtues, but now I shall show more plainly how great was his love of wisdom. For as the divine Eusebius was on the point of leaving this world, he asked Jacobus to take on the leadership of the flock. But he refused this responsibility, and unable to satisfy those who wanted him to take it on, went to another flock, preferring to be fed rather than to feed, and came thus to the end of his life after many years.

It was Agrippa who took this leadership on, a man adorned with many good qualities, especially purity of soul by means of which he eagerly sought after the vision of divine beauty and burned with the fire of love. His cheeks were perpetually furrowed by tears. After feeding that chosen, divine flock for many years he departed this life, and the divine David took on the leadership. I myself was able to profit from his personality.

He was a man who truly followed the injunction of the Apostle to 'mortify his members which were on earth' (Colossians 3.5). He had benefited so much from the teaching of the great Eusebius that he lived for forty-five years in the monastery without any outbursts of anger in all that time. Even after he had taken on the leadership no one ever saw him in a state of agitation, even though there were many things that might have upset him. A hundred and fifty men were nurtured by his skill. Some, helped by his excellent and unsurpassed virtue, were able to imitate him in 'having his conversation in heaven' (Philippians 3.20). Others took wings for the first time and were taught how to rise above the world and fly. But if it became obvious that out of the many who were taught such divine things some were failing (for it is hardly possible that those attempting this life should always be faultless), that divine man remained completely unmoved; nothing that happened could make him lose his temper. I know this not merely by hearsay but from experience. I had long desired to visit this community, and when I did so with several other pilgrims who followed the same way of life as I did, we stayed a whole week with this divine man and never saw his expression change once. He was never either convulsed with mirth or bowed down by sorrow. His eyes likewise were never sometimes screwed up and savage, sometimes twinkling, but maintained

unwaveringly a serene and straightforward expression.

I think I have said enough to demonstrate his tranquillity of soul, and some might think that nothing ever moved him at all. So I must needs tell you something which happened while we were there. That divine man was having a session with us expounding on the love of wisdom, and considering the question of what was the highest form of living the evangelical life, when the presentation of his opinions was interrupted by one Publius, a Roman by race, a man of impeccable morals, endowed with the honour of the priesthood and holding the second highest position in that hierarchy [*illius praefecturae secundas partes obtinens*]. He spoke forcefully against the divine David, saying that his mildness was a common scandal, and that his clemency was disastrous for everyone, and that his idea of the highest form of the love of wisdom was not good sense [*modestia*] but madness [*amentia*]. But David's composure was rock-like. He listened to the argument, was not in the least bit injured by such words, which by their very nature are designed to cause injury. The expression on his face did not change, he did not refuse to continue with the conference, but answered his opponent with a calm voice and gentle words which gave outward expression to his serenity of soul. He spoke as one who could bring healing to whoever wanted it. Along with those who came with me, I speak, as you can see, as one who thinks healing was needed.

How could anyone have shown greater gentleness of spirit? As one of the highest rank he put up with insults from one of the second rank in the presence of many guests who heard these insults, and yet was not subject to any angry outburst or upset which might have overcome the equanimity of even the greatest and highest spiritual virtue. The divine Apostle himself, when dealing with the weakness of human nature, controlled though it should be by laws appropriate to that nature, said 'Be angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath' (Ephesians 4.26 & Psalms 4.4). For he knew that it is part of our nature to be moved by anger even when we do not want to be, and that the law does not help us in making difficult decisions which we might not even be able to carry out. He allowed a whole day in which to be moved by the natural storms of anger, expecting it be constrained by reason, to be held in as with a bridle, and not allowed to be given its full expression. But this divine man contended with the law as laid down and 'leapt over the wall' (Psalms 18.29). Not content with allowing his anger to last till evening, he did not allow himself to be angry at all. Such was the result of having been

taught by the great Eusebius.

I saw many others in that house who loved and emulated his love of wisdom, some in the flower of youth, others in extreme old age. Even those who had got to the age of ninety were reluctant to modify their laborious way of life, but maintained with great credit the disciplines of their youth, praising God day and night, and performing their sacred duties, surviving on unattractive food taken every two days.

To prevent this story becoming unduly prolonged let me omit some who do not really deserve to be passed over, but are worthy of being praised and celebrated. I will just mention one more who lived in that divine place, a man called Amman who hailed from the tribe of Ishmael. He had not, however, been driven out from the house of Abraham as had he from whom his tribe is named (Genesis 16.11), but shared in the inheritance of his father Isaac, or rather, he had taken the kingdom of heaven by storm (Matthew 11.12). He had persevered in the practice of monastic discipline under someone called Marosas, whose life in the desert gave them both an excellent opportunity to develop. Marosas gave up acting as superior to others, and with Amman came to this monastery [sc. Eusebius' monastery], where he lived for but a short while with diligent discipline and outstanding distinction before departing this life. Amman however lived for another thirty-eight years. His enthusiasm for the work was as great as if he had only just begun. Day by day he never wore shoes. In wintertime he would sit in the shade, in the heat of summer he would sit in the sun, and would endure the scorching fire of it as if it were the gentlest of Zephyr breezes. He did not allow himself to drink any water, he did not even eat the sort of food which was used by others who abstained from water (for they used to eat food which was well soaked in water), but ate the same food as everyone else. Eating such small quantities, sufficient to give him a reasonable amount of energy, he deemed water to be superfluous. His loins were bound with heavy iron chains, he rarely sat down, night and day he either stood or knelt, offering the Lord the sacrifice of prayer. He never reclined [sc. at meals], and no one night or day ever saw him lying down completely. And indeed, when he was made leader of the choir, did he not apply himself to this labour with prompt and eager attention, giving an example of his love of wisdom to those under him?

This is what those outstanding warriors were like whom the divine Eusebius, as their schoolmaster and trainer, was able to offer to the Lord. He produced many more like that, and sent them as teachers to other monasteries, where

they filled those sacred landscapes with spiritual meadows, giving off a sweet scented odour. So although this house of monastic training was originally in the East, it seems to have become an embryonic love of wisdom, coming to birth in the West and South, as if forming a choir of stars encircling the moon, giving praise to their Creator, some in Greek, some in the language of the place where they lived. But I am attempting things beyond my capabilities in my desire to portray all the noble deeds which sprang from that divine soul. So I put a stop to this narrative and turn to another, confident of the benefits to be gained as I beg to share in blessings from these great men.

Chapter V

PUBLIUS

At that same time there was a certain Publius who was very comely to look upon, and blessed with a soul appropriate for such a body, or rather, giving proof in the body of the admirable qualities of his soul. He was of a senatorial family, born in Zeugma, a city associated with Xerxes, whose fame is everywhere known. Xerxes while fighting in a Grecian war and wanting to send his army across the River Euphrates gathered a great number of ships, joined them together and thus made a bridge over the river. He called the place Zeugma, that is, 'Bridge', and the city takes its name from that.

Coming from such a city and born into such a family, Publius took possession of a site high up about thirty miles from the city, where he built himself a little dwelling place, and then sold everything left to him by his father: house, possessions, flocks, clothing, vessels both of silver and bronze, and everything else there was. In accordance with the divine law he shared it all out among the needy and freed himself from all worldly cares, taking upon himself one single care only, to serve him who had called him. Night and day he turned things over in his mind, planning and devising means of growing in this service, with the result that he daily took on more and more. Each day became fuller and more intense, which he found to be sweet and pleasurable, though never enough to satisfy him completely. No one ever saw him idle at any time during the day. If he wasn't praying he was psalmodising, if not psalmodising he was praying, both of these things alternating with the reading of the divine scriptures. Besides this, he saw to the needs of visitors who came to him and carried out other necessary tasks. As he went on in this kind of life, he became an example of virtue to anyone who had a mind to follow him, and like a

singing bird he enticed into his saving net many others like him.

Right from the beginning, however, he did not let anyone share his dwelling place, but built little huts for them at a suitable distance nearby. He bade each person who came to him to live by himself, constantly visiting them, and keeping a sharp eye out lest anyone should be changing this custom. They say also that he took with him a pair of scales and carefully weighed out the bread, and if he found anyone with more of it than he should, he would be very angry and call them gluttons. He taught that they should never eat and drink to satiety, but take only so much as was necessary to sustain the life of the body. And if ever he found anyone using flour instead of bran, he labelled them accursed as if they had been enjoying Sybaritic delights. And at night he would appear unexpectedly outside the door and if he found anyone to be awake and praising God he went away again, but if he found anyone asleep he would bang on the door and give him a tongue-lashing, telling him he was taking far more care of his body than he needed.

This was a great labour for him, and on this account some of those who were of the same mind and opinion as he made a suggestion that he should build one house for all of them. They urged that those who were scattered about could be much more closely and carefully governed, and he would be freed from a considerable burden of care. The plan was approved by this most wise man. He gathered them all together, pulling down their small huts and building one house for the whole company, so that they could live together and encourage each other. While one strove to be gentle, another might season his gentleness with zeal; one who could demonstrate the value of keeping vigil might also take on the discipline of fasting.

"In this way," he said, "each of us may make up for what is lacking in the others, and strive towards the perfecting of our virtues."

In the same way, while one sold bread in the market place of the city, another sold vegetables, one had clothes to sell, another made shoes. Each one contributed to the smoothness of the life by seeing to the needs of the other. Someone who had clothes to spare could receive shoes in exchange, another who needed vegetables could buy them with bread. We all of us need to share our best attributes with each other.

They all fought the ascetic battle using the same language, praising God in Greek. But when some of those using the local language were smitten with a desire to take part in this organised life, they came in a body to ask that they might also be admitted to the community and benefit from their teaching.

Their request was granted, and mindful of the saying of the Lord, 'Go and teach all nations' (Matthew 28.19), he built another house next to the first for them to live in. He then built a chapel and divided them into two choirs, but bade them offer the morning and evening prayers together at the same time at the beginning and end of each day, each section using their own language, but singing the psalms alternately. This arrangement continued up to the present day. The passing of time, which often tends to bring changes, in fact brought no alteration, for those who later came to be in charge never took it into their heads to make any changes in what Publius had laid down. And this stayed the same throughout not just two or three but many changes of leadership.

When Publius finally won the victory and passed on to realms free from all strife, the leadership went to Theotecnus who spoke Greek and Aphthonius who spoke Syrian, both of whom were of such virtue as to be living icons or statues. But in dealing with those who were already there as well as those who came in from outside, neither of them would claim that Publius' death meant that they were putting themselves forward as express copies of the sort of life he had lived. Theotecnus did not live very long, and his leadership passed to Theodotus. Aphthonius however lasted for a long time, caring for the flock and ruling according to the laws already laid down. Theodotus came from Armenia, and when he saw how the monastic life was ordered, he became the first of those who were ruled by the great Theotecnus, after whose death, as I have said, he took on the leadership. He was such an adornment to this position that he almost eclipsed the fame of those who had gone before.

The Love of God so filled his being and wounded him with fiery darts, that day and night he poured forth tears of compunction. He was so full of spiritual grace that when he was praying everyone else who was present fell silent, in order to listen only to his sacred words, reckoning that just to listen to him was a good prayer. Who could be so obstinate as not to be won over by those genuine words so sincerely uttered, softening all disobedience and hardness of heart and leading towards the service of God? He daily increased his labours, opening his treasures full of such good things. After feeding the flock for twenty-five years, he was gathered to his fathers in a good old age, as the Scriptures put it (Genesis 25.8), having taken up the reins from Theotecnus, whose nephew he was, although a brother in the way he behaved.

After the divine Aphthonius had presided over the choir for forty years he was made a bishop [sedem accepit pontificalem], but he did not change his monastic habit, nor his woven tunic, nor his goatskin cloak, and he kept to the

same diet as he had always been used to. And although he had accepted this great pastoral responsibility he by no means neglected his own flock. He frequently came back to them, now settling a quarrel which had arisen among them, now consoling someone who had suffered an injury, now giving spiritual teaching to his companions. And he shared in all the common tasks: sewing, cleansing lentils, washing the harvested grain, and all the other things of that sort. He was a great ornament to the pontificate, and when he departed to the gate of heaven it was with a full load of virtues.

And what should I say about Theotecnus, and Gregory who followed him!

The latter from his youth up gathered to himself all kinds of virtues, exceeding all his predecessors in glory, and even to this day he continues to labour in his extreme old age, just as if he were still in the flower of youth. Throughout his life he steadfastly refused to eat fruit, and would not even accept sour wine or dried grapes, and drank no milk either fresh or in the form of cheese. For this was the way in which the great Publius had decided to live. They approved of using olive oil at Pentecost, but refused it at other times.

These are the things I have learnt about the great Publius, some by hearsay, and some from the disciples of his that I met. In these disciples I recognised the teacher, in these athletes I learned about the trainer.

I think it would be a shame to have remained silent about a man of such value to the world. I have told his story for those who have never heard of him, so that I can enable them to derive benefit from it, and also that I might prepare a memorial for myself. For I have taken to heart what the Lord said: 'Whoever confesses me before men, him shall I also confess before my father in heaven' (Matthew 10.32), and I am in no doubt that since I have made the memory of them known among men they also will remember me before the God of all.

Chapter VI

SIMEON PRISCUS

If anyone were to think of leaving Simeon out, and consigning the memory of his wisdom (*philosophia*) to oblivion, they could well be accused of being vindictive and envious of his merits. Such a person would be seen as unwilling to praise things worthy of praise, unwilling to promote goals worthy of being sought after. But it is not so much that I am afraid of being so accused, as from a simple desire to sing this man's praises, that I am describing the sort of life that he lived.

He lived the solitary life for a very long time in a small cave, with no human companionship, preferring to live completely alone. He communed steadfastly with the God of all. The labour of growing edible greens for his food took up a lot of his time. He was so copiously endowed with grace from on high that he was able to tame even the fiercest and boldest of wild beasts, and this power was manifested not only to the faithful but even to unbelieving Jews.

For some of that race were making a business journey in foreign parts to a fortress outside the bounds of our empire when a severe rainstorm occurred. They missed the pathway, not being able to see either before or behind, and wandered about in the desert with no sign of any village, shelter or fellow traveller. Cast out into this vast country, as if negotiating the waves of the rolling seas, they suddenly espied a place of refuge in the shape of Simeon's cave, together with Simeon himself, ill-kempt and unwashed, with a scanty cloak of goatskin hanging from his shoulders. When he saw them he greeted them (he was a kindly man), and asked them how it was they were passing by that way. They told him what had happened and asked him the way to the fortress.

"If you wait for a while," he replied, "I shall soon be able to give you some guides to take you where you want to go."

They relaxed, glad of the rest, and were sitting down, when two lions appeared, not with fierce and savage looks, but with the submissive looks of those who acknowledge the presence of a master. Simeon made signs to them, directing them to take his guests back to the path from which they had strayed.

Let no one think that this is a fairy tale, even though it is those who are commonly held to be the enemies of truth who are here bearing witness to the truth. They benefited from Simeon's act, and sang his praises everywhere. The great Jacobus himself told me that he was there when they were talking of this miracle to the blessed Maronus. Can anyone not be deservedly held to be even more faithless than the Jews, if he does not believe Jews bearing witness to Christian miracles? If those who are hostile towards us can be convinced by the rays of truth, surely those who are kindly disposed towards us, fellow citizens in the faith, may believe even enemies when they bear witness to the power of grace.

Simeon became so famous because of his miracles that many of the neighbouring barbarians were attracted towards him (the desert dwellers there gloried in being of the tribe of Ishmael). But his love of silence led him to

desert his cave and travel through many pathways till he arrived at the mountain called Amanus. This is the place which was formerly known for the unreasoning worship of many gods, but he performed many miracles of all kinds, and planted the seeds of the devout and true religion which is now practised there.

It would be an immense labour to tell of everything about him, and probably beyond my powers. But I shall have mentioned one example to show the shape and character of his apostolic and prophetic miracle-working, leaving the rest to the imagination of those readers who accept the power of this man's grace.

It was summer, and harvest time, and bundles of corn were being carried into the threshing floors. And there was one man, not content with the fruits of his own labours, who coveted those of his neighbour and stole some bundles of corn in his desire to increase his own stores. But divine judgment fell immediately upon this theft, for a bolt of lightning fell upon his threshing floor and set fire to it. This miserable man then rushed off to the man of God, who had pitched his tent not far from the village, and told him of the calamity which had befallen him without mentioning the theft. But when Simeon urged him to tell the truth, he confessed his crime, for the very circumstances of the case proclaimed his guilt. That divine man then decreed that he would not be punished if he made amends.

"If you," he said, "will return the bundles of corn to the man you stole it from, the fire sent from God will be put out."

And as soon as he ran back and returned the stolen sheaves to their rightful owner, the fire was extinguished without the need of any water, but simply by the prayers and intercessions of that divine old man. This event not only filled the local inhabitants with awe but the whole city as well - that's Antioch I am talking about (for the farm fell under the jurisdiction of that city) - and it made them gravitate towards him, one seeking to be liberated from a rabid demon, another seeking relief from a fever, others seeking medicines for whatever it was they were being plagued with. And he allowed the rivers of his grace to flow abundantly over those who lived there. But in his unabated love for silence he decided to go to Mount Sinai.

There were many people who also shared his love of wisdom, and when they got to know about his travels, they decided to join him. After a journey of many days they had got as far as the desert of Sodom, when they saw in the distance a man lifting up his hands high above his head. They thought at first

it was a deceit of the devil, so they prayed with deep concentration of the mind. When they looked again and saw the same thing they hurried towards the place, but found a hole such as wolves make when they are seeking to construct a den to hide in, but there was no sign of any person outside it. For when the man holding up his hands had heard the sound of their footsteps he had hidden himself inside it. Simeon stopped outside and called upon him to show himself if he was really human and not a deceiving demon who had taken human shape.

"For we also," he said, "follow the monastic way of life and are seekers after silence, travelling through this desert in the hope of adoring the God of all in Mount Sinai, where he appeared to his servant Moses and delivered to him the tables of the law. Not that we think that God is circumscribed by considerations of place, for we hear him saying, 'I fill the heavens and the earth, saith the Lord, and all that the circle of the earth contains, and those who live in them in number as the locusts' (Jeremiah 23.24 & 46.23). It is just that those who earnestly love God not only desire to seek out those people whom God loves, but also those places which were favourable and pleasant for them when they came there, and in which they dwelt."

When he had finished saying this, and much else along the same lines, the person hiding in the cave came out. He was of wild appearance, with scruffy hair, lined face, dried up and wizened in every member of his body. He was dressed in unsightly garments made of palm leaves woven together. He greeted them and gave them a word of peace, and then asked them who they were, where they had come from and where they were going. The leader replied to this request by asking him in his turn who he was, and where he had come from and where he was going, and why he was living like this.

"I had the same desire as you have," he replied, "to go where you are all going. And to share this life with me I took a companion who thought as I did and had the same intention of being watchful and disciplined. And we swore an oath together that not even death should part us. But it has come to pass that he has come to the end of his earthly pilgrimage in this place. Bound by my oath I have dug out a tomb for him as far as I am able and buried his body in it. Because I have made this sepulchre for him, I have also dug out one for myself, and hope to end my days here, offering to the Lord the accustomed prayers. I feed on figs, which are brought to me by a certain brother at the behest of him who cares for all."

As he was speaking, a lion appeared in the distance. All except the old man

were frightened to death, but when he noticed it, he went forward and motioned to the animal to go away, but it came closer, bringing with it a bunch of dates. It then departed as it had been told to do, lay down some distance away and went to sleep. They all shared in the dates, said some prayers and psalms together, and at the end of this morning office he let them go, stupefied by the strangeness of what they had witnessed.

If there should be anyone who does not believe this story, let him call to mind the life of the renowned Elijah, and the ministry of the ravens who brought him bread in the morning and meat in the evening (1 Kings 17.6). It is, after all, a simple matter for the ruler of the universe to use any possible means of providing for the needs of his own. Likewise he preserved Jonah for three days and three nights in the belly of the whale (Jonah 1.17), caused the lions to shut their mouths before Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6.16), and in the same manner changed the power of the fire so that those in the midst of it were illuminated, while those outside it were burnt. (Daniel 3.21-22). But really it should not be necessary for me to bring forward arguments to prove the power of God.

Simeon eventually arrived at the mountain where Moses was found worthy to see God (or rather, saw as much of God as human nature is capable of), and they say that he knelt there determined not to rise till he had heard the voice of God giving him a blessing. After staying in this position for a week, having taken no food, he heard a voice commanding him to pick up what had been put before him and to eat it with a keen and eager mind. He reached out his hand and found three apples and ate them as he had been told. His strength returned to him, and with a joyful spirit, as you might expect, he called out to his companions, and came back to them jubilantly, as one who had heard the divine voice and eaten food given him by God.

He then constructed two places for the purpose of training people in the love of wisdom, the first at the top of the mountain (the place we have already mentioned), the other one further down at the foot of the mountain. He gathered together in each one athletes in pursuit of virtue, for whom he was trainer and coach. He taught them how to attack the enemy, and strengthened those who were struggling, bidding them be of good heart, not lazy and weak. He treated his own disciples with great discretion, but was bold of spirit towards the enemy. Thus teaching, living, doing miracles, displaying his glory in all kinds of ways, he at length came to the end of his labours in this life, and passed over to that life which is free from strife and decay, leaving behind him

a glory which can never be overshadowed and a memory which remains in perpetuity. My blessed and thrice blessed mother received a blessing from him while he was still alive and has often told me many things about him.

And I pray that I may benefit from the intercessions which he is able to make for me. I know I shall have them, and that he will surely present my petitions to God, showing forth the compassion of God himself.

Chapter VII PALLADIUS

Palladius, the subject of many a discourse, was in his time Simeon's equal. His way of life was similar, he was well known as being one of the same kind [notus et familiaris]. They say that many people came to him one after another, and that they in turn derived great benefit from him, and that they spurred one another on in inspiring a zeal for God. He lived alone in a small dwelling, not far from a fairly large village called Iemme, with quite a numerous population. I need hardly say that he practised great restraint in what he ate; he fasted and lived abstemiously, with vigils and perpetual prayer. He committed himself to the same kind of yoke as the blessed Simeon. I thought it would be well worthwhile to tell the story of a great miracle that he wrought both with his voice and his gestures, and which is still celebrated to this very day.

In Iemme there was a very busy market which attracted merchants from all directions and a numberless crowd of people. There was one merchant who decided one night to go home, taking with him the money for the things he had sold. But somebody had noticed how much money he had gathered, and in a murderous and hateful frame of mind, banished sleep from his eyes and watched vindictively to see when the merchant would set out. He decided to go just after cockcrow, as being a safe time, but the thief went on before him, and hid in an ideal place for an ambush. He suddenly jumped out and killed him with one blow. To this wicked deed he added another, for, having stolen the money, he threw the corpse down at Palladius' door.

When daylight came, the crime was discovered and all the market was talking about it. They came in a body and broke the divine Palladius' door down, demanding that he pay the penalty for the murder, and one of the people in this mob was in fact the man who had done the murder. But although surrounded by such a crowd of people, Palladius simply gazed up at the sky,

and projected his mind into the heavens, praying to God that he would refute such a scandalous lie and reveal the hidden truth. After his prayer he took the hand of the recumbent corpse and said,

"Speak, man. Who has inflicted this fatal blow? Show us who has committed this dreadful deed and free the innocent from this false calumny."

This exhortation produced results. For the dead man sat up, looked round at all those present, and pointed at the murderer. A great shout arose from the crowd, astonished at this miracle which had brought the intended false accusation to naught. They grabbed hold of that wicked man, and found blood on his sword, and also the money which had been the motive for the deed. If the divine Palladius had ever been worthy of admiration before, this deed makes him even more admirable. And let this miracle be quite enough to demonstrate the confidence that the man had in God.

He was the same kind of person as the admirable Abraham who built Paratemon, for he shed the splendour of his virtues abroad into every land. The miracles performed after his death bear witness to the beauty of his life, for the cures of all kinds of diseases flow from his tomb right up until the present day. The testimonies of those who have through faith abundantly enjoyed them are innumerable. I have dedicated my power of speech to maintaining the memory of them. May his aid also be given to me.

Chapter VIII APHRAATES

Whether you are Greek or barbarian or any other nationality, it is obvious that human nature is one and the same everywhere, and that anyone can be turned towards a love of wisdom. A sufficient example of this is to be found in Aphraates without looking any further. For he was born and brought up in Persia, an uncivilised nation, but in spite of his parentage and the laws under which he was educated, he arrived at such a peak of virtue as to overshadow even those born of devout parents and nourished in the true faith from an early age. He was the first of that contemptible family, influential and well known though they were, to imitate his ancestors the Magi by coming to worship the Lord. Sickened by the impiety of his own nation he preferred a foreign land to his own. He came to Edessa, a great city enjoying a great number of people of deep devotion. Just outside the city he built a small dwelling for a hermitage and devoted himself to the development of his spirituality, like the best of

farmers weeding out the thorns of vice at their roots, cultivating the crop, and offering the ripened fruits of the Gospel to the Lord.

From there he went to Antioch, which was then in the grip of a tempestuous heresy, and learned something of the Greek language in a school of philosophy outside the city. He attended as many lectures in divinity as possible, and using a mixture of Greek and his own barbarian language he gave birth to a multitude of ingenious and brilliant orations, which flowed from his acceptance of the grace of the divine Spirit. Was there ever anyone who could better this unlearned, barbarian voice from among those who peddled their own eloquence, arrogantly disputing in a high flown and decorative language, childishly glorying in their flood of syllogisms? He met their reasonings with reasoning, and overturned the arguments of the philosophers with an eloquence divine, claiming with Paul that though 'rude in speech he was not in knowledge' (2 Corinthians 11.6). In the words of the Apostle he never ceased refuting them, 'casting down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ' (2 Corinthians 10.5).

Magistrates could be seen coming to him, military men, people learning a way of life from him, and - let me say it once for all - civilians and soldiers, learned and illiterate, rich and poor, some who accepted in silence what was offered them and some who asked pertinent questions and talked a lot. And although he took such labour upon himself he would not allow anyone else to come and live with him; he preferred doing all his own work to accepting assistance and service from others. People gathered together wanting to speak with him, and when they appeared at his door, he opened up to them himself, and as they were leaving, he saw them out and bade them farewell. He took no payment from anyone, no bread, no sweets, no clothing; all his personal needs were seen to by one person only whom he knew very well. Even in extreme old age he was accustomed to eating nothing till after sunset, and then vegetables only.

There is a story that Anthemius, who later became prefect and consul, had been to Persia when serving as a legate, and brought to Aphraates a tunic woven in Persia.

"I know how dear each person's native land is," he said, "and how much they appreciate anything that has been produced there, so I have brought this tunic for you from your native land. I beg you will accept it and give me your blessing."

He bade Anthemius to put the tunic down on one of the benches, and took part in several different conversations before replying.

"I am rather troubled in spirit," he said, "and find myself in two minds."

"Why is that?" asked Anthemius.

"I have always settled for having one person only to live with me," he said. "I made this rule for myself and won't have two people with me. After having had one person with me who suited me very well, a fellow countryman came to me asking me to let him live with me. This bothered me. I couldn't put up with two. I was delighted to see my fellow countryman, as a fellow countryman, but I thought it would be seriously wrong to get rid of the man I already had and who suited me very well."

"Quite right, father," said Anthemius. "You could not possibly drive out someone who had served you for such a long time, even if he had not been well-suited, and take in someone whose character you had not tested, simply because he was of the same nationality as yourself."

"In the same way," said Aphraates, "much as I appreciate your kindness, I cannot accept your tunic. I could not abide having two of them, and I am delighted that your opinion is the same as mine, that the one who has served me for such a long time is the better."

With these mollifying words he escaped the attentions of Anthemius, showing a miraculously shrewd cleverness in doing so, and made sure that no one would argue with him about that tunic.

I have told this story to highlight two points at once. Firstly that he would have one person only to see to his personal needs, and secondly to illustrate his ingenuity in getting the would-be donor of the gift to provide from his own mouth the reason for refusing it. But I shall tell you an even greater thing than this and other things of that sort.

After Julian, the enemy of God, had paid the penalty for his wickedness in the lands of the barbarians, there was peace for a while among the ranks of the pious while Jovinianus was Emperor of Rome, but he only reigned for a short while. After he came to the end of his life [AD 364], he was succeeded by Valens, at a time when terrible hurricanes and storms were ravaging the Mediterranean, causing extremely high seas and many shipwrecks. The dismissal of many of those in positions of authority, however, caused an even greater storm. For the Emperor sent into exile anyone who defied him by practising the one and only true religion. His wickedness and irreverence knew no bounds. He expelled and scattered abroad the company of the faithful

like a gigantic wild animal attacking and scattering the flock. He not only drove them out from all the churches but from the mountainsides and riverbanks and the military training fields. He altered the character of those places forever where with his iron hand he happened to direct his wrath. The people all rested secure in Scythia and other barbarian places, and in Thrace from the Danube to Propontis. He would give them a hearing with his ears twitching, as the saying goes, but against his own kith and kin, celebrated for their religious devotion, he brought arms to bear.

The people of God wept for the misfortunes fallen upon them, singing the song of David: 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered thee, O Sion' (Psalms 137.1). But they did not find the next verse of the psalms suitable for them ['We hanged our harps upon the willows thereof'], for Aphraates, Flavianus and Diodorus refused to hang up the harp of their teaching on the willow trees, and would not sing: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Psalms 137.4). On the mountains and on the plains, in the city and in the suburbs, indoors and out of doors, they sang the Lord's song with all their heart. They learned from David what to sing: 'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the circle of the world and all that live therein' (Psalms 24.1). And again from the same Prophet: 'Bless the Lord, all you works of his, in every place of his dominion' (Psalms 103.22). They heard also the divine Paul bidding the men 'to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands free from anger and controversy' (1 Timothy 2.8). Furthermore, the Lord himself in speaking with the Samaritan woman made it clearer still: 'Amen, I say to you, woman, that the hour is coming, and now is, that not in this place, not even in Jerusalem, but throughout the whole world they shall worship the Father' (John 4.21)

Acting on this, they bore witness without ceasing, at home and in the market place, or, as the apostle says, 'publicly and from house to house' (Acts 20.20), and just like the most outstanding Emperors, provided ammunition for their own people and discredited their adversaries. And the great Flavianus and the divine Theodorus, who were held in high honour in the second most important see, did likewise. What they did was certainly admirable and praiseworthy. Nevertheless they acted as officially appointed generals of an army, subject to army rules, whereas Aphraates in his great wisdom entered into battle of his own free will. Schooled in quietness, living in solitude, secure from the threat of hostile attack, he nevertheless saw quietness as being a valid option only when circumstances permitted, and chose not to remain in sheltered isolation

when he saw how savage the war had become. So he became a leading light in the ranks of the faithful, pursuing the battle by his way of life, his oratory and his miracles, all that without coming to harm himself.

Now the Emperor (who was foolish in all sorts of ways) had come to understand that Aphraates was in the habit of going to the military training fields where the company of those who joined in the true worship of the Trinity used to meet. Someone pointed Aphraates out to him walking on the banks of the river in full view of the Emperor, who asked him what he thought he was up to.

"I am on my way to pray for the world and the Empire," he replied.

"If you profess to be living the monastic life, how is it that you have abandoned your silence and quietness to wander about freely in public?"

"Tell me, O Emperor," he said, speaking in parables in imitation of the Lord, "if I were an enclosed virgin and I saw someone setting fire to the family home, what would you advise me to do? Just watch the flames, and the burning house, and sit there with no thought for the house being burnt? If I did that I would perish in the flames as well. But if you were to say that I should make haste and fetch water, and run up and down putting out the flames, then don't reproach me, O Emperor, for doing the same sort of thing. I who profess the monastic life am compelled to act in the same way as you would advise the enclosed virgin. You reproach me for abandoning my quietness. Rather direct your reproaches at yourself for setting fire to the household of God, and not at me for trying to put the fire out. You have admitted yourself that it is right to try and save the family home from burning, but God is a truer and closer father than any father on earth. That is obvious, even to anyone who has not been fully instructed in matters divine. I have not done anything unreasonable, O Emperor, or contrary to my rule, by meeting with the followers of the true religion, and cherishing them, and providing them with heavenly food."

To these words the Emperor could not but give consent, as to a speech for the defence which was just.

Now one particular person began to declaim loudly against the divine man in public places, threatening to kill him. He was one of that tribe who are neither man nor woman, who had been deprived of the ability to achieve fatherhood, and who therefore was favoured by the Emperor as someone to whom he could speak confidentially. It was not long, however, before he paid the penalty for his malice. For when the Emperor decided to take a bath, this

wretch went to make sure that the bathwater was the right temperature, and in a fit of folly jumped into it, unaware that the water was very hot indeed. There was no one else about, for he had come all by himself to get the bath ready, so there he stayed, cooked and done for! Some time passed by and the Emperor sent someone after him, who reported back to him that he was nowhere to be found. Many more joined in the searching through all the bathrooms and eventually found the one in which he was lying lifeless.

There was great consternation, everybody wept. Some drained the water out of the bath, others lifted the miserable man's body out. The Emperor, and all those who were opposing the true faith, were filled with fear as a result of this, for the rumour spread through the whole city that the unfortunate man had suffered this fate because of his opposition to Aphraates. Everyone was singing the praises of the God of Aphraates. Those who were against him were demanding that at the very least the man of God should be sent into exile. But the Emperor, even though terrified, avoided those who tried to persuade him of this, for he had a great respect for the man.

Later he had occasion to experience his power from another quarter. For he had a favourite horse, a thoroughbred, a well trained horse for riding, who fell ill, much to the Emperor's grief. The horse was constipated, and those who had skill in this field were summoned to try and effect a cure. But when the illness remained unbeaten the Emperor was greatly troubled, as was also the stable boy who had charge of the horse. This boy was devout and of a firm faith, and he brought the horse to Aphraates in the middle of the day, identified himself as one of the faithful, explained what the trouble was and begged Aphraates to effect a cure by his prayers. Without delay Aphraates prayed to God and ordered water to be drawn from the well. He signed it with the saving cross and ordered that it be given to the horse who drank of it even more deeply than usual. Then he invoked the blessing of God upon some oil and anointed the horse's stomach. At the touch of his hands the illness was immediately cured. The stable boy rejoicingly took the horse back to the stable.

That evening the Emperor came to the stable at his usual time and asked him how the horse was faring. He told him he was cured, and brought the horse out in obvious good health, neighing and prancing and stretching out his fine neck.

"How did this cure come about?" the Emperor asked.

The boy hesitated to answer, for he was afraid to reveal who the doctor was,

knowing that the Emperor was in dispute with him, but at last he could not avoid telling him how the cure came about.

"I am absolutely astonished," said the Emperor, "and I must confess that he really is a remarkable man."

Nevertheless he did not abate the mad tirades which he furiously issued against the Only begotten Son right up to the time when at last he was committed to the barbaric rite of cremation, a funeral rite beneath the dignity of even a slave or a beggar. But the divine Aphraates throughout all those stormy times gave constant proof of his virtue, and when peace was restored carried on exactly as he had done before. He did many other miracles besides, of which I will mention one or two.

There was a certain noblewoman, yoked in matrimony to a totally unreasonable husband, who came to that blessed man, weeping over her distressing situation. For she told him that her husband was completely engrossed in keeping company with a concubine because of magic spells which had been uttered, and that he held in contempt his legally wedded wife. She said all this standing outside the porch. This was his usual custom in dealing with women, none of whom were ever admitted inside. He took pity on the weeping woman, and aborted the effect of the incantation by his prayers, for he blessed with godly prayer a small portion of oil that she had brought with her, and told her to anoint her husband with it. After the woman had done this she drew her husband's love back to her, and he chose to sleep legally rather than illegally.

The story is also told about him during a time when locusts suddenly invaded the region and consumed everything as if by fire, standing crops, trees, meadows and groves. One of the faithful approached him who possessed a farm which provided food for himself and his wife and children and the rest of the household, and which was the subject of an imperial tax. Again, he showed compassion in a manner similar to that of the Lord; he asked for a congius of water [about six pints] to be brought to him. His petitioner brought the water and Aphraates then laid his hand on it, and prayed that God might imbue it with his divine power. After the prayer he instructed the man to sprinkle it around the boundaries of the estate. He did so, and it was as if a defensive palisade had been placed around the boundaries of his fields, sacrosanct and inviolable, for the crawling mass of locusts, flying about everywhere like an army, drew back, fearful of the blessing which had been poured out on the fields, restrained as if by a physical barrier, preventing them

from going any further.

What need to say anything further about the deeds of this blessed soul? I have said quite sufficient to demonstrate the splendour of the grace that was in him.

I saw him myself and received a blessing from his holy right hand, for my mother had taken me there with her while I was still a youth at the time when he was near to death. He opened his door and showed his favour to her by giving her a blessing and a short homily, then he took me inside and bestowed on me the grace of his prayers. I still enjoy that blessing, believing as I do that he lives with the choirs of Angels, closer to the Love of God than ever before. Before, his faithfulness was kept within bounds by his mortal flesh, in order to avoid the sin of arrogance. Now, having laid aside the fight against all turbulence of spirit, like an athlete enjoying the fruits of victory, his faithfulness and freedom of conversation may be used on behalf of all who suffer. I pray therefore that I may continue to be aided by his prayers.

Chapter IX

PETER

We understand he was a Gaul from Western Europe. But we know also that they originated from those in Asia around the Euxine Sea. From this stock blessed Peter came, indeed three times and four times blessed. For they say that he was brought up by his parents until he was seven, when he then dedicated his whole life to the struggle in the search for wisdom. He is said to have died at the age of ninety-nine.

Who can adequately praise this man who battled victoriously for ninety-two years, night and day? What tongue is sufficient to describe his glorious and virtuous deeds, in childhood, youth, middle age and extreme old age? Who can tell the extent of his sufferings? Who can count the struggles he endured over such a long time? What power of speech can do justice to the seeds he sowed and the sheaves he reaped? Who is endowed with such a brilliant mind as to be able to comprehend all the benefits and dividends accruing from such an outstanding investment? I know that the effect of his deeds is as vast as the ocean, and I fear to undertake this account of his history, lest my words fail me. So I shall walk as one on the seashore in front of the sea, describing and marvelling at what is done on the continent, but leaving the depths to him who searches the deep and hidden things. (Daniel 2.22 & 1 Corinthians 2.10)

He lived first in Galatia, but left there in order to see Palestine, where he viewed the places of the saving Passion, and worshipped there the God he served, not as though God might be circumscribed by place (for he knew that the nature of God has no limits), but simply to feast his eyes on the sights which he had long desired to see. It was not just the mental faculty with which he gazed; quite apart from sight, he enjoyed nourishment for his spirit by faith. It is natural for those courting a lover to take pleasure not only in her face but also to think with great joy about her house, her clothes, her shoes. It is with love for the bridegroom such as this that the bride sings in the Song of Songs: 'Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons of men. With great desire I sat under his shade, and his fruit was sweet in my mouth' (Song of Songs 2.3). This divine man was not doing anything strange or unusual in seeking this same kind of love for the bridegroom, for he was using the same words as the bride: 'I am wounded by love' (Song of Songs 2.5). Since he longed to gaze, as it were, under the shadow of the bridegroom, he went off to those places whence flow the waters of salvation for humankind.

Having enjoyed what he had longed for, he went to Antioch, where having seen the devout religion of the city, he preferred it even though it was not his native land. Rather than being a citizen of his own country among his own family, he preferred those who thought like him and who were of the company of the faithful and bore the same yoke of devotion and religion. Although he decided to stay there he did not pitch a tent, or construct a shelter, or build a small house. He spent all his time there in an uncomfortable tomb. A platform here was set before him to which was attached a ladder inviting those who would to climb up it. He remained enclosed there for a long time, drinking tepid water and eating nothing but bread, and that not every day. He did not touch it one day but took it the next.

A certain madman came to him raging furiously, in the grip of a most malignant demon, whom he cured by prayer, freeing him from the demon's anger. Unwilling to leave, he begged to become Peter's servant, in exchange for his cure, and Peter let him stay and live with him. I knew Daniel (for that was his name) and remember the miracle, and I saw how he paid for his cure, and I listened to what he said about me, which was that I too would become part of this wonderful ministry. But that divine man would not agree to that, mindful of the love which my parents had for me. But he regularly fed me on my knees with grapes and bread. For my mother bade me enjoy this blessing

since she too had experienced his spiritual grace.

This is how she came to know about him. She had developed a disease in one of her eyes, resistant to all medical knowledge. There was nothing in the writings of old time or of those who came later which had not been used against the disease. She had tried everything to no effect, when a friend of the family came and told her about the divine man and the miracle he had done.

"When my wife had the same illness as this," he said, "he cured her with prayer and the sign of the cross."

She went to the divine man immediately after hearing this, wearing her usual earrings and bracelets and necklets and a few more golden ornaments about her person, not to mention a multi-coloured dress of fine silk. She had not yet set out on a search for perfection, though she was well on in years, a mature woman behaving like an adolescent. When this chief of men had taken all that in, overflowing with love he brought healing to her primary problem in these words (I repeat them exactly, I shall not change one word of what this holy man said):

"Tell me, my daughter, suppose there was a painter well skilled in his art, who painted a picture according to the laws of his art and put it on view for anyone to see, and then someone came along with very rudimentary knowledge and rashly decided to paint over it without asking anyone, holding of no account a picture painted with skill, and added extra lines to the eyelashes and eyebrows, and made the skin look whiter, and put red colouring on the cheeks, wouldn't you expect the original painter to be rightfully furious because his artistry had been treated with insults and contempt, and altered unskillfully by someone who had no right to do so?

"Therefore you should believe that the universal workman, the Creator and decorator of our own nature, has a right to be angry, when you accuse of poor quality that nature and wisdom which is beyond the power of human description. You would not have added red and white and black colouring unless you have thought the original was lacking in some way. By thinking to improve the body by these means, you are accusing the creator of reckless negligence. You need to understand that he has the power of reacting to your own will in just proportion. For as David says, 'The Lord does all things according to his will' (Psalms 115.3 & 135.6) He it is who takes thought for everything that will be of benefit for all; he is not the author of anything leading to damnation. So then, don't deface the image of God, don't try and add things which in his wisdom he did not give you, don't imagine that this

false appearance is beautiful. All it does is suggest to anyone who looks at you that modesty has gone out the door."

She was really a lovely woman in every way, and as she listened to this she was caught up in Peter's net (for he was in the habit of going fishing in the same way as he whose name he bore). She fell at his feet, and cried, and begged him to cure her eye.

"But I am only a human being with the same nature as you," he said, "carrying a great burden of sin which deprives me of any influence with God."

"I shan't leave you," she said, weeping and begging, "till you have restored me to health."

"God is our only healer," he said, "and he hears the prayers of those who believe in him. He will hear now also, not as a favour to me but as he looks upon your faith. So if your faith is sincere and true and free from all doubt, and if you earnestly desire the doctors and medicines sent by God to be effective, take now to yourself this medicine."

So saying he laid his hand upon her eye, made the sign of the cross, and the disease was cured.

When she got home she washed herself in the medicine he had given her, by divesting herself of all her ornaments, and beginning to live according to the rules the doctor ordered. No more multicoloured dresses, no more fancy earrings and necklaces. And this even though she was still quite a young woman, in her twenty-third year, not even yet a mother, for it was seven years after this that I was born, her first and only son. What great fruit she gained from the great Peter's teaching! It was a double cure. She was seeking medicine for the body, but he prepared for her a wholesome condition for the soul. Such were the sort of things he said, and such was the potency of his prayer.

On another occasion she took him a certain steward, grievously vexed with a demon, in the hope that he would be able to help. The divine man prayed, and then charged the demon to tell him how it was that it had power over this creature of God. It stood there like a murderer or burglar or highway robber standing before the judge, ordered to own up to what he had done, and it felt so pressurised that quite unusually it was compelled to tell the truth.

"The master of this steward fell ill in Heliopolis," it said, "and his wife who was sitting with him in his illness, told her servant maids about the life of the monks who were following the life of wisdom (philosobantur) at Antioch, and what power they had against the demons. Now these servant maids had been

made by me into insane demoniacs, but this steward, dressed up in a goatskin as a monk, was brought in to exorcise them in a monastic manner. I was standing nearby all this time, and, unable to put up with what they were saying about the monks, I resolved to test the power they were boasting about. So I left the servant maids and entered into this steward, to see whether I could be driven out by monks. And now I have learned the truth, I need no further test. For at your command I now depart."

And as it said this it fled, and the steward was liberated.

My maternal grandmother took one of her farm workers to this monk who was able to drive out evil, asking for his help.

"Where do you come from," he asked, "and who has given you power over this creature of God? "

There was no reply. Peter fell on his knees and prayed to God that he might show the power of the servants of God by bringing down a curse on this demon. He stood upright, but there was still no reply. And this went on until the ninth hour. He poured out more prayer to God even more earnestly, until at last he arose and spoke to the demon.

"It is not Peter who commands you, but Peter's God," he said. "Answer! Whose power is it that drives you?"

Notwithstanding the shamelessness of this pernicious demon, it was overawed by the gentle authority of this holy man.

"I come from Mount Amanus," it cried in a loud voice, "and when I saw this worker drawing water from the well and drinking it I resolved to make him my dwelling place."

"Depart!" said the man of God. "It is he who was crucified for the sake of the whole world who gives you this command."

It heard, and fled. Freed from its fury, the worker was restored to my grandmother.

I could tell you any amount of similar stories about this blessed soul, but I shall omit most of them for fear of the scorn it might provoke among ignorant people so wrapped up in themselves that they simply would not believe in this man's miracles. But I shall just relate one or two more before passing on to another athlete of the Lord.

There was a certain dissolute man, a former army commander, who numbered among his household a very attractive, unmarried girl. This girl left her mother and family and joined a community of women living an ascetic life. For women also enter into battle like men, striving to become perfect in

virtue. When the commander learned of her flight, he had the girl's mother imprisoned and whipped, vowing never to let her go free until she had revealed where the house of religious women was. In a furious frenzy he seized the girl and brought her back to his house, intending, wretched man, to have his will with her. But just as Sarah, Abraham's wife, kept her modesty untarnished in the face of the many great temptations of Pharaoh, (Genesis 12.17), just as the Sodomites were struck with blindness when they tried to indecently assault the angels who were guests in Lot's house (Genesis 19.11), so also was he who was making an attempt upon the girl's virtue struck with blindness. When he went into her bedroom, the Lord took care of her. She slipped past him, for he was unable to see her, and she hastily escaped back to the house of religious women. This coarse man realised that he was unable to subdue her who had chosen God for a bridegroom, and was compelled to restrain himself, and make no further attempt on her whom he had captured, but who had escaped.

But after a short time she fell ill with the grievous disease of cancer, suffering increasing pain from a swelling in her breast. When the pain got excessively severe she called on the great Peter, and she testified that when his holy voice fell upon her ears all her pain was taken away, and she was unable to feel any trace of illness. She was often able to get help from him when she visited him. From that time to this, her pains receded. But having given this testimony, and poured forth praise for her victory, she followed it by departing from this life. Again, he snatched my mother from the hands of death, when, at my grandmother's request, he came to her when she was mortally ill after giving birth to me. I have been told that she was despaired of by the doctors, the family all weeping in expectation of the end, as she just lay there with her eyes closed, suffering with a violent fever, not recognising anybody at all. But Peter came to her, worthy of being called an apostle, with an apostle's grace. "Peace be with you, my daughter", he said. (This was his usual salutation.) I was told that she then opened her eyes, looked at him fixedly, and returned his blessing. The women around were all weeping, a mixture of joy and anxiety making them cry out aloud. The divine man urged them to join in prayer with him. For he said that Tabitha was restored to health in the same way, with the widows weeping as the great Peter offered to God their tears (Acts 9.39). They did as he had asked, and prayed as requested, and as the prayer came to an end so did her fever. Her body was suddenly bathed in sweat, her temperature subsided and she began to look better. God even now in our times performs

such miracles through his devoted servants.

The touch of his clothing also worked in the same way as that of the most divine Paul. For I can tell you, without any exaggeration, but knowing that I speak the truth, that he divided his girdle in two (it was long and broad, woven of thick linen); he kept half for his own loins, and the rest he wound round me. My mother often laid it on me when I was ill, and on my father also, in order to drive away any illness. It was often used as a health giving medicine. Many of our friends also got to know about this girdle and made use of it as a cure for illness, and so Peter's grace worked in many places. There was one person who borrowed it and did not give it back, showing gross ingratitude to those who had been helping him. And so we lost this great gift.

Peter himself shone with glory and illuminated Antioch with his rays of brightness, until at length he was taken up from the battle, in expectation of receiving the crown laid up for those who overcome. I received his blessing while he was yet with us, and I pray that I may receive it even now, as I bring his tale to an end.

Chapter X

THEODOSIUS

Rosus is a town on the right hand side of Cilicia as you look at it from the Cilician Sea. To the North and East of Rosus there is a high mountain, spread out over a wide area, forested, a home for wild beasts. The great and widely celebrated Theodosius found a grove in this mountain facing the sea, and built himself a little shelter where he embraced as a solitary the evangelical way of life. He came originally from Antioch, a distinguished member of a famous family, but he left his home and relations and all his possessions, in order, as the gospel says, to 'buy the pearl of great price' (Matthew 13.46). To anyone who has seen his disciples and companions, it would be superfluous to say anything about his abstinence from food, his sleeping on the ground and his rough clothing, for they all mirror his way of living. He carried out these disciplines conscientiously, providing an example to his followers. He also wore an iron yoke on his neck and iron bracelets on his wrists as well as having his loins girded with iron. His hair was untidy and unwashed, and stretched down to his feet and even longer, so that he had to tie it up to his middle.

By the assiduous practice of prayer and hymnody he subdued the passions of

avarice and anger and arrogance and other spiritual diseases. He piled labour upon labour, not only doing the manual work of weaving baskets in osier wickerwork, but also converting some of the woodland into a little bit of cultivated ground, where he sowed seed which produced sufficient food for himself.

As time went on, his fame spread abroad to such an extent that many people from many different places gathered around him, wanting to share his dwelling place, and his labours, and indeed his whole enterprise. He accepted them all and trained them in that way of life. Some could be seen manufacturing sails, some sheepskin cloaks, others wickerwork baskets, others tilling the soil. Because it was near the sea, they built a small boat for transport, which they used to bring in any necessary materials, and carry out the products of those who lived there. They were mindful of the words of the apostle, 'Working night and day lest we be a burden to any of you' (2 Thessalonians 3.8), and 'These hands have supplied what I need' (Acts 20.34). He worked himself and urged on his companions that spiritual labour and bodily labour were two sides of the same coin.

"Those who live in the world," he said, "work hard to support wives and children, and pay taxes and commissions, and offer to God their first fruits, and alleviate the needs of beggars according to their ability; it would be absurd therefore if we did not provide for our needs by our own labour, however cheap and sparing our food and however inferior our clothing, but sat here with folded arms enjoying the fruits of someone else's labour."

With these and similar words he encouraged their manual work and the regular performance of the divine offices, the periods of time running seamlessly into each other. They took great care of guests, deputing men to provide for their needs who were gentle and kindly and experienced in taking thought for others. He himself oversaw and directed everything, to ensure that each person should do his duty within the rules laid down.

So famous and widely known became the fame of his doings, that sailors a thousand miles away would call upon the God of Theodosius when they were in danger, and by calling upon him could lessen the power of the storm. Even the bold and cruel brigands who were laying waste a great part of the East were afraid of him. Is there anyone in our habitable world who has not heard of the things that were being done at that time by those who used to be called 'Solymi', but are now known as Isauri? They spared neither town nor village, they tortured their captives and consigned them to the flames; but they feared

the wisdom for which Theodosius was famed, and from him they demanded nothing but food while at the same time begging him to pray for them. They left his monastery unharmed, and this not once but even twice.

But the leaders of the church were frightened that these barbarians sent from the devil might take this great luminary prisoner because of their greed. For it could quite easily happen that a great deal of money might be demanded as his ransom from all those who valued things divine. So they persuaded him to go to Antioch. (The barbarians had already taken two church leaders prisoner, and only allowed them to go back to where they had come from after being paid fourteen thousand gold pieces for each one.) In Antioch he lived in a house which he found near the river, and continued to attract the attention of those who had a nose for people like him.

I have got so carried away by my story that I have almost forgotten to tell you about a miracle which the divine man performed. Many will see it as having been something incredible, but the evidence of it is still there to this very day, still talked about as proof of the grace and confidence which this admirable man enjoyed in the sight of God.

There was a steep rocky face overhanging the monastery that he had built, completely dry, without a trace of any moisture. He carved out a channel capable of carrying water from the top of the rock right down to the monastery. Full of confidence towards God, and believing without possibility of denial that God looked favourably on him, he ascended to the top of what is now an aqueduct with a faith that brooked not the slightest doubt. Here, before the brothers had got out of bed to say their usual prayers, he prayed to God, trusting in him who 'fulfils the desires of those who fear him' (Psalms 145.19), and struck the rock with the staff he had with him. The rock was shattered, water gushed out like a river, flowing down in the aqueduct to the monastery, supplying abundantly enough water for all their needs, with what was left over flowing on down to the sea. It works to this day, proof of how Theodosius enjoyed the same grace as Moses (Exodus 17.6). This alone should be sufficient to show the favour which this man had in the eyes of God.

He lived at Antioch for only a short time before passing over to the choirs of Angels. His holy body was carried through the midst of the city, decorated on its bier with what looked like golden crowns. All the leading men were present, and those of the administration who had placed great trust in his faith. There was great discussion and contention about who should carry the coffin, in the hope of gathering great blessings and benefits from it. The funeral

procession carried him to the shrine of the holy martyrs, since he had been a companion of Julianus in his victory, and renowned for his athletic piety. He rests in the same place as the divine and blessed Aphraates.

The admirable Helladius took over the leadership of the monastery. He had been there continuously for sixty years. He then was elected to be the spiritual leader of Cilicia, but abated nothing of his former way of life. He simply added the daily responsibilities of the pontificate to the labours he was already undergoing.

After him the blessed Romulus, who had sat at Helladius' feet, was made leader of this great flock.

The monastery is there to this present day, pursuing its regular life. It is near the village called in Syriac Maratus.

And so I bring this story to an end, praying that Theodosius may give me a blessing.

Chapter XI ROMANUS

The great Theodosius began in Antioch and lived his ascetic life in the mountains near Rosus, before returning to Antioch where his life ended. The divine Romanus, was born in Rosus where he had his early education, but he first began to strive after virtue at Antioch, pitching his tent outside the city boundaries on the side of the mountain, and in this little dwelling place he lived out his whole life. Right up to extreme old age he made no use of either fire or lantern. His food was bread and salt, his drink a flowing spring. His hair was like that of Theodosius, as were the items of iron which he wore. He displayed great simplicity of life, and gave evidence of the splendour of divine grace in his gentleness and self-control. For 'to whom shall I look,' he said, 'if not to those who are meek and quiet and tremble at my words?' (Isaiah 66.2) He also said to his disciples, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest unto your souls' (Matthew 11.29) And again, 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5.5). He was as well favoured a man as Moses the Lawgiver, for 'Moses', he said, 'was the most meek of all men that are upon the earth' (Numbers 12.3). And the most Holy Spirit testifies of the prophet David: 'Remember David, O Lord, and all his meekness' (Psalms 132.1). And concerning the patriarch Jacob we learn that 'he had not been accustomed to living in a house' (Genesis 25.27). All

these virtues he collected like a bee from the meadows of divine Scripture, and converted them into the honey of true wisdom.

His virtues overflowed most happily into other people, for in his gentle, sweet voice he urged all who came to him to love the brethren in harmony and peace. By his looks alone he persuaded many to become lovers of things divine. Who could not greatly admire this remarkable man in view of his bodily labours, his flowing hair, the iron weights he carried about his person, his hair shirt, and his custom of eating only sufficient to prevent him dying of hunger?

Grace poured into him in proportion to the greatness and number of his labours, persuading everyone to admire and honour him. He cured many deep-rooted diseases, and brought it to pass that many sterile women bore children. He gave ample evidence of being filled with the power of the divine spirit, but he described himself as a needy beggar. However many people kept on coming to him, he helped them all by speech and example all the days of his life.

When at length he departed and was translated into the angelic choirs, he left behind him a memory that did not go down into the grave with him, but which grows and flowers and produces seeds and which cannot be uprooted, but which remains forever for the assistance of all who will. Praying that I too may obtain his blessing, I now move on to narrate the doings of some of the other athletes, to the best of my ability.

Chapter XII

ZENO

Not many people know about the admirable Zeno, but those who do know him cannot praise his worthiness enough. He gave up great riches in his native land of Pontus, in order to drink at the fountains of Basil the Great, as he is called, who lived nearby, pouring out the waters of life to the whole Cappadocian region, and bringing forth admirable fruit thereby. Zeno had been a member of the Emperor Valens' swift courier service, from which he resigned after Valens was taken from our midst.

From living at court he went to live as a solitary in a tomb (of which there were many in the mountains) not far from Antioch. There he began to purify his soul, continually rebuking it by the practice of contemplation, seeking the vision of God, finding in his heart a way of ascending to God (Psalms 84.5),

longing to possess the wings of a dove that he might fly off and be at rest (Psalms 55.6). This was the reason that he had no bed, no lantern, no hearth, no storage jar, no oil flask, no chest, no books or anything else; he was clothed in old rags, his shoes had no buckles, and their leather soles were torn and worn to shreds. One of his family brought him what food he needed, which consisted of one loaf which he made to last two days. He carried water himself from some distance away. Someone who realised what a burden it was to carry this water offered to lighten his load. He refused immediately, maintaining that he could not bring himself to drink water brought to him by some else. Unable to make Zeno change his mind he nevertheless gave him some pots of water, which he left in the doorway. But Zeno poured the water out and let it run away, before going back to the spring again, thus confirming what he had said.

Later on, I climbed up the mountain myself in order to see him, and I came across him carrying the water pots in his hands. I asked where was the cell of that admirable man, Zeno, but he replied that he knew no monk of that name. But from the graciousness of his speech I realised who he was, and I followed him. When I got inside his dwelling I saw a bed of straw, and a rush mat laid over the stones, providing a minimum amount of comfort for anyone seated on it. I had a long conversation with him on the subject of true wisdom, and when it was time for me to return home I asked him to speed me on my way with a blessing, but he would not agree to that, saying that it would be fairer for each of us to pray for each other. He said that he was just a private citizen, whereas I belonged to the army - for I was at that time a Reader for the people of God. I replied that I was very young and immature (I had only just begun to produce a little down on my cheeks), and that I would not feel able to come back again if I were obliged to say the prayers. In the end in response to my many requests, he did offer intercession to God, but made many excuses for doing so, saying that he was only doing it for love's sake and out of a sense of obedience. But I had, however, heard him praying as I was approaching earlier.

Who could adequately pay tribute to the deep love of wisdom, the modesty and self-control, of this old man? (For he had then been following a monastic discipline for forty years.) Who could find sufficient words of praise to acknowledge the magnitude of his achievements? He possessed a great wealth of virtue, while living in extreme material poverty, but he worshipped on Sundays in the church of God with God's people, listening to sermons and

sharing in the mystical banquet, but returning afterwards to his dwelling which had no lock or key, no one to guard it. Possessing nothing but one rush mat he was immune from evildoers, who nevertheless held him to be sacrosanct anyway. He would borrow one book from his family, and having read it would return it in exchange for another. But although he had no locks or bars he was protected by grace from above, as we clearly learned from our own experience. For the Isauri treacherously captured the citadel by night, and in the morning advanced up the mountain, cruelly threatening the many men and women living the monastic life. But the divine man, sensing this disaster, prayed to God and they were all struck blind, so that having found the way in, they could not see where to go next. And he bore witness to having clearly seen three youths driving out the whole crowd of them. God had openly poured forth his grace.

I think I have said sufficient to show what sort of a life this divine man led and how filled he was with divine grace. But I must add just one more thing. He was worried and distressed that he still possessed property and had not sold it and distributed it according to the evangelical precept. The reason for this was that his brothers were still very young. The money and other goods they all owned in common, but he was unwilling to return home in order to divide it up and he feared to sell his share of the estate to anyone, lest the buyers greedily cheat his brothers and humiliate them. He put off doing anything about it for a long time as he turned it over in his mind, but when eventually he sold everything to someone he knew he was able to give away the greater part of it. But then he fell ill, which compelled him to take counsel about the rest of it. So he approached the leader of the church in Antioch, the great Alexander who was a splendid example of true religion and virtue, and an exact and accurate image of a true lover of wisdom.

"I would like you, " he said, "O divine leader, to act as steward of these moneys, sharing them out in virtue of your divine office according to your best judgment. I have distributed most of it myself as seemed best to me. I would like you to distribute the rest in a similar manner. Since I am like to be called out of this life, I appoint you as the one to share it all out, for you are the pontiff, and you exercise your pontificate justly in accordance with the laws."

He handed over his money as if it had been required of him by God. He lived for forty years after this, and then like an Olympic victor he departed from his enclosed place, covered in glory not only by men but also by Angels.

I beg that he will intercede for me before God, and continue my tale in another direction.

Chapter XIII

MACEDONIUS

Macedonius was called krithophalos, that is, 'barley-eater', and he was known as this throughout Phoenicia and Syria and Cilicia. The name was given him because of the food that he ate. People near and far knew about him, some because they had seen his miracles, others because they had heard their fame being celebrated. Not everyone knew everything about him, some knew this, some knew that, but what they knew they deservedly wondered at. I know more about this divine outstanding man than others (for I had heard many things which led me to go to him and be with him for quite some time), and I shall tell you a few things as far as I am able. I am putting him in this position in my narrative, after telling you of many other people, not because he was inferior in virtue to the others (for he was indeed the equal of the greatest and best), but because he lived a long life which did not come to an end until long after the others whose tale I have told.

He made the top of a mountain his palace and arena, but never always in the same spot. He did not stay long in one place before going on to another. This was not because of any dislike for any particular place, but because he was forever fleeing from the crowds of people who followed him and gathered about him. Forty-five years he lived like this, with no tent, not even a hut, content with a deep cleft in the rock, for which reason he was also known as Gubba. This name when translated from the Syrian into Greek means lakkos, that is, 'hollow'. When he got to be a bit older, he gave in to people's urging and built a hut for himself. Later, in response to his followers' entreaties, he made use of little cottages, which did not belong to him, but to others.

Twenty-five years he lived in hut and cottage, making a total of seventy years during which he lived his life of constant struggle.

He ate no bread, but only clear barley, and drank only the water it was steeped in. For a long time it was my mother who supplied him with this food. She was a follower of his. Once when she was suffering an illness, he heard that she was refusing to eat the sort of food which would be best for her in her illness (for she too had embraced a monastic discipline), and he advised that she should do what her doctors ordered, and consider that food not to be a

luxury but a medicine, taken because it was necessary.

"You know perfectly well," he said, "that I have eaten only barley for forty years, but when I was ill the other day I told the person living with me to bake some bread and bring it to me. For it occurred to me that if I were to die, I would have to explain to the just judge of the universe why I had fled from the battlefield and spoiled my work of serving him. For if a little bit of food could save me from death and let me live a little longer to work and discipline myself, gathering the rewards that go with it, I decided that it was better to avoid dying from hunger than stick to my rigid rule. With some apprehension, therefore, I 'kicked against the pricks' of my thoughts (Acts 26.14), and ordered bread to be brought, and when brought I ate it. And now I ask you to show me barley no longer, but bread."

It was from what he said here, that we learned beyond any possibility of someone else's lies that he had eaten only barley for the last forty years. And that in itself should be sufficient to show how strenuously and laboriously he worked in his monastic discipline.

There are other things we can tell you as proof of his integrity and simplicity of life. After the great Flavian was consecrated to the pastoral care of the great flock of God he soon heard about Macedonius, that man of great virtue, and ordered him to be carried off from his mountaintop as if some accusation had been laid against him. In the course of offering the mystical sacrifice, he caused Macedonius to be brought up to the altar and ordained him to the priesthood. He was entirely ignorant of what was actually happening, and when someone enlightened him after the end of the service, he railed against them all at first with many hard words and reproaches. Then he took his staff (for he walked about leaning on a staff because of his great age), and complained to the pontiff and those who were with him. He feared that ordination would mean he had to leave his mountaintop and change his preferred manner of life. But none of the bishop's entourage could calm his anger.

When Sunday came round again at the end of the week, the great Flavianus sent messengers inviting him to share the celebration with him.

"Haven't you done enough," he said "that you want to ordain me as presbyter all over again?"

When they told him that he could not be ordained twice, he still would not give way, and refused to attend right up to the moment when those around him told him that it was time.

I am aware that many may find this story not particularly edifying, but I have included it because I do think it worthy of being recorded insofar as it shows his simplicity of mind and purity of heart. To such as these the Lord promised the kingdom of heaven: 'Amen, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 18.3). So you must realise that in trying to sum up in a general way his manner and character, I am portraying him as he really was.

There was a certain military commander who in pursuit of his pastime of hunting came up into the mountain with his dogs and soldiers and all the paraphernalia of the hunt. He caught sight of Macedonius in the distance and his followers told him who it was. He immediately jumped off his horse and went up to speak to him

"Is there anything lacking in what I do?" he asked. Macedonius replied with another question.

"What have you come up here for?"

"To hunt," he said.

"I am a hunter too," he said. "I hunt for my God. I hope to capture him. I long to contemplate him, and I shall never cease from this beautiful quest."

The commander acknowledged that what he had heard deserved respect, and so departed.

There was a certain city which a demon inspired to run riot and deface the statues of the Emperor. As a result of this, some of the top military commanders came to the city with orders to put the citizens to the sword. Macedonius came down from the mountain and accosted the commanders in the market place. When they learned who he was they jumped off their horses, and embraced his hands and knees and wished him well.

"Tell your Emperor," he said, "that I am human with the same nature as those who have offered him injury, and although it is part of that nature to show anger, the anger he has used in this case is quite immoderate. To revenge what has been done to the images of himself, he proposes to kill the images of God. Does the destruction of bronze statues merit the death of human bodies? It is a simple and quick matter to refashion bronze statues, but can he, for all that he is the Emperor, bring back to life any bodies he has killed?"

He said all this in the Syrian tongue, but when they had heard an interpreter translating it into Greek they trembled, and signified their intention of passing the message on to the Emperor.

Now I am sure that you must all agree that these words came from the grace

of the divine Spirit. How else could he have spoken in the way he did, a man of no learning, who had spent his life on the top of a mountain, completely simple in spirit, who had in no way been trained in divine eloquence? Now that I have made clear his spiritual wisdom, and how faithfully he adhered to the principles of justice (for he trusted in justice with the strength of a lion), I shall pass on to his miracles.

The wife of a certain wealthy nobleman was afflicted with a grievous eating disorder. Some said that this disease was the work of a vexatious demon, others that it was simply physical weakness, but whether this or that, the fact is that she was eating thirty chickens a day. She was simply unable to restrain her appetite, but kept on asking for more. Her whole life was directed towards this end, until her family, in pity for her, begged the help of that divine man. He came and prayed. With his right hand he made the saving sign over some water, which he then commanded her to drink. Her illness was cured, her immoderate appetite was restrained, and from then on she ate only a small portion of chicken per day. Such was the disease, such the cure.

When a certain girl took to her bed vexed by an evil demon, her father hastened to the divine man, praying and crying and begging that he cure his daughter. He prayed and ordered the demon to leave the girl, but it replied that it was not there of its own will but at the command of a powerful magician. It also told him the name of the one who was behind it and said that his desire to possess the girl was his motivation. Hearing this did nothing to lessen the father's anger for he thought that his daughter could not be cured. So he went to the highest judge of all, the one who presided over the whole panel of judges, made his accusation and described the whole affair.

The accused man denied everything when brought to trial and declared that the accusation was slanderous. But he could not bring forward anybody to testify on his behalf except the very demon that was bound by the incantation, so he begged the judge to have recourse to that divine man and hear his testimony. The judge said that it would not be right and proper for him to hear the case in a monastery, so the girl's father said he would bring Macedonius down to the court, hastened up to him, managed to persuade him, and brought him back.

The judge moved out of the judgment seat; he became a spectator and not a judge. It was Macedonius who took on the function of being a judge, exercising his own inner authority. He ordered the demon to lay aside its usual mendacity and tell the whole truth about the tragedy. Vanquished by the

greatest possible superior power, the demon named the man who had bound it with magic spells, and also the maid who had administered a potion to the girl. It went on to admit to other things it had done at the commands of others, burning a house, killing a beast of burden, putting a curse on somebody. The man of God then ordered it to be silent and depart at once from the girl and from the city. In obedience to the law of God the demon did what it was told and fled far off.

So the divine man freed the girl from her demonic possession, exonerated the poor wretch who had been accused, and enabled the judge to abandon the death sentence which he had been considering. These events should be enough to demonstrate the abundance of divine power which had been given to him, but I still have yet more to tell.

There was a woman called Assyria from a noble family, very wealthy, who became so mentally disturbed that she no longer recognised her own family and refused to take either food or drink. In the course of time she began to rave; some said she was possessed by a demon, the doctors said it was mental illness. After every possible remedy had been tried and had not brought her any relief, her husband, whose name was Abrodianus, a magistrate held in high honour, went to that divine fountainhead Macedonius, told him of his wife's illness, and begged him to effect a cure. The divine man agreed, came to the house and with great zeal offered urgent prayer to God. After praying he asked for some water, made the sacred sign over it, and asked her to drink it. The doctors protested that to drink cold water would only make the illness worse, but he drove the whole lot of them out, and offered the water to the woman. As soon as she had drunk it she came to herself, completely free from all illness. She recognised the divine man, asked him to give her his right hand and moved it to her mouth to shower it with kisses. From that time on she was completely sane.

The kind of life that Macedonius led began to spread through the mountains. One very dark night when snow was falling, a shepherd came looking for his wandering sheep near the place where the man of God was. He relates that he saw him surrounded in flames with two men in white garments stoking the fire. He quickly realised that the man of God was enjoying assistance from God.

He was no less gifted in respect of prophecy. A leading citizen came to him once, a man well known for his devotion and true religion, and said that he was very worried about certain goods which were being transported to him by

sea from the capital city. It was now fifty days since they left port and he had heard nothing from them.

"One ship," said Macedonius immediately, "has perished, but the other one will arrive tomorrow at the port of Seleucia."

He listened to what Macedonius had to say, and experience later proved the truth of what he had heard.

Whatever else I might miss out, I must tell you about things to do with me.

My mother had lived with my father for thirteen years without being blessed with any children, for she was sterile, naturally unfruitful. She did not grieve excessively about this, for she was well instructed in the ways of God and believed that it must be for her benefit. Nevertheless, while bearing patiently her sorrow of not having children, wherever she went she asked the servants of God to pray that children be given her from God. Some promised to do so, but urged her to be content with the will of God. Macedonius said quite plainly that he would pray to the Creator of the universe, and promised that his prayer would be heard. But when three years went by and the promise had not been fulfilled, my father went to see him and reminded him of his promise. He was asked to send his wife to see him. When she came, the divine man told her that he would pray and that she would have the gift of a son, and that he must be dedicated to the giver of the gift. She was living her life seeking salvation for her soul and deliverance from the pains of eternal death.

"God will give you a son over and above that," said Macedonius, "for he is generous and bountiful and rewards twofold those who pray to him in sincerity and truth."

My mother went home blessed by that promise. And in the fourth year she conceived and her womb was quickened, and she hastened to the man of God and blessed him profusely.

But in the fifth month of her pregnancy she found herself in danger of having a miscarriage. She was too ill to go anywhere herself, so she sent a message to this new Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 4.16) to remind him of how she wished to have children and of what he had promised. He saw the messenger coming and knew why, for the Lord had revealed to him in a dream both the illness and the remedy. So he came, leaning on his staff, and gave his usual blessing of peace when he entered the house.

"Be of good cheer and fear not," he said then. "The giver of the gift will not deprive you of the gift, so long as you do not fail to keep faith with what has been agreed between you. For you have promised to give back to him the gift

he will give you by consecrating him to the sacred ministry."

"That is what I choose and promise," said my mother, "though my thoughts are more on seeking the survival of this half-formed foetus than on the education of a son apart from God."

The divine man took water and blessed it.

"Drink this water," he said, "and be assured of the help of God."

She drank it as he had asked, and the danger of miscarriage passed. Such were the miracles of our own Elijah.

I often benefited from his blessing and teaching.

"My son," he would say, "your birth was brought about through much hard work. I spent many nights beseeching God that your parents would ensure that you would live up to the name given you when you were born. See that you live a diligent life as befitting one who had been dedicated by promises made before you were born. What is dedicated to God and is separate from the world is universally venerated, so it follows that you must not give room to thoughts of evil, but think and do only such things as are pleasing to God, the fount of all virtue."

The divine man often gave me lessons, and I learned to remember what he told me and that I was a gift from God. I won't go into details about everything he taught me, but I pray that through his prayers the assistance of God may be always with me, and that I may continue to follow his precepts for what remains of my life. I trust that what I have said is sufficient to show what his life was like and how his labours drew down the grace of God upon him.

His departure from this world was marked by honours worthy of his laborious life, for not only all the citizens and people from far and wide were there, but a number of important government officials, to whom was entrusted the task of carrying his sacred coffin on their shoulders. They carried it to the shrine of the sacred martyrs, renowned for their victories, where his sacred body, blest by God, was laid to rest along with the divine Aphraate and Theodosius. His glory is still with us and cannot be extinguished. But now I put an end to this tale, knowing what a beautiful inspiration can be drawn from his story.

Chapter XIV

MAESYMAS

We know of many other shining lights of devotion and true religion in the city

of Antioch, the great Severus, Peter the Egyptian, Eutyches, Cyril, Moses and Malchus, and many others who walked this same path. But if I tried to describe the deeds of them all, all the time there is would not be sufficient. Besides, to read about an excessive number of them would be far too much for many people. But great praise is due to those who have been written about, as also indeed to those whose life we can only guess at. They are to be imitated, they bring great benefits. I, however, shall wander through the meadows of Cyrus [near Antioch], and describe the beauties of the fragrant and beautiful flowers to be found there, to the best of my ability.

In former times there was one Maesymas who displayed every kind of virtue. He was a country dweller whose first language was Syrian. When the quality of his life became known, he was entrusted with the pastoral care of the village. He offered the sacrifice, and cared for the flock of God, and said and did all that the law of God required. They say he never had a new tunic or mantle, but mended tears in them with patches of old rags, and this was his way right up to the end of his life. He happily cared for the poor, and travellers; his doors were open to all who came. He is said to have had two dolia [large storage jars], one filled with grain, the other with oil. From these he supplied all the wants of the needy, for the blessing given to the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17, 9&14) was granted also to those two dolia.

The Lord hears the prayers of all who call upon him, and the sharing out of his water supply brought forth a harvest from the seeds of his hospitality, insofar as a plentiful supply was granted in response to the zeal of his spirit.

From the God of all he received the grace of doing miracles. I will mention one or two of them, but pass over the rest in order to hasten on to other people.

There was a faithful woman of noble family whose son of tender years became ill. She had several doctors come to see him, but when they had tried every remedy they could with no result, they despaired, and declared that he was near to death. But the woman had hope of better things, and in imitation of the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4.24) she ordered that a litter should be harnessed to her mules. She and the boy both arrived at the house of that divine man, showing her grief in weeping, and begging for his help. He took the boy and laid him at the foot of the altar and prostrated himself in prayer for healing both of body and soul. His prayer was accepted, and the boy was restored to his mother whole. I was told this story by her who witnessed the miracle and obtained healing for her son.

The ruler of the village was one Latoius, who was one of the chief senators of Antioch. He was totally godless, and demanded excessive dues from the local farmers. The divine man counselled clemency, and preached to him of the virtue of mercy, but he was obdurate, unwilling to suffer the loss of anything which could have been got for him. When it was time for him to go and collect his taxes, his chariot was got ready, he got into it and ordered the driver to set the horses going. They pulled with all their force, endeavouring vigorously to make the vehicle move, until it was noticed that the wheels of the chariot were tied up with iron chains and pieces of lead. When even a team of farm workers were unable to move the vehicle, one of Latoius' company realised why this was happening, and told him that the old priest had put a curse on him, and that he would have to placate him and get him to change his mind.

He jumped out of his chariot and came as a suppliant to him whom he had previously spurned. He fell at his feet, embraced him, dirty old clothes and all, and begged him to abate his anger. He listened to his plea, and offered his prayers to God. The chains on the wheels were loosened which before were firmly fixed, and the chariot was able to move as normal.

Many other things like this could be told about this outstanding divine person. But the chief lesson to be learnt by those who would pronounce otherwise, is that there is no reason why living in towns or villages should be a spiritual disadvantage. For this man shows that anyone who like him takes charge of the worship of God in the midst of crowds of people is equally able to achieve the heights of virtue. Would that I also, aided by their prayers, might be lifted up to at least some small share in their virtues.

Chapter XV

ACEPSIMAS

Acepsimas was a contemporary of Maesymas, and his fame was widely spread throughout the East. For sixty years he was enclosed within his little dwelling, seeing and speaking to no one. He looked inwards where he might seek the vision of God, and this was all his delight, as the prophet said: 'Delight in the Lord and pray to him, and he will grant you all the petitions of your heart' (Psalms 37.4). He received the food brought to him through a sort of narrow gap in the bank around his cell, which was not straight in front of the cell so that he would not be directly opposite anyone who might be trying

to catch sight of him. It went at an angle, and so constructed that it was in the shape of a curve. The food brought to him was lentils soaked in water, and once a week he would go out at night and draw up from a nearby well as much water as he needed.

A shepherd tending his sheep once saw him in the distance moving through the darkness and thought he was a wolf, for he was bent over with all that he was carrying. The shepherd picked up his sling, intending to throw a stone at him, but found that he was unable to move his hand in order to throw the stone, until the divine man had finished drawing his water and returned on the way home. He then realised his ignorance, and next morning he went to the little house where Aceptsimas was training himself in virtues, and in a loud voice described what had happened and begged for pardon. He was forgiven for his sin, not by hearing any voice, but by the sight of Aceptsimas' hand moving in a gesture of absolution.

Another person, with an ill-mannered curiosity and a desire of discovering what Aceptsimas was doing all the time, climbed up into a plane tree beside the passageway, and immediately suffered the penalty of his audacity. For he became paralysed in a kneeling position from the middle of his body down to his feet, which made his wickedness very obvious. But Aceptsimas, having first cut down the plane tree, indicated that all would be well. He had the tree cut down so that no one else could do the same thing and suffer a similar fate, but the rescue of the kneeling person followed the cutting down of the tree. Such was the strength of character and tolerance of this divine man. Through his struggles, however, he enjoyed much grace.

Not long before he departed this life, he predicted that his end would come in about fifty days' time, and he allowed inside all who wanted to see him. The bishop came to see him and urged him to accept the yoke of the presbyterate. "I know, father," said the bishop, "how exalted is your way of life, as compared with my own poverty, but to me has been entrusted the pontificate, and it is by virtue of that that I lay hands on anyone to ordain them, not by any virtue of mine. So accept the gift of priesthood through the laying on my right hand and the grace supplied by the most holy Spirit."

"Seeing that I am about to depart this life in a few more days," replied Aceptsimas, "I won't argue with your decision. But if I had been going to live much longer, I would have fled from the grave and serious burden of priesthood, in fear of how I might be required to give an account of what had been entrusted to me. However, I've only got a few more days to go, so for the

space of what time is left to me I gladly submit to your wishes."

And at once with no further prompting he knelt down in expectation of the grace of the Spirit, which would be administered to him by the laying on of hands. He lived only a few days as a priest, and then exchanged a life of burdensome responsibility for a life freed from senility and care.

There was a contention among the people about who should take possession of his body, everybody wanting to take it to their own villages. But the contention was silenced when someone revealed an oath concerning the holy man.

"This holy man," he said, "made me swear an oath that he would be buried right here."

So it is that even in death the true citizens of heaven manage to preserve their asceticism and simplicity. While they were alive it never occurred to them that anything would turn them into important characters, while in death they had no desire for human honour, for all their love was directed towards the bridegroom. It is the same thing with women who have the virtue of modesty. They desire to be loved and praised only by their husbands; they have no time for the praises of anyone else. And the husband for that reason declares how outstanding and beautiful she is, even if she does not want this, and so she shares in his glory in overflowing abundance. When anyone seeking God petitions heaven for anything he receives much more besides; his petitions are answered in overflowing measure. This is the rule he gives us in the Gospel: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be added to you' (Luke 12.31). And again: 'He who leaves father, mother, brother and children for the sake of my gospel will receive a hundredfold in this life and in the world to come life everlasting' (Matthew 19.29). Acepsimas followed these precepts in word and deed.

And in word and deed he is present with us as our teacher. We rely on his prayers to watch over us as we strive to attain the reward of our heavenly calling which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter XVI

MARO

Maro is my next subject, for he also was an adornment to the divine choir of saints. Having embraced a life dedicated to God, he took possession of a mountaintop which used to be venerated by the pagans, and where there was a

shrine to the demons. He consecrated it to God and went to live there, pitching a small tent inside it, which, however, he rarely used. He not only exercised himself in the usual labours, but thought up others as well, building up a great store of wisdom. His whole life of struggle measured out the grace which sprang from his labours. God in his liberal generosity gave him the gift of healing, so that his fame spread everywhere and people came from all parts to find from experience that his reputation was genuine. For they saw fevers extinguished by the dew of his blessing, trembling fits stilled and demons put to flight and various diseases of all kinds cured by his one universal remedy. Doctors supply medicines suitable for each kind of illness, but the prayer of the saints is the common remedy for all diseases.

He not only treated sicknesses of the body but also illnesses associated with the soul; curing avarice in one case, anger in another, to one person advocating the virtue of self-control, to another the exercising of justice, condemning intemperance in this person, stirring up the laziness of that person. By the use of this husbandry he brought forth many shoots of wisdom, and cultivated for God the garden which now flourishes in the region of Cyrus. This garden was originally the work of the great Jacobus, to whom may be applied the words of the prophet: 'He shall be multiplied as the cedars of Lebanon' (Psalms 92.12), and indeed all the other individual people whom I shall mention, God willing.

He kept on giving all his care to this divine agriculture of making both bodies and souls grow, until after a brief illness, in the course of which he suffered the weakness of nature with bravery of spirit, he departed this life.

A fierce dispute broke out over his body among people round about. But among all the villages nearby, one with a greater population poured out en masse and drove all the others off. They seized the much-desired treasure of his body and built a large shrine for it. They are aware of the benefit they draw from it, which they continue to enjoy to this day, honouring that outstanding victor with a publicly celebrated feast.

But we also enjoy his blessing, even at a distance. The memory of him is for us a sufficient monument.

Chapter XVII ABRAAMES

It would not be right to pass over the admirable Abraames on the pretext that

after his monastic life, it was the pontifical see of which he became the ornament. Indeed he is all the more worthy of being commemorated by name for the simple reason that he did not change his way of life even though he had been compelled to change the circumstances in which his life was lived. For he carried over with him the burden of his monastic exercises, and lived all the rest of his life in maintaining his monastic labours in the midst of his pontifical responsibilities. He was one more fruitful product springing from the region of Cyrus. Here he was born and educated and began to put together a collection of monastic virtues. Those who lived with him say that he so subdued his body by fasting and keeping vigil standing up that he could remain completely motionless for extremely long periods. By divine providence he was liberated from that kind of helplessness, so that by divine grace he could undergo more serious testing.

He went to Lebanon, where he had heard there was a village covered in a cloud of godlessness. He changed his monastic appearance for the disguise of a merchant. He and his companions carried wicker baskets in which to put the nuts which they proposed to buy (for this was the chief product of this village). He leased a house and agreed a certain price with the owners, after which they stayed there quietly for two or three days. Then little by little they began to sing the divine offices, but in a very quiet voice.

But their psalmody was heard by someone who declaimed against it in a loud voice, and everyone came running to the spot, a crowd of men and women and children. They broke down the door, they climbed on the roof, and between them made such a pile of rubbish that Abraames and his companions were almost buried and suffocated. There was nothing they could do or say except pray to God. The older people of the village then prevailed upon the rest of them to cease from this madness. Through the open doors they pulled Abraames and his companions out of the rubbish and told them to get out of the village. But then the debt collectors turned up demanding payment of their rent. They tied some of them up, the others they abused and beat with rods. But that divine man took no account of the things that were being done to them, and in imitation of the Lord on the cross had compassion on them, urging them to use self-control and clemency in making their demands. They demanded sureties, and Abraames said he himself would be the surety and promised to provide a hundred pieces of gold within the next few days. And then the dignity of the man aroused such admiration that those who had been most fierce against them began to ask pardon of these men who were so brave.

They even asked that he would become the ruler of the village, for at present they were simply farmers and householders with no one in charge.

He went to the city, Emesa by name, and borrowed a hundred gold pieces from some people whom he knew, then returned to the village and fulfilled his promise. When they saw how conscientious he was, they repeated their request even more vigorously. He promised that he would agree if they in their turn would promise to build a church. They asked him to come with them immediately and took the blessed man to a suitable site. Someone else suggested another place, others somewhere different, but at last they agreed on the best situation. Foundations were laid, and it was not very long before they were able to put the roof on. Once it was finished he said they ought to have a priest. They replied that they would not have anyone else to be their priest except himself. They begged him to be their father and pastor. And so he submitted to being given the grace of priesthood. He lived there for three years, instructing them beautifully in the things of God, until he had ensured that one from among their number could take charge instead of him, after which he returned to his monastic dwelling.

My story would become too long if I were to include everything about him, but I must make mention of the fact that he became bishop of Carrae, since in this he was quite outstanding. Carrae had been a city submerged in the most ungodly dissoluteness, given to drunken, demonic orgies. But it showed itself worthy of his husbandry, for it accepted his fiery teaching and was rescued from its former thorn bushes, and began to bring forth a fruitful harvest of the Spirit, offering to God its sheaves of ripened grain. This harvesting was not accomplished without hard work on the part of the divine man. He undertook countless labours, and, imitating the art of those who prescribe medicine for the body, he used sweet persuasiveness in some cases, but in others bitter medicines, and in some cases he used burning and cutting tactics in order to bring about good health. The brilliance of his life and discipline lent support to his teachings. People were enlightened by these things, and listened to what he said and freely accepted what he did.

During all the time that he was bishop he never ate bread, he never drank water, he had no use for a bed, and never lit a fire. They said forty psalms antiphonally at night and double that number of prayers in between. For the rest of the night he sat, and allowed his eyelids to rest a little. Moses, who saw God, said that man should not live by bread alone (Deuteronomy 8.3), and the Lord in his turn kept this in mind when he rejected the temptations of the devil

(Matthew 4.4). There is no place in Scripture, however, which says that it is possible to do without water; even the great Elijah drank water from the stream, and when he visited the widow at Sarepta he bade her bring water and bread (1 Kings 17.6-11). But this admirable man, during the whole time of his pontificate, ate no bread or cooked vegetables, and drank no water which those learned in such matters reckon to be the most important of the elements because of its usefulness. Lettuce, watercress and parsley served him for food and drink, demonstrating that the skills of millers and cooks were for him superfluous. In the autumn he also ate a little fruit. But he never ate before Vespers. At the same time as treating his body to such rigours, he was indefatigable in caring for others. He was always ready to give hospitality to all comers; he would offer them the best bread which he had chosen himself and fragrant wines, and fish and vegetables, and everything else that goes with them. He would even sit with guests at noonday, offering each one of them a helping of what was set before them, giving each one a cup and bidding them drink, imitating him whose name he shared, that patriarch who prepared food for his guests but ate nothing himself (Genesis 18.8).

Sometimes he sat in judgment between those who were in legal disputes with each other, some he persuaded to be reconciled, the one with the other, with others he was more forceful when they seemed unwilling to accept his gentle and benign suggestions. No person in the wrong could ever by his own audacity ever gain a victory over the person in the right, because he always took the part of the one in the right who had suffered some injury, making sure that his case was unassailable, and impossible for the troublemaker to overcome. He was just like the best of doctors, who always inhibit the humours which are too active, and ensure a balance between all the faculties. The Emperor himself wanted to see him, for he had heard that Abraames could always discern what was good and what was bad. He visited him and greeted him and embraced him, and declared that his country-style garments were more elegant than his own purple. A group of noble ladies also shook his hand and bowed to him [lit. 'seized his hands and knees'], and asked questions of this man who could not even understand the Greek language. This is a measure of how his way of life was held to be worthy of honour and respect by rulers and all kinds of people.

Is it not true that after God's lovers and followers have died they acquire an even greater glory? This can be borne out in many cases, but especially in the case of those who were associated with this divine man. For when the

Emperor heard about his death, he proposed that his body should be put into a sacred shrine, but then he realised that it would be right and proper to give the body of the shepherd into the care of his flock. The Emperor himself, therefore, led the funeral procession, followed by a chorus of noble ladies and everyone over whom he had ruled, all the people, military and civilian, together with the government officials. The city of Antioch and those associated with it gave him great respect, until he arrived at the great river Euphrates. But then on the riverbank people from the city all crowded together, both citizens and visitors, together with people from the country and even some from neighbouring lands, eager to get a blessing. The bier was protected by many lictors beating back those who were trying to denude the body in order to take away a rag of his clothing. On all sides could be heard some singing psalms, some weeping, a woman here mourning him as leader, another there as one who had provided spiritual nourishment, another as pastor and judge, a man weeping because he had lost a father, another a helper and healer. And so they committed that holy and sacred body to the tomb amid a vast cry of praises and tears.

For myself I admire him because after having to change the circumstances of his life he did not change his way of life. When he was a bishop, he did not lapse into a relaxed and careless way of life, but even increased the rigour of his monastic exercises. I judge his place in history to be monastic, and I have taken nothing away from that holy company which was precious to him. I also desire his blessing.

Chapter XVIII

EUSEBIUS

To the holy men I have already mentioned I must now add the great Eusebius, who died not so very long ago. Even when he got quite old he gave just as much time as usual to his labours, and his labours were matched by his virtues. The rewards which he generated were manifold, the magnitude of his benefits are a measure of the struggles in which he won the victory. In the beginning he entrusted the development of his faith to others, and where they led he followed. Those divine men were athletes in the exercises of virtue, and when he had spent some time with them, and well and truly acquired the knowledge of how to seek for wisdom, he embraced a solitary life and went to live on the side of a mountain near a large village called Asicha. He dug a

ditch and built a dry-stone wall, and spent the rest of his life in the open air, subduing his body, clothed in skins, subsisting on chickpeas and beans soaked in water. Sometimes however he did wear garments woven from reed grass as a protection for the weakness of his body.

When he got so old that he had lost most of his teeth, he still made no alterations to either his diet or his dwelling. Freezing in the winter, burning in the summer, he bore all the vagaries of the weather with fortitude. His face was lined and his limbs were shrunken. His body was so wasted away by all his labours that he could not even keep a girdle from falling away from his loins. There was nothing that would stop it; his hips and buttocks were so thin that a girdle just slipped downwards. So he fixed the girdle to his tunic, thinking by this means to make it stay in position.

He could not abide a lot of conversation. For when he was caught up in contemplation of the divine, he was reluctant to tear his mind away, but even though given primarily to this deep love, he did allow some people whom he knew to remove the barriers to his door and come in. After giving them the benefit of his divine teaching, he would beg them to replace the barriers as they went away. There came a time when he felt he had had enough of that, and wanted to avoid even the minimum of human company, so he blocked up the approach to his cell completely, by piling up as many stones as possible into the entrance. But he left a gap through which he could talk to his friends without being seen, and through which he was able to receive his meagre supply of food.

I was the only one to whom he then did not deny the benefit of his conversation, in that sweet voice of his so pleasing to God. In fact he would often keep me with him discussing heavenly matters, when I wanted to get away. But many people still came to him wanting his blessing. He could not bear crowds, however, so in spite of his age, and with no consideration at all for his physical weakness, he climbed over the ditch and bank, which even a strong and healthy person would have found difficult to do, and went to a nearby monastery where he built himself a ditch and bank in the angle of a wall, and continued in his usual labours.

The superior of this monastery said that he brought an end to seven weeks of fasting by eating only fifteen figs. He came to the end of his earthly strife when he had lived more than ninety years. His bodily weakness it would be impossible to describe, but it was overcome by his keenness of mind. His love of God made everything easy and straightforward for him. In the midst of his

labours he came to the winning post of his race, the end of his struggles in sight, longing for his crown.

I ask that I may know of the benefit of his intercession coming hither now, even though he is in heaven above. For I do believe that he lives even now in a more intimate relationship with God.

Chapter XIX

SALAMANUS

I believe I would be failing in my duty if I were not to leave for posterity an account of the life of the admirable Salamanus. I shall rescue him from oblivion by giving a short summary of his life.

There is a village on the western bank of the river Euphrates called Capersana, where he was born. In embracing a life of silence he found a small dwelling with no door or windows near the village on the other side of the river, where he shut himself up. He dug his garden once a year, from which he obtained a year's supply of food, but spoke to nobody. He persevered in this not just for a brief period but for many years. When the bishop of the city within whose jurisdiction the village lay heard about him he visited him with the intention of bestowing upon him the gift of priesthood. He entered the little house by making a gap in the bank, laid his hands upon him and said the prayers, and explained to him several times over the meaning of the grace that had been bestowed on him. He got no word in reply from Salamanus, before he went away leaving Salamanus to build up the ditch and bank again.

Not much later people who lived in the village from which he came crossed over the river by night, came into his house and carried him back to his own village. He made no protest or resistance. They built him a little house like the one on the eastern bank and forthwith installed him in it. And still he kept complete silence in all their doings with him. After a few days the people of the village on the opposite bank came by night, entered his house and carried him off without his making any objection, or contention that he should stay where he was. But nor did he go back eagerly and happily, either. The point is that he had decided that he was completely dead to the world, illustrating what the Apostle had said: 'I am crucified with Christ. I live, but not I, it is Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in Christ, is lived in the living faith in the son of God who loves me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2.20). That is what he was like. And that should be enough to show what the

whole course of his life was like.

And now, in the hope of a blessing from him, I shall pass on to someone else.

Chapter XX

MARIS

There is a village in Homer which we know by the name of Netis. The divine Maris built a little dwelling near there and lived enclosed in it for thirty-seven years. Being so close to a mountain this house was very damp; in winter time the moisture dripped off the walls. Villagers and farm workers alike knew how harmful this was to the body, and how many diseases it gave rise to, but none of that could persuade that sacred exemplar to move house. He stayed there with fortitude and without interruption till his life's end.

Even in his early life he had laboured to acquire the virtues, especially chastity of body and soul; he told me quite plainly himself that his body remained as whole and incorrupt as when it came from his mother's womb. When he was a young man celebrating the feasts of the martyrs, the people were charmed by the beauty of his singing voice. He was often called upon to sing the psalms, and he was physically very beautiful. And yet the beauty of his soul never came to any kind of harm in spite of the beauty of his body, the purity of his voice, or the crowds of people who approached him with their many requests. He lived exactly like all those who are enclosed, developing the care of his own soul. He increased in virtue in proportion to the labours which he underwent.

I often used to see him. His door was always open to me. He would welcome me whenever I came and would talk with me freely at great length on the search for wisdom.

Moreover he lived in complete simplicity. He detested any variation in his routines. He much preferred to live with want than with an overabundant supply. Even at the age of ninety he still wore a shirt of goat's hair. When at length he wanted to be present at the offering of the spiritual and mystical sacrifice, he asked that the offering of the divine gift be brought to him. I was very happy to agree to that. I ordered the sacred vessels to be brought (the village was not all that far away), and using the hands of the deacons as an altar I offered the saving sacrifice. He took part with the greatest of spiritual pleasure, asserting that he had seen heaven, and that never before had he experienced such joy.

Having experienced his immense love towards me I would have thought it a great injury to him not to praise him now he is dead, and hold up his love of wisdom to others as an exceptional way to follow. I now pray that I shall always enjoy his help, and bring this story to an end.

Chapter XXI

JACOBUS

I have given an account of the struggles of those athletes of virtue who have won the victory. I shall now turn to the way of life of those who even now are engaged in labour, who are suffering the trials of the battle, winning brilliant and very famous victories while yet with us, and striving to outdo with their labours those who have gone before us. I shall endeavour to keep their memory alive for the benefit of those who are coming after. The way of life of the saints who shone in their times is of enormous benefit to those who come after. May their stories be of benefit to those who come after us.

I shall take my cue from Jacobus the Great [see Chapter I], who was the first of all the others, both in order of time and in the amount of work he did. And the admirable things done by those who emulated him are beyond dispute. I don't know how it comes about that of those who are dead and those who are still with us, the name that stands out is Jacobus. Indeed in writing about these lives I began with that divine Jacobus who put to flight the Persian army with his prayers. When they attacked the walls around the city he prevented the city from being taken and put to flight the enemy by calling down on them a plague of mosquitoes and gnats. And he who by chance bears the same name is like him in his way of life, and takes pride of place among those of that athletic company who are alive now, not simply because he has the same name, but because he emulates him in virtue and has himself become an exemplar of those who search for wisdom.

He lived for some time with the incomparable Maro, and absorbed his divine teaching, but soon outshone his teacher by even greater works. He sheltered within the walls of a former pagan temple, where he constructed a tent out of skins which he used as protection against the rain and snow. He was able to make use of the tent, the temple and the shelter of the walls, but the only roof he had was the sky. All the winds of heaven beat down upon him; now he was soaked by the rain, now frozen by ice and snow, now scorched and burnt by the rays of the sun, always enduring all these things with fortitude, as if

wrestling with the body of someone else, striving to subdue the nature of that body by the power of his mind. Clad in this mortal and vulnerable [passibile] body, he lived a life beyond suffering [impassibile], concentrating on the spiritual life dwelling in his flesh [vitam incorpoream in corpore], and therefore able to proclaim with St Paul: 'We walk in the flesh but we do not fight according to the flesh, for our weapons are not of the flesh but of the power of God for the destruction of our defences, destroying the thoughts and every other high thing which vaunt themselves against the knowledge of God, but rather taking captive the whole mind into obedience towards God' (2 Corinthians 10.4-5). He fought these supernatural battles by attending to every least detail of everything he did. Shut up in his narrow dwelling, freeing his mind from the tumult of external affairs, fixing his mind securely on the memory of God, he thus contrived to move towards perfect and absolute virtue.

After working hard for a while and getting used to the idea that such works were good for him, he began to enter into more severe testings. For he moved on to this mountain thirty miles from the city, where his reputation as someone to be venerated began to grow. Whereas before he had been unknown and quite unproductive, now he was believed to have received such blessings that the topsoil was almost all gone because the crowds of people who came to him were in the habit of carrying off handfuls of it as holy relics. All who came to him could see that he lived there with no cave, no tent, no shelter, no ditch and bank, no protective hedge around him, but in full view of everyone he prayed or stood in silence, then sat, then stood, in sickness or in health, so that it was plain to all who saw him that he had conquered all his natural impulses. Nor would anybody, however freely brought up, find it easy to discharge their bodily waste in the presence of other people unless they were exercised in the very highest way of life. And I say this not as having learnt it from anyone else, for I saw him myself.

Fourteen years ago he fell seriously ill. It affected him like everyone else who is provided with a mortal body. It was a time of fierce summer heat, and the rays of the sun burnt even more fiercely, for the winds had died down and the air was absolutely still. His illness was caused by a superfluity of yellow bile, which pressed down on his intestine and infected it. Then I saw how great was his patience. For a great number of villagers had gathered in order to meet this glorious man, but he just sat there not quite sure what to do: whether to obey the force of nature which was compelling him to go apart, or whether

consideration for the people should lead him to stay where he was in the same state and difficulty. Realising his dilemma I urged the people to go away; some needed a lot of encouragement to do so, some less, but in the end I had to order them solemnly on my authority as a priest. The divine man, however, even before they had all gone, was overcome by the force of nature, but he remained perfectly unworried. It was nightfall before they were compelled to go home.

The next day when I went to him the heat was even greater than before, and his fever was being fed and increased by this exterior heat, so pretending to have a headache I told him I could hardly bear the force of the sun's rays, and begged him to let me have some kind of shelter. He took three long reeds and fixed two woven blankets to them, thus providing some shade.

"Go in under that," he said.

"It would not be right, father," I said, "for a strong young man like me to take advantage of such a shelter while you are suffering such a violent fever. It is you who could do with the shelter, but you sit there suffering the full force of the sun. If you want me to enjoy the shade come and keep me company in this little tent, for I would like to stay with you but the force of the sun's rays prevents me."

He yielded to my request at these words, and accepted the remedy I had planned for him. When we were enjoying the shade together, I spoke to him again.

"I think I shall have to lie down," I said. "My buttocks can't put up with sitting down for long without becoming sore."

"Well, lie down then," he said.

"I don't think I could allow myself to lie down if you stayed sitting up," I said.

"So if you want me to take advantage of that relief, let us lie down together, father. Then I shan't have to blush because I am the only one lying down."

By these words I undermined his resistance and got him to rest himself by lying down. I used those deceiving words only because he was ill, in the hope of lifting his spirits. I put my hand inside his clothing in order to rub his back, and found that he was carrying a considerable weight of iron hanging from his neck and loins. There were also other circular chains hanging from his neck, two in front and two behind, at an angle from the lower chains, so that where the two circles met they formed a letter X. He also had some chains from his elbows down to his hands. At the sight of these burdens weighing many talents, I begged him to give his body some respite.

"You can't go on wearing these voluntary burdens at the same time as bearing this involuntary illness," I said. "Let the fever fulfil for now the same function as the iron. When the fever is gone then you might return to imposing on the body the labour of carrying the iron."

He agreed to this as well, taking them off to an accompaniment of many short prayers. But then, after a few more days of illness he began to get better.

Later on, he fell into a much more serious illness, and many people gathered from various different places in the hope of being able to carry off his body. When news of this reached the city, soldiers and civilians all came rushing out, the soldiers armed with their military weapons, the civilians with any other weapon they could find. They drew up in an ordered line of battle, throwing spears and hurling stones, not deliberately wounding but trying to instil fear. Having driven them off they put that athlete of famous victories on to a litter and brought him into the city. He was completely unaware of what they were doing; nor had he been conscious when the people were coming after relics. They came to the church of the prophets and put his litter in the monastery next door.

Somebody came to Berhoea, which is where I was then, to tell me about everything that had happened, and he told me Jacobus was dead. I hastened away and journeyed all night until at dawn I met up with him at last. He did not speak, nor was he aware of anyone about him. I spoke to him and prayed for his good health in the name of the great Acacius. At once he opened his eyes and asked what had happened to him and how long I had been there. When I replied to him he closed his eyes again.

Towards evening on the third day he asked where he was, and when we told him he became quite agitated, and asked to be taken back to his mountain immediately. Since I was wanting to stay with him for good and serve him, I ordered the litter to be brought for him to be taken back to where he wanted to be. Then I witnessed how completely alien to this beloved leader of mine was any ambition or desire for glory. For next day I offered him some broth made from barley- groats to build up his strength a little. He refused to take it, for he never ate anything hot as he had forbidden himself the use of fire. When he refused I spoke to him.

"Do this for our sake, father," I said, "for we are united in wanting nothing but your good health. For you are not only set before us as an example, but you aid us through your prayers and mediate the goodness of God to us. If you find it difficult to accept something which you are not used to, try and put up

with it all the same, father. For this also is a part of the search for wisdom. In taking thought for your food while in good health, you have conquered any inordinate appetites. Now that you don't seem to want anything, show some flexibility by having something to eat."

As I was speaking, the man of God, Polychronius arrived, and he backed me up in what I was saying. He said that he would be willing to try some first, even though it was still morning, and he was one who often went for a week before taking any food. Jacobus was convinced by what we were saying, and did drink a bowlful of the broth, though he did so with eyes screwed up, as one does when drinking something bitter.

He was unable to walk because of his weakness, but we persuaded him to wash his feet, and I think that the result of this task was that our eyes were opened further into the way of his wisdom. One of those who were ministering to him wanted to put a screen round the bath to shield him from view

"Why are you putting a screen round the bath?" he asked.

"So that you won't be seen by those coming to visit you," was the reply.

"God forbid, my son," he said, "that you should conceal from men what is open to the God of all. Him alone do I wish to serve, I care nothing for human glory. What use is it to me if they should think that there is more due to my hard works and practices than to God himself? They will not give me any reward for my labours, it is God from whom comes all."

Who can refrain from admiring both his teaching and the mind which produced them, so far above any thought of human glory?

I remember something else that happened once. It was long past vesper time, and he was sitting with his plate in front of him eating his lentils steeped in water, which was his usual food, when he saw in the distance someone coming. It was the man from the city in charge of collecting military taxes. Jacobus did not put his food down, but continued to eat as usual. He had a vision which led him to believe that his visitor was a demon, whom he therefore berated as an enemy. But he kept on eating his lentils to show that he was not afraid. The visitor begged for mercy, even while still being vigorously cursed.

"I am only human," he said, "and I swear on oath that I have just left the city before vespers to get here now at this time."

"Well, be of good heart, then and stop looking so frightened. Come, be my guest and share my meal, as long as you will go away again when asked."

And he gave him his right hand and offered him some lentils. It was in acts like this that he drove from his heart any trace of vainglory.

I hardly need mention how he was able to bear all kinds of testings.

Sometimes he would lie prone, buried under a snowfall of three days and nights, praying to God, but unwilling to be seen in anything other than the rags which he customarily wore. Sometimes his neighbours had to dig him out with shovels and mattocks from the snow which was covering him, and then wake him up and get him moving again. Labours like this brought him gifts of divine grace which everyone wished to have a share in. His blessing drove out many fevers, many illnesses ceased and totally disappeared, many demons were put to flight, and water which he had blessed was a powerful remedy.

Is there anyone who has not heard about the boy whom he raised from the dead by prayer? His parents lived in one of the city's suburbs and had had many children who had all died an early death. When this last son was born the father ran to the man of God praying that he might have a long life and promising to dedicate him to God should he live. But when he was four years old the boy died. The father was absent at the time, but as he came back he saw the boy's body being carried out, and snatched him up out of the litter. "I have to fulfil my promise," he said, "and give him to the man of God even though he is dead."

He carried him away and laid him down before those holy feet, repeating what he had earlier said to the bearers of the litter. The divine man placed the body before him, bent his knees and lay prone, praying to the God of the living and the dead. In the evening the boy uttered a cry and called for his father. The divine man knew that God had heard his prayers and restored the boy to life, and he worshipped him who listens to those who fear him and hears their prayers. He finished his prayers and returned the boy to his father. I am a witness to this; I heard the father telling the tale. He told this apostolic miracle to many others knowing that the more people who heard it, the more it would be passed on to others.

Later on I also enjoyed his help. I will mention one or two things, which I think it would be ungenerous of me to pass over in silence, without sharing the benefit of them.

That accursed Marcion was planting many thornbushes of false doctrine about in the region of Cyrus at this time, and I was trying to pluck them out by the roots, and it was causing me a lot of hard work as I used every device I possibly could. There were those in my flock who ought to have loved me but

who poured scorn on anything I might say prophetically; I was praying, but they were returning evil for good and hatred in exchange for my love. They were using powerful magic, relying on the aid of malignant demons, but not trying to wage war by way of visions. For a demon bent on destruction came to me by night and simply shouted in the Syrian language.

"Why are you fighting with Marcion? What have you taken up arms against him for? What harm has he ever done you? Give up your warfare. Stop being so malevolent. Discover the advantages of peace. You must know that I have dug a defensive ditch around you, to prevent me from seeing the chorus of martyrs and the great Jacob protecting you."

"Did you hear that?" I said to one of our company sleeping next to me.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "I heard everything. And I got up and looked around to see if I could find out who was talking. And then for your sake I stopped, because I thought you were asleep."

So then we both got up and looked around, but we could not see anyone moving, and we could no longer hear anyone talking. The others living with us had also heard what was said.

We understood that the "chorus of martyrs" referred to a flask hanging near my bed, which contained oil which had been collected from many martyrs, and which was a source of blessing. And around my shoulders was the short cloak which had belonged to the great Jacob. For me it was more powerful than any adamantine lock. I tried to go into the village, and found that there were many forces preventing me from going in. I sent a message to my 'Isaiah', begging him to give me his divine help.

"Be of good heart," was his reply. "All those encumbrances like spider webs have been wiped out. I have had a revelation from the Lord tonight, not in a dream, but in actual fact. For when I had begun singing the psalms I saw a large serpent in the place where you are, breathing out a kind of fire in front of it, stretching from the West to the East, flying through the air. When I had completed three prayers I saw it turn and form itself into a circle, with its tail in its mouth. When I had come to the end of the eighth prayer I saw it split in two and disappear in a cloud of smoke."

That was his vision. We saw how it worked out in practice. For in the morning, at the command of the chief of demons, there appeared those who were of the Marcion sect (though now they belong to the apostolic band), stretching out from the West, with their swords bared against us. At the third hour of the day, on a sudden impulse, they seemed to be concerned only with

the safety of their own skins, like a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and at the eighth hour they scattered, leaving us free to go into the village. There we found a serpent made out of brass which they had been worshipping. When they had taken up arms against the maker and creator of the universe, they had begun to make a cult out of this dreadful serpent as being the enemy of God. This tale shows the blessings I received from this venerable chief among men.

Now that my tale has entered the realms of divine revelation, well then, I shall tell you what I heard from his own lips - lips which cannot tell a lie. He did not tell me these things from any desire to boast (for his divine soul was not remotely sullied by any vice), but simply because the usefulness of it compelled him to disclose what he would much rather have kept secret. I was humbly begging him to pray to the God of all to provide me with a harvest free from weeds and liberate me completely from the seeds of heresy. For the errors of the abominable Marcion vexed me greatly, and were becoming very strong.

"You don't need me or anyone else to intercede for you," he said in answer to my plea, "when you have the glorious John Baptist, precursor of the Word, offering prayers for you without ceasing. "

"But I have faith in your prayers," I said, "just as much as in the prayers of other holy apostles and prophets whose relics we have recently been given."

"Be of good heart," he said. "All you need are the prayers of John the Baptist." But I would not be silenced, and kept on questioning him more closely.

"Why John the Baptist, particularly?" I asked.

"How I would love to embrace and kiss his adorable relics," he said.

"I won't bring them to you," I said, "unless you promise to tell me what you see."

And he promised, and next day I brought to him what he wanted. He sent everyone away and spoke to me alone.

"It was you who accepted these relics to be the defenders of our city when they came here from Phoenicia and Palestine, accompanied by a choir singing psalms, but it did occur to me to wonder whether they really were relics of the Baptist or of some other martyr with the same name. Next day I was standing to sing the psalms when I saw a figure dressed in white who spoke to me:

""Brother Jacobus, why did you not come out to meet us?"

""Who are you?" I asked.

""We came recently from Phoenicia and Palestine, and everyone welcomed us

eagerly, pastor and people, citizens and country dwellers. You were the only one who did not take part in the welcome, and what's more you sowed doubts in the minds of other people.'

"I may not have been present with you and the others. but I do honour you and I worship the God of all.'

"He came again the next day at the same time.

"Look, brother Jacobus,' he said, 'at the figure standing nearby, dressed in clothing as white as snow.'

"This figure was wearing vestments and gesturing as if he was baptising, and I divined it was John the Baptist.

"Yes, it is John the Baptist, as you realised,' he said. 'And when you went to the village that night to confront those traitors, you had prayed that I should offer earnest prayers to God, and I spent all night beseeching the Lord.'

"Then I heard a voice saying, 'Fear not, Jacobus, it is indeed John the Baptist praying for you all night to the God of all. If the audacity of the devil had not been put to flight by his intercessions, there would have been a great slaughter.'"

Having told me this he then urged that I should be the only one to know about it, and that I was not to tell anyone else. But because it is such a beneficial story I have told many people, and now I even write it down.

He also said that he had seen the patriarch Joseph, his hair and beard grey, shining brightly in his old age, famed as the greatest in virtue among the saints.

"When I named him as the greatest among those who were with him in procession," said Jacobus, "he himself said he was the least."

He also told me about the great number of various kinds of attacks made on him by the demons.

"On my first encounter with these beings," he said, "I saw a naked shape like an Ethiopian, shooting flames out of his eyes. As I looked at him I was terrified, but turned immediately to prayer. And during the whole time he appeared to me I was completely unable to take any food. After seven or eight days I was still fasting, until at last I felt able to despise his filthy insults. I sat down and took some food. He was infuriated by the strength of my spirit, and threatened to beat me with rods.

"If that is what the God of all allows you to do', I said, 'strike, and I will gladly accept the blow as coming from God. But if it is not permitted to you, stop persecuting the soldiers of Christ immediately.'

"At this he fled. But he continued to keep on attacking me secretly. For there was someone who brought me water twice a week, and the demon met him disguised as me, took the water from him and then poured it out. After this had happened not just twice but thrice I was suffering grievously from thirst. I asked my usual water carrier why he had not brought me any water for the last fifteen days, and he told me he had brought it three or four times and I had taken it from him.

"And where was I, when I took it from you,' I asked.

"And he named the spot.

"Even if you see me coming to meet you a thousand times', I said, 'don't hand the water pot over except in this place that you see me now.'

"After these open and irritating attacks, he tried some other methods as well. He shouted loudly at me by night.

"I will make you stink so foully, and inflict such slanderous reputation on you that nobody will want to come near you,'

"Thank you very much,' I said. 'You have unwittingly bestowed a great benefit on me, for you have seen to it that I shall be all the more occupied with the remembrance of God. The more leisure time I have the more time I can spend in perpetual contemplation of the divine beauty.'

"A few days later as I was saying my midday office, I saw two women coming down the mountain. Contrary to my usual custom I was apprehensive about their approach, and thought I had better throw stones at them, but then I remembered the threats of that accursed demon. For I understood that this would have led to the 'slanderous reputation' he was talking about. So I shouted out in a loud voice that even if they should wrap themselves around my shoulders, I would not throw stones at them but simply give myself to prayer. They just vanished when I said that; my words had put an end to that showpiece of a vision."

He told me also about something which happened at the time when that pernicious band of robbers were descending on us out of Isauria, plundering and laying waste many parts of the East. He was very frightened, not that he might be killed (for he had no great love for his body), but that he might be taken captive, led into slavery and forced to witness scenes of godless wickedness. When the devil sensed his fear (for he had often been observing him, and this had come to his attention), he imitated at night the ululation of women.

"And I seemed to hear," he said, "the noise of a great army approaching,

setting the village on fire. I immediately parted my hair, half to the right and half to the left, and drew it all down to my chest, so that my neck would be more easily exposed to the sword and I would be liberated from this abominable spectacle by one swift stroke. This went on all night; I was expecting to be attacked at any minute, but when daylight came and I asked some visitors what they had heard about the Isauri, they said they had not heard anything about them for days. So then I knew that it had all been a vision from the devil".

At other times he would take on the appearance of a vigorous and sprightly youth, devastatingly beautiful, with lovely blond hair, who would come to him smiling playfully.

"I was very angry," he said, "and I rejected him and cursed him. But he just stayed there, seductively giggling and talking and inviting me to have a good time. I was even more annoyed still.

"How is it,' I asked, 'that you can wander about through the whole world, practising these deceptions on everybody?'

"It's not me alone' he replied. 'There are thousands of us scattered about the world, who play about with a serious intent, for by this playfulness we intend to bring the whole human race down to perdition.'

"You,' I said, 'be off. It is Christ who commands you, he who drove the whole herd of swine into the deep' (Matthew 8.32). He heard, and vanished, unable to bear the power of the name of the Lord, nor strong enough to bear the wisdom of his servants."

There is a great deal more I could tell you, but I am unwilling to write too much about it, lest the sheer amount of it provoke unbelief in the minds of the weaker brethren. For those who know this divine man, nothing that is said about him could appear incredible, because the virtue that they see in him authenticates what they have heard about him. But when it is only the written word which brings these stories to posterity, we must needs temper our story in line with the weakness of those who listen, for the ear is much more liable to incredulity than the eye.

Others were putting up a large building for him in the neighbouring village, not many miles away. And I set aside a small area in this building in honour of the victories of the glorious martyrs. When Jacobus heard about this he told me that his own body should be buried in the mountain. But I told him that for someone who took no thought for the needs of this present life he was out of order in worrying about where he should be buried. I saw that he took this to

heart, and I nodded my agreement, and caused a small cell to be divided off. When I saw that the rock was broken up by hoarfrost, I asked if he would allow this cell to be made into a small dwelling. He agreed, the walls were completed and we put a roof on it.

"I don't want this to be known as Jacobus' tomb," he said. "I want this building to commemorate the victories of the glorious martyrs. Let me be put like some stranger in a separate tomb, although as one held worthy to be put near them." He not only said this but made sure that it would be carried out. For he collected relics of a great number of prophets, apostles and martyrs, and placed them all in one shrine, so that he would remain in the company of the saints, and rise with them, and be found worthy of the contemplation of God. That should be sufficient to show how modest he was. He who had gathered together such great riches in the midst of extreme poverty, desired to travel like a poor pilgrim in the midst of rich merchants. The labours of my beloved leader, the number of his contests, the divine graces that he received, the number of times he drank the victor's cup and was crowned with many crowns must by this be sufficiently depicted.

Some people find fault with his severe and difficult customs, and find it hard to understand why he delighted so much in solitude and silence. I shall now say a few things about that as I bring my story to an end. As I have already said, he lived in full view of everyone, surrounded by no ditch and bank, with no hut or tent for covering. There were no locked doors confronting anyone who came to him. They all had immediate access to him and could say to him whatever they wanted. Others who loved this way of searching for wisdom did have locked doors in their enjoyment of silence, but they differed in their measure of enclosure, and in how often and for how long they decided to open their doors, and how much time they wished to spend in divine contemplation. Jacobus was not like any of those.

But he did object if anyone bothered him during his times of prayer. They would usually back off if he protested to them, and he would then resume his prayers. If they persisted in bothering him more than once or twice, he would get very angry and speak to them very sharply. I remonstrated with him once about this.

"These people are naturally very upset," I said, "when you drive them away without having the benefit of your blessing. Since many of them have journeyed here for many days for that very purpose wouldn't it be better if they did not go away in an indignant frame of mind, but filled with joy in their

hearts, and therefore more likely to be able to enlighten the ignorance of others, by giving them friendly accounts of this way of life?"

"I did not come to this mountain," he replied, "for the sake of anybody else except myself. I am so full of the most vicious sins, that my need for medicine is overwhelming. Therefore I lay siege to the mercy of God that he may provide me with the medicine for my vices. Wouldn't it be reprehensible and stupid of me to interrupt my course of prayer to hold converse with humans? If I were the servant of another human being, of the same nature as myself, and instead of serving him by bringing him his food and drink at the appointed time, I were to go into a long conversation with my fellow servants, would I not be rightly liable to be beaten? Or if I were to come before the magistrate to make a formal complaint about some injury I had received, and then interrupted my speech in the middle of it in order to talk with someone else who was there, wouldn't you agree that the magistrate would not put up with that, and would not give me the help I needed, but whip me out of court? It is right and proper that a servant in his master's presence and a plaintiff in the presence of the judge should behave themselves correctly. But I am coming before God the eternal Lord, the most just Judge, and King of the universe; shouldn't I behave in a similar manner, and not turn away to my fellow servants and carry on a long conversation with them, when I should be praying?"

All this that I heard I passed on to those who were annoyed with him. It seemed to me that what he had said was good and even beautiful. To make a further point, it is characteristic of someone in love to have no feelings for anyone except the person whom they love and admire, and dream about at night, and long to see again soon. So it seems to me that if someone desires to be given to contemplation, it would be very hard that he should be hindered from fulfilling his search for that most excellent beauty which is all his desire.

We have not written this as a formal eulogy, for we have tried to be as brief as possible lest we bore the reader with our prolixity. Even if somebody wishes to add more to this story and bring forward many other famous deeds to add to what has already been written, and to write them down, nevertheless I think it right to stop here. May the outcome of his godly struggles bring the reward that those struggles deserve, may the rest of his life be consonant with what has gone before, may he may be victorious at the winning post, and sustain and suffuse us with his prayers, so that we too may be strengthened and bring

about many victories for those who have learned about them from us, and that we may all be victors as we pass out of this life.

Chapter XXII

THALASSIUS AND LIMNAEUS

Helimna is a village near us which formerly offered its soil to the seeds of that ungodly Marcion, but which now enjoys the agriculture of the gospel. To the North there is a hill, neither too steep or too gentle, where that admirable man, Thalassius, built a monastery. He was a man adorned with many good qualities, but excelled everyone else in simplicity of life, gentleness and self-control. I say this, not only because of what I have heard, but because I have seen it for myself. I have often visited him, and had gratifying conversation with him.

In this place he trained Limnaeus, whose praises are now sung by all. He came to this monastery while still a youth and initiated into their beautiful way of searching for wisdom. He soon realised that language could be dangerous, and opted for total silence, even while still so young; for a long time he went without speaking to anyone. After imbibing as much as possible of the divine teaching of the older man, he had become the living image of all his virtues, after which he went to Maro, whom we have already mentioned. He went there at the same time as the divine Jacobus. After learning a great deal from Maro, and emulating him in his life under God, he took possession of the top of another mountain hanging over a village called Targalla. Here he lives to this day, with no cottage, no tent, no hut, simply surrounded by a wall which he built out of stones. There is just one little opening in this wall, carefully blocked-up by clay, which he never clears away for visitors, although he does allow me to clear it away in order to visit him. That is why many people come from all directions if they know that I am going to visit him, hoping that they will also be able to go in with me. Usually when people come to him he speaks to them through another small opening and gives them his blessing. To many of them his blessing brings healing. He calls himself our servant, and heals diseases, expels demons and follows the apostles in performing miracles.

He not only brought healing to those who came to him; time and time again he brought healing to his own body. Quite some time ago he suffered a severe digestive disorder. Only those who have experienced this illness can fully

know how severe are the griping pains they suffer, but just to observe them is also to know how they twist and turn in a frenzy, turning this way and that way, repeatedly stretching and contracting their feet, they sit down, get up again and walk about, sometimes finding that sitting in a bath gives them some relief. But why go on enumerating all these symptoms when they are quite generally known? When Limnaeus was in the throes of this illness, suffering so many intense pains, he would not accept the help of any medicine, would not make use of a bed, but lay down on a board on the bare ground, and was cured only by prayer and the sign of the cross, and in the midst of his suffering he dulled the pain by the repetition of the holy name. Later, while walking about one night, he trod on a viper. The viper in defence fixed its teeth in his foot. Limnaeus moved his hand down towards his foot in order to massage it, and the viper bit his hand. He then tried to use his left hand to protect himself and the viper bit that as well. He had more than ten bites before the viper was satisfied and went away to seek its own den. He was in considerable pain as a result of all this, but even so he would not use any medicines, but trusted solely to the medicine of faith, the sign of the cross, prayer and the invocation of God. I can only suppose that the God of all allowed this beast to attack his sacred body so that the ability of his divine soul to bear suffering might be made manifest to all. And that of course was the remedy used by the brave and generous Job, who was more than willing to be tossed about by the greatest storms of all kinds, as long as he could demonstrate to everyone the wisdom of his master. We would not otherwise have known either the bravery of the one or the long-suffering of the other, unless a space for throwing all kinds of weapons at them had been allowed to the enemy of godliness.

I think I have said enough to show his long-suffering. But I will also add something about his clemency and kindness. For he gathered up many blind people and beggars, and built little dwelling places for them both to the East and to the West, where he bade them live and praise God. He urged his visitors to supply their food and other necessities. He however remained enclosed in the midst of them, encouraging both his visitors and the blind and the beggars in singing psalms, to make their regular praising of God to be heard. Such was his kindness to people of that sort. He and the great Jacobus both spent the same amount of time in this godly battle. They completed thirty-eight years.

Chapter XXIII

JOHANNES, MOSES, ANTIOCHUS, ANTONIUS

Johannes also took up this kind of life, a man famous above all for his gentleness and kindness. He occupied a rather rugged cliff, exposed to the storms coming from the North, where he has already lived for twenty-five years, buffeted by the winds of heaven. For the rest, there is no need for me to itemise his food, his clothing and his iron weights, for they are all similar to what I have already described. He was above other human beings in this, that he would not accept any comforting solace from anybody, as the following incident demonstrates. For someone kindly planted an almond seedling to provide him with his only bit of greenery, so that as it grew into a tree he could enjoy its shade and feast his eyes, but he ordered that it should be taken out to avoid having to take any pleasure in it.

Moses also embraced this way of life, living on the top of a high mountain overhanging the village of Rome.

And Antiochus, an older man, who built a small enclosure in a very remote mountain.

And Antonius, who even in old age rivalled the deeds of those much younger. They all had the same sort of clothing and food, the same reputation, the same order of fixed prayers, labouring night and day. Neither length of service, nor old age nor natural weakness is able to diminish their powers of fortitude, which continue to flourish and keep alive their desire to keep working. This difficult life of striving for virtue is embraced by many other athletes in the mountains and fields of God. It would be difficult to number them all and describe the life of each one.

I have said sufficient to be of use to those who wish to benefit from it, and I will now turn to another kind of story, praying that I too may share in their blessings.

Chapter XXIV

ZEBINAS AND POLYCHRONIUS

Even to the present day, those who have seen Zebinas count themselves fortunate. For they say that even in extreme old age he carried out the same routine right up to the end. He did not allow the heavy weight of age to take anything away from the struggles of his youth. They say that his tirelessness

in prayer exceeded that of any other human being of that time. He would pray far into the night; he never could have enough of it but was always eagerly desiring more. Even when engaging with those who came to see him he was not able to force himself to drag his thoughts away fully from the things of heaven, but as soon they had gone, he would renew his prayer as if there was hardly anything which separated him from the God of all. When old age would not longer allow him to stand continuously without doing himself an injury he used a staff for support. He would lean on it, praying and praising God. Although above all he had a deep love of hospitality, he would ask many of those who came to see him to wait until evening. Many feared that they might have to wait there all night and made a pretext that they had other business to attend to and excused themselves from sharing in his labour of prayer.

The great Maro was one of his admirers, and he always suggested to those who came to see him that they should go to Zebinas for a blessing. He called him his father and teacher, and an example of every virtue. He wanted them to be buried in the same tomb, but those who snatched away his body and buried him in the place which I have described prevented that [see Chapter XVI]. He died before the divine Zebinas in a neighbouring village called Cirtica, but Zebinas accepted what happened to his body and built a great shrine over his tomb, which brought many healings of different kinds to those who visited it in faith. So now all the martyrs who strove against the Persians are together under the same roof, and are honoured with great celebrations every year.

The great Polychronius sat at the feet of Zebinas. Even the most divine Jacobus said that he had been given a hair shirt by Zebinas. I never saw him myself, for he died before I was born, but in the marvellous way that Polychronius lived I could see that Zebinas lived again, not that he was like a wax tablet taking the impression and character of whatever shape the writer makes upon it, but I pass on what I saw myself and what was said about him by those who were with him. For he was consumed by the same desire for God, rising far above earthly things. His mind was untrammelled by his body, carried upwards through the air and the aether, higher than the heavens. He was perpetually caught up in the contemplation of God, and it was impossible for him to drag his mind away from that. Even when talking with those who came to see him, his mind was fixed on things above.

He stood keeping vigil all night through, and this is how I learnt about it. For when I saw that he was suffering from old age and bodily weakness, and

taking no care of his body, I began more and more to urge him to agree to take two companions to live with him and look after him. And he did ask for two men of obvious virtue to come from another monastery. And I persuaded these admirable men to put the care of the divine man before everything else. They had not lived with him for very long before they wanted to leave, because they could not cope with staying up all night. I remonstrated with the divine man that he should temper his labours to the weakness of his body.

"I did not compel them," he replied, "to stand resolutely with me all night, but I repeatedly urged them to go to bed. But they asked how could they possibly go to bed, being in good health and the prime of life as they were, when they saw someone else despising his bodily weakness adopting such a laborious stance."

Thus I learnt about the nocturnal labours of that venerable chief among men. And in due course those companions also developed so greatly in virtue that they too adopted the same way of life as the great man.

And Moses, too (that was the name of one of them) remains to this present day, loyal to Polychronius his father and teacher, giving clear and perfect expression to the virtues which shone forth from that sacred soul.

Damianus (the name of the other one) went to a village not far away called Niara and found a little dwelling where he lives now, carrying on with the same sort of life. Those who have known them both say that as they look at Damianus it is like looking at the blessed Polychronius clothed in another body. They both had the same simplicity, gentleness and self-control, the same placid way of talking, the same sweetness in conversation, the same vigilance of spirit and knowledge of God, the same ordering of work and vigils and food, and the same divine law of poverty and owning nothing. Apart from one bowl containing lentils steeped in water there was nothing else inside his dwelling. He owed such a great debt to the customs of the great Polychronius. However, let me leave the disciple and return to the teacher; it is from the source that the flowing streams arise. Along with the other vices he cast out from his soul the desire for admiration, and trod underfoot the tyranny of empty fame by trying to conceal the full extent of his labours. So he rejected the idea of wearing iron weights lest he incur some spiritual damage if it led to his soul becoming inflamed by arrogance. But he asked for a heavy oak tree root to be brought to him as if he wanted it for some other purpose, and then placed it on his shoulders at night time when he prayed. If anyone came and knocked on his door he hid it. Someone who saw this told me about it and in

trying to see how heavy it was I found that I could scarcely lift it up with both hands. He caught me doing so and told me to put it down, but I asked him to let me take it away, hoping to lighten his load. But when I saw that he carried it quite easily I yielded to his desire for the victory.

Grace divine flowed from his labours, and many miracles from his prayers. When a grievous drought was afflicting the human race and calling forth many prayers, a number of priests came to see him. Among them was one who was in charge of the food supply for all the villages of the Antiochene region. He asked the seniors present to persuade Polychronius to lay hands on the vessel he used for oil. They replied that he would not do that, but he kept on asking and begged Polychronius himself, who at last did spread out his hands over the oil vessel. It immediately began to overflow with oil, so that two or three others of those present held out their hands, and their vessels were filled likewise.

But although he radiated divine grace, and was full of wonderful acts of kindness, and deeds done with power, daily scattering about him the fruits of his search for wisdom, he still remained modest and discreet. He embraced the feet of each one who came to him, bowing his forehead down to the ground, whether they were soldiers, workmen or farmers.

I will tell you something else to illustrate his simplicity and discretion. When a certain good man belonging to the prefect class came to Cyrus, he asked me to show him some of these great athletes. I took him to several people and then to Polychronius. I told him that the man with me was a prefect, and one who loved justice and fairness, whereupon the divine man stretched out his hands and embraced both his feet.

"Will you grant me a petition I would like to make to you?" he asked.

The prefect was embarrassed and begged him to get up, at the same time promising to agree to his request, thinking that he probably wanted to ask a favour for someone over whom he had jurisdiction.

"Since you have made a promise," said the divine man, "and confirmed it with an oath, please offer fervent and vigorous prayer to God for me."

The prefect beat his forehead and begged to be released from his oath, as somebody who was not worthy to offer prayers for him to God. How can any amount of talking praise him enough to do justice to his wisdom and modesty and discretion?

Various different illnesses might attack him but had no effect on his zeal for the labours he undertook. His routine was exactly the same however many

illnesses he suffered. It was only after a long argument with him soon after building his little dwelling that we succeeded in introducing a little heating into it, for his body was freezing cold. Many people offered him money, or left it behind with him as they went out, but he refused always to accept any of it. Instead he asked them to share it out to others. Later, the great Jacobus gave him a cloak which someone had given him, but he sent it back, saying it was too thick and elegant. He always wore the plainest and cheapest clothing. He rated so highly the poverty in which to seek the kingdom of heaven that often he did not even have enough food. I know I have often been there to seek his blessing and found that all he had was two figs. The honey of his words was highly sought after by those who came to see him, and was highly pleasant and full of joy for those who heard. I have never known anyone except the shallow and sarcastic who have ever been able to find fault with him. Everyone praises him and celebrates him, and when they come to see him are always reluctant to leave.

Chapter XXV

ASCLEPIUS AND JACOBUS, HERMITS

Asclepius was of this same category, and emulated his style of life ten miles away. He had similar food and clothing and habits of self-control, charity towards brothers and guests, gentleness and kindness, and conversation with God, extreme poverty and an abundance of virtues, the fruits of his search for wisdom, and all the other things which I have told you concerning Polychronius, that chief of men. They say that when he was numbered among the brothers living in community, he embraced the monastic, ordered life, and never did anything wrong in spite of being in the midst of such a crowd of people. So then, he conducted himself so well in both lives, that is, the community life and the solitary life, that he is worthy of a double crown. Later, many others followed his path of virtue. Not just our own state but neighbouring states and countries too are full of such seekers after wisdom. The divine Jacobus is one of them, enclosed in a little dwelling just outside a village called Duzan. Even towards the end of his life (he is ninety years old), he still lives alone within his ditch and rampart, shaped in a curve. He gives answers to people but will not allow himself to be seen, except that twice he has told me to break through the wall and come in, which was a great honour for me, to have him show me such good will.

People who are still living at this time do not need my writings; they can go and witness his search for wisdom for themselves if they want to. But what I have written should be sufficient for those who come after and who did not actually see him to be able to grasp the nature of his way of life. So I leave him now, and say no more, but asking the blessing of his prayers, go on to talk about someone else.

Chapter XXVI

SIMEON STYLITES

Every subject of the Roman Empire knows of the famous Simeon, the great wonder of the world. The Persians know of him as well, as do the Indians and Ethiopians; in fact his fame has spread even as far as the Nomads of Scythia, where they have learnt about his diligence and way of life. Let me say at once that if I did not have so many witnesses, I would hesitate to describe his battles, which are greater than it is possible to tell, lest posterity should hold them as mere fables destitute of all truth. For they are greater than you would think possible for human nature, and human beings, of course, are apt to judge of what they hear according to the limits of human nature. And if what they hear exceeds those limits, those who are not partakers of the divine mysteries judge it to be false. But the earth and sea are full of godly members of the true religion, well instructed in divine matters, who are aware of the grace of the holy Spirit and are so far from disbelieving what I am about to narrate that their faith will become even greater, and they will readily accept my tale with keen interest. It is on that basis that I will begin by describing how he was worthy of a vocation from above.

He was born in a village called Sefa on the border between our country and Cilicia, where his parents taught him to keep sheep. In this respect he was in the good company of the patriarch Jacob, the disciplined Joseph, the legislator Moses, the king and prophet David, and all those other divine men like them. Once when it had been snowing heavily the sheep had to be kept inside, and in this period of rest from active shepherding he went to church with his parents. His own holy tongue told me this next bit. For he said that he heard the voice of the gospel saying 'blessed are they who weep and mourn, wretched are they who mock, blessed are the pure in heart', and the rest of this passage. (Matthew 5.4ff). He asked one of those present what one should do to follow all these things, and was told about the solitary life and its high way of

searching for wisdom.

He said that after receiving these seeds of the divine word, fruitfully planted in the deepest furrow of his heart, he went to a nearby shrine of the holy martyrs, bent his knees and touched the ground with his forehead, and prayed to him who 'wills all people to be saved' (1 Timothy 2.4), begging that he might be led into the perfect way of godliness and true religion. Not long after this he was sleeping peacefully when he had a dream.

"I seemed to be digging foundations," he said, "and I heard someone standing nearby telling me that I must dig much deeper. When I had dug deeper as he asked, I tried to have a rest, but he told me to keep on digging and not to cease from my labour. This happened three or four times, until at last he told me I was deep enough. He then told me to build but use no labour, for the labour had ceased, and the future building would appear without labour."

Future events proved this prediction to be true, for what happened was beyond the power of human nature.

When he awoke he went to a nearby house of monks. He stayed there for two years, seized by a deep desire to become perfect in virtue, then went to the village of Teleda, which we have already mentioned, where the great and divine men Ammianus and Eusebius had built their monastic dwelling. But he did not join them; he went instead to another house which was an offshoot, a training ground in the search for wisdom built by Eusebonas and Abiton after they had been sufficiently instructed by Eusebius. These two spent their whole life in harmony with each other in mind and deed. They were like one soul in two bodies, and had many others with them who were gripped by a love for this kind of life.

After they had departed this life, Heliodorus was in charge. He was greatly admired by his companions. At the age of sixty-five he had lived an enclosed life for sixty-two years, for his parents had looked after him for only three years before he entered this community, so that he had never set eyes on many things in this world. He used to say that he did not know what pigs looked like, or cockerels or other such animals. I often saw him, and I admired his simplicity of life and likewise valued his marvellous purity of soul.

That outstanding athlete of godliness, Simeon, fought the battle among them for ten years. There were eighty of them, but he overshadowed them all.

Whereas the others ate every second day, he fasted for the whole week, which those superior to him by no means approved of. They argued with him, saying that he was upsetting the regular order of things, though nothing that they said

made him change his mind, or succeeded in putting checks upon his spiritual zeal.

The present superior of this community told me that Simeon once made a rope out of palm leaves, which are the most sharp and prickly things, and wound it round his loins, not outwardly but next to his skin, and pulled it so tight that wherever it touched him he became quite ulcerous. After wearing it for ten days the ulcers began to bleed, and someone who noticed this asked him why he was bleeding. He said it was nothing, but his companion forcefully put his hand inside his clothing and discovered the reason. He reported it to the superior, who scolded him and entreated him and emphasised the cruelty of it, and managed to persuade him to desist only with great difficulty. Later on, when it was discovered that he was doing other things of this sort he was expelled from the monastery, lest others who did not have such bodily endurance should try to emulate him, to their great detriment.

He went to a more solitary place on the mountain where he found a very deep gully, without any water supply, into which he lowered himself down and began to offer to God his hymns of praise. Meanwhile the seniors in the monastery began to suffer a few pangs of conscience, and they sent two of the brothers out to find him and bring him back. They wandered over the mountain telling the shepherds what he looked like and how he was dressed and asking them if they had seen him. The shepherds pointed out the gully, and when they saw it they cried out in astonishment, and they had to get a rope in order to draw him out after a great deal of trouble, as it was a place much easier to get into than to get out of.

He stayed with them for a while longer before going to the village of Tellanessus, near Antioch, where he took possession of the mountaintop where he now lives. He found a little dwelling there in which he spent three years completely enclosed.

And then in an attempt to augment his store of virtue, he decided to fast completely for forty days like those divine men Moses and Elijah. He tried to persuade the admirable Bassus, who administered many communities in his capacity of leader among the ranks of the priesthood, to block up with clay the entrance to his dwelling, leaving nothing behind inside. Bassus objected that a self-inflicted death should by no means be accounted a virtue, but rather was a crime first and foremost.

"All right, father," said Simeon, "leave me ten loaves, and a jar of water, and if I see that my body is in need of some nourishment I will take some of it."

It was done as he asked. The food was brought in, and the entrance was blocked up with clay. At the end of the forty days, that admirable man of God, Bassus, came and removed the clay, went inside, and found the same number of loaves as before, the jar still full of water, and Simeon himself lying down, scarcely breathing, unable to speak or move. He found a sponge and moistened and washed his mouth with it, after which he brought him the elements of the divine Sacrament. Strengthened by this, he revived, and took a little food, some lettuce and watercress, which he ate a little at a time, and managed to swallow.

The great Bassus was astonished, and came back to tell his own flock of this great miracle. He had more than two hundred companions, who were allowed to possess neither a beast of burden nor a mill. They were not allowed to accept gold from anyone, not go out at all to buy what was necessary, but stayed in, content with what food was given them by divine grace. They maintain that rule to this day, and however much they may increase in numbers, they do not transgress against the rule they have been given. But let me return to the great Simeon.

From that time right up to the present day, that is, for twenty-eight years, he has practised fasting for forty days. For the first few days he would stand to praise God, but by keeping at it and as the time went by he had to modify that labour. Weakness of body would not permit him to keep standing. Then he would have to sit to say the divine office, and in the last few days he would lie down. And as little by little his natural forces got weaker and weaker, he had no option but to lie there half dead. But after he went up onto his column he never once thought of coming down and devised a means of remaining there standing. For he set up a large beam of timber on top of his column and fastened himself to it with ropes, and spent the whole forty days like that. From that time onwards his superiors tolerated what he was doing and accepted that he did not need any help. He stood for the whole forty days, taking no food, but with the liveliness of his soul strengthened by divine grace.

As we have said, he spent three years in that little dwelling before coming to the top of that mountain which has since been so famously celebrated. He caused a fence to be built around the place, and took a chain of twenty cubits length, one end of which he fixed to a large stone, and the other to his ankle, so that even if he wanted to, it was impossible for him to go beyond the limit he had set. There he stayed, seeking the vision of heaven, drawing strength

from the contemplation of those things which are above the heavens, the flight of his mind in no way impeded by his chains of iron.

But later that admirable man Meletius was given the episcopal care of the city of Antioch and the region roundabout, a judicious man, famous for his prudence and adorned with unusual brilliance. He declared that Simeon's chain was superfluous, for it was quite enough that the mind should impose upon the body the limitation imposed by the chain. So in obedience to the bishop he agreed to cease using the chain. A smith was called and instructed to remove it. Now there was a piece of leather next to his shinbone sewn together round the chain for bodily protection, and when of necessity that was cut apart, they say that they found twenty great insects hiding in its folds.

Meletius himself attested that that was what he saw. I have mentioned this to demonstrate what great fortitude this man had, for he could easily have turned back the leather and destroyed the insects. But he preferred to put up with their fierce bites, and aspire to higher things by enduring the small things. His fame spread through all the region roundabout, and people came from near and far, some bringing with them people with paralysis, some seeking healing of their own illnesses, others asking to become monks, for what naturally they found hard to accept they willingly accepted from him. When all these people had obtained what they had asked for, they went away rejoicing, telling every one about the benefits they had received, and sending back many more to seek for the same sort of things. All these people coming from everywhere were like rivers flowing down every road, and they gathered together in that place like a human ocean filling up with streams from all directions. There was a flood of people not only locally but there were Ishmaelites, and Persians and Armenians and Iberes, and Homerites, and others from further away still. Many came even from the far West, Spaniards and Britons, and Gauls. It is hardly necessary to add that they came also from Italy; they say that at Rome, by far the greatest city, he was so eulogised in sermons that people placed little images of him in all their porches and doorways, to make themselves safe through his protection.

People without number kept on coming to him, trying to touch him in order to receive a blessing from his clothing of skins. At first he just thought it was ridiculous and unnecessary for such high honour to be paid to him, but eventually he found that he could hardly bear all the extra vexation it caused. So he organised that column to stand on, at first ordering it to be of six cubits, then twelve, and later twenty, and finally thirty-six which is what it is today. It

was part of his desire to fly away into the heavens and free himself from things of the earth.

I don't believe that the building of this column is contrary to the divine plan, and I urge those who delight in pouring scorn on it to hold their tongue and not let it wag so thoughtlessly. They should rather remember that the Lord has arranged many things like that for the benefit of the slothful. He ordered Isaiah to walk naked and barefoot (Isaiah 20.2), Jeremiah to put a girdle about his loins as a prophetic act for the benefit of the unbelieving (Jeremiah 13.1), and later to put yokes of wood and steel on his neck (Jeremiah 27.2). He ordered Hosea to take back his fornicating wife and show his love for that fornicating and adulterous woman (Hosea 1.2), and Ezekiel to lie on his right side for forty days, and then on his left side for a hundred and fifty days (Ezekiel 4.5-6), to dig through the walls, to go forth as of one going into captivity, and even to take a sharp blade to shave his head, and divide his hair into four parts, giving some to these people and some to those, so that no one would be able to count them completely. The Ruler of the universe ordered all these things to be done in order to bring to their senses those who did not obey his word or listen to the prophets, convincing them by these extraordinary spectacles, and making them pay heed to the oracles of God. Who would not be utterly astonished at the sight of the divine man going naked? Who would not wonder why he was doing that? Who would not want to know how a prophet could allow a fornicating woman to live with him?

But the God of all ordered each one of these things to be done because of his great concern for those who were living disgracefully and slothfully. And so he provided this wonderful new spectacle [of Simeon on his column], drawing everybody to come and see it for its sheer novelty and wonder, making sure that those who came would get a lesson they could believe in. The novelty of the spectacle was in itself a pledge of true teaching, and anyone who came to see it went away having learnt something of the nature of God. For just as human kings from time to time change the images on their coins, putting a lion on some, stars on another, Angels on another, making the gold more valuable because of the image stamped upon it, so does the high King of the universe add to the godliness of the true religion many new ways of living, as if imprinting pictures and seals, not just for the sake of those who are of the household of the faith, but to encourage the tongues of all those who suffer under the disease of unbelief to turn towards the praise of God.

It was not just words that persuaded them of this, but the sight of the column

itself, which itself spoke volumes. This simple fact of a man standing on a column enlightened countless thousands of Ishmaelites who had been slaves to a blind ungodliness. For just like a very bright candle placed on a lamp stand, he shed his rays all about like the sun, and, as I have said, he saw the Iberes, the Persians and the Armenians all coming to receive divine Baptism. The Ishmaelites also came in crowds, two or three hundred at a time, sometimes even a thousand, shouting their rejection of the errors of their forefathers. In the face of that great source of light, they utterly did away with the idols they used to worship, and denounced the orgies of Venus, for they accepted that this was the worship of demons, as Simeon repeated from on high time after time. They received the divine Sacraments, and accepted the rules which that divine tongue laid down. They gave their assent to the rites of the fathers, and renounced the barbaric cult of asses and camels. I saw and heard all this myself, as they condemned the ungodliness of their native land and accepted the teaching of the gospels.

I once got into a very dangerous situation, for Simeon suggested to them that they should come to me for a priestly blessing, from which he said they would receive a great benefit. When this great mass of barbarians came rushing towards me a little later, some of them dragged me forwards, some backwards, some sideways. Those on the outskirts of the crowd pushed in, stretching out their hands to touch my beard or seize my garments, so that truly I would have been suffocated by the way they crowded around so violently, if Simeon had not shouted out for them all to move away. Such was the kind of power, ridiculed by the spiteful, which flowed from that column, as Simeon radiated the light of the knowledge of God into the minds of the barbarians.

There is another thing which I saw happening like this: one tribe of people present begged him to say a prayer and give a blessing to their leader, but the people of another tribe which was there objected, saying that he ought not to bless the leader of that tribe but give a blessing to the leader of their own tribe, for the other leader was a tyrant, whereas their own was absolutely just. The argument was so great and barbarous that they eventually began to attack each other. I stepped in with a prolonged appeal, and tried to persuade them to desist, on the grounds that the divine man was perfectly able to give a blessing to both of them. But some still continued to complain that the others should not be included, and the others still tried to prevent a blessing being given to their opponents. It was not until Simeon scolded them from above, likening them to baying dogs, that the quarrel subsided. I tell you this to show how

deeply their belief had taken hold of their minds, for they would not have quarrelled among themselves if they had not believed in the great power of his blessing.

I saw another greatly celebrated miracle. The leader of one of the Saracen tribes came to ask help for one of his company whose limbs had been stricken with paralysis when they were in the great fortress of Callinicus in the course of their journey. The paralysed man was brought forward, Simeon asked him if he would renounce the ungodliness of his people, he freely consented and did what he was asked. Simeon asked him if he believed in the Father, the only-begotten Son and holy Spirit, and he replied that he did.

"By your belief in these names," said Simeon, "arise!"

He got up, and immediately offered to carry the leader of his tribe back to his tent on his own shoulders. The leader agreed, and they departed. All those present lifted up their voices in praise to God. It was in imitation of the Lord who ordered the paralysed man to pick up his bed that he did this (Matthew 9.6). Let no one call this action some sort of arbitrary power. For his own voice tells us, 'whosoever believes in me shall do the same works as I do, and even greater' (John 14.12). And we have seen the fulfilment of this promise. For whereas there were no miracles done by the Lord's shadow, yet the mere shadow of the great Peter broke the power of death, healed the sick and drove out demons (Acts 5.15). The Lord did miracles through his disciples, and now likewise the divine Simeon did many miracles by the use of the divine name. There was another miracle that he did, hardly less wonderful than the other. Among those who had come to believe in the saving name of the Lord Christ was an Ishmaelite from a quite well known place who made a vow to God, with the divine man as witness, that he would abstain from that time onwards from eating the flesh of any living creature. Somehow or other there came an occasion when he transgressed against his promise, and attempted to eat something that had been killed. But God wished to rebuke him and make him change his mind, in honour of his servant who had been a witness of the promise which had now been transgressed, so he turned the flesh of the chicken to stone. Even if he had wanted to, he was no longer able to eat it. How could he indeed, when the flesh which he wanted to eat had been turned to stone? This barbarian was stupefied by this amazing and unbelievable sight, and went to the holy man as quickly as possible, bringing his hidden sin into the light of day, confessing his transgression in the hearing of all, and seeking pardon of God for his offence, and the assistance of the holy man that by his

all-powerful prayers he might loose him from the chains of his sin. There were many who witnessed this miracle, for they saw about his person some of the chicken bone turned into stone.

I not only witnessed miracles, I also heard him predicting the future. Two years before it happened he predicted a drought and consequent harvest failure, together with the famine and pestilence that went with it. He said he had seen a great rod lifted up against the human race, with whips attached to punish them. At another time he said there would be a plague of locusts, but that they would not cause a great deal of harm as the divine mercy would be poured out in response to prayer. Thirty days later a numberless multitude of them descended on us, such as to block out the rays of the sun and overshadow us all. We all saw this plainly and clearly. But only the animals' pasture suffered any loss; human food took no harm whatsoever.

And also when I was in a dispute with somebody he told me that the dispute would come to an end fifteen days before experience proved the truth of his prediction.

He also saw two rods coming down from the heavens, one falling in the East and the other in the West. The divine man interpreted these as incursions against Roman rule by the Persians and the Scythians, and he explained the vision to those who were present with him, and with many tears and earnest prayers he turned aside those blows which were threatening the world. For the Persians were already armed and ready to attack the Romans, when with the will of God against them they were hindered right from the beginning, torn apart by their own internal arguments. I know of a whole lot more incidents like this, but I pass over them to avoid being accused of prolixity. What I have told you is sufficient to establish the spiritual vision his mind was capable of. He was so highly thought of by the king of Persia, that he sent envoys to Simeon, wanting to know about his life and miracles. It is also said that the queen of Persia asked that he might bless some oil for her, which she accepted as a very valuable gift. All the king's court attendants were very excited when they heard about this, in spite of hearing calumnies about him from the learned magicians. They asked innumerable questions about him, and having learnt as much as they could, made the name of that divine man even more widely known. Crowds of other people approached the muleteers, the servants and the soldiers, offering money to be given a share in the blessed oil.

The queen of the Ishmaelites was sterile but longed for children. She sent someone of dignity and authority to him to ask that she might become a

mother. He made his petition, she gave birth as she had desired, and the king took the child and brought him to the divine old man (for women were not allowed to approach him), and asked if this had happened because of his blessing.

"No, it was your act that did it," said Simeon. "I simply poured out with tears the seed of prayer. It was your seed that resulted in the harvest when you drew down the shower of divine grace through prayer."

But why should I attempt to measure the depth of the Atlantic ocean? Human beings cannot measure it, just as the deeds he did daily defy the telling of them. He stood night and day in full view of all. He had no doors, he could be approached from all directions, providing a novel and wonderful sight for everybody, now standing for a long time, now bending frequently to offer adoration to God. Many of those present counted his adorations; somebody who was with me once counted up to twelve hundred and fifty-four before he made a mistake and lost count. As a result of so much bending he was able to move his forehead very close to his toes. For since his stomach took food only once a week, and that only a small amount, about as much as sharing in the divine Sacraments, it meant that his back could bend very easily. They say that as a result of standing on one leg he developed an ulcer which exuded matter, but nothing that happened to him impeded his way of life. He endured with a brave and generous heart both voluntary and involuntary sufferings, triumphing over them all by the devotion of his soul.

On one occasion he was compelled to show this ulcer to somebody. What happened was this: a good man, highly thought of in the ministry of Christ visited him from Arabena .

"Tell me the truth," he said, "what sort of a man is it who changes his life as you have done. Are you really human, or are you an incorporeal spirit?"

The bystanders were annoyed at his interrogation and told him to hold his tongue, but Simeon answered him.

"Why are you interrogating me like this?" he asked.

"Because I hear it commonly said that you neither eat nor sleep, but both are necessary for human beings. No one clothed in human nature can live without food and sleep."

"Get a ladder and come up here," said Simeon.

And as soon as his hand appeared over the top of the ladder he lifted the hem of his long robe and guided the hand to his feet, where the man saw not only Simeon's feet but also that grievous ulcer. He was amazed at the size of it.

Simeon also told him how he was nourished, and when the man came back down the ladder, he came to me and told me all about it.

On public feast days he demonstrated another example of his powers of endurance. From the setting of the sun till the time when it once more approached the western horizon he stood with his hands raised in prayer, sleepless, bearing the labour of it without difficulty. In all his labours, notwithstanding the magnitude of all the deeds he performed, he was gifted with a modesty and self-control which made him the most dignified of all human beings. To go with his modesty, he made it easy for people to approach him, for he was pleasantly friendly, and gave equal attention to all who spoke to him, whether they were workmen, beggars or agricultural workers. He was given the gift of teaching by a generous and bountiful God. Twice daily he gave little homilies, pouring the water of life into the ears of his audience. He spoke quite beautifully, showing the discipline of a divine spirit, urging them to look upwards and open their wings, leaving the world far behind, to seek for the vision of the expected kingdom, to stand in fear of the punishment of hell, to despise the things of the earth and to look for the world to come. He could also be seen acting as a judge, whose verdicts were always right and proper.

It was always after the ninth hour that he did things of that nature. The whole night, and the day up to the ninth hour he gave to perpetual prayer. First of all at the ninth hour he would preach to those present, then he would listen to individual requests, curing some, giving judgments to others among whom there was some dispute. At sunset he would begin to turn towards the Lord. But along with all these things he did not fail in care and forethought for the holy churches, now confronting the ungodliness of the pagans, now confuting the impudence of the Jews, now vanquishing and putting to flight the hordes of heretics, and, what is more, writing letters to the Emperor about them. He would write also to community leaders and magistrates, inciting them to zeal for the Lord, and sometimes to the chief pastors of the churches, urging them to take greater care for their flock.

By describing to you these few raindrops I hope to have given readers some idea of a life-giving shower of rain, or what it is like to taste the sweetest honey. But there are a great deal more things than these to be sung about and celebrated. However, I did not promise to write down everything, but just a few things in his life to show his style and character. Let others write much more about him as they will.

He lived for a long time after this, with many miracles and labours, in the heat of the sun, in the ice of winter, buffeted by the gales, in the weakness of his human nature, remaining alone invincible out of all who ever were, until at last it behoved him to be with Christ and receive the crown for his immense labours, confirming to unbelievers by his death that he was but human. Even after death he remained immoveable, for although his soul had gone to heaven his body was not allowed to fall, but stayed upright on his battlefield, an unconquered athlete, none of his members willing to touch the earth, proclaiming the victory of the athlete of Christ even in his death.

His cures of various diseases, his miracles, the power of his holy work are all just as much celebrated now in various holy reliquaries, as they were at the time, but above all now in that monument to his high virtue and daily strife, that great and celebrated column, proclaiming, I say, Simeon's righteousness and praise.

I hope that I may share in his holy intercessions, that I may persevere in holy labours, and I pray to God who provides for us all, the God who is the splendour of devotion and true religion, to govern my life, and shape me into the mould of the gospel.

Chapter XXVII BARADATUS

The common enemy of human beings has many paths of vice through which he strives to lead to perdition the whole human race, whereas the followers of the true religion think up many different ladders whereby they may ascend to heaven. Some strive together in communities, of which there is a countless number, to enjoy the crown incorruptible by ascending to heaven together. Others choose the monastic [i.e solitary] life aiming to speak with God alone and enjoying no human consolation. Their victories are publicly renowned. Some of these praise God living in tents, some in huts, some choose life in caves and caverns. But there are many others among those we have mentioned who have decided not to use either cavern, tent, cave or hut, but to commit their bodies to the open air, enduring all conditions, the most rock-hard ice equally with the burning rays of the sun. Among them again there are various modes of living. Some always stand, some divide their time between standing and sitting, some shut themselves in behind fences, fleeing from human company, others use none of these devices, but are available for all who want

to see them. It is as one of this latter sort that I now need to describe the life of the admirable Baradatus, for he found quite different ways of showing endurance.

At first he enclosed himself for quite a long time in a little dwelling, enjoying solitary contemplation. From there he went to a cliff face, where he built for himself a small box-like structure, which was in no way conformed to the dimensions of a human body, but in which he had to live bent double, for neither its depth nor its length was of a convenient size. Nor was it of a single wooden surface, but constructed more like the latticework of an open window letting in the light. So he was not protected from the force of the rain nor was there any shade from the heat of the sun, both of which had as free entry there as to anywhere else under the sun. But he was concerned with overcoming only in those matters concerned with the work of being enclosed.

Having spent a long time like this, he at last came out in response to the entreaties of Theodoret, the bishop of Antioch. But he still stood diligently lifting up his hands in praise to the God of all, his whole body hidden beneath a tunic of skins. Only around his nose and mouth was there an opening left for the entry of the spirit as he breathed, using the air common to all, without which human nature is not able to survive. He endured all this work in a body which was not very robust, but liable to ill health because of various ailments. But he was fervent and eager of spirit, he burned with the love of God, compelling him to labour even though he should not really have been capable of labouring.

He was gifted with wisdom and intelligence, seeking always the best things and responding to them. The force of his reasoning ability was often better and more compelling than those who read the labyrinthine books of Aristotle. Although he reached a high level of competence in this ability, he did not let his spirit be carried away by arrogance, which he simply ordered to creep away downwards around the side of the mountain. So his mind did not take a great deal of harm from any kind of bursting burning insolence. And that sums up his character.

It was given to him to travel in his pilgrimage to the very furthest limits, that is, to the glory of those who have obtained the victory, a cause of joy to all the faithful. May it be granted to me, that supported by their prayers, I may be found not far from that high peak, where ascending little by little I may find fulfilment in the joy of the contemplation which is theirs.

Chapter XXVIII

THALELAEUS

I will not keep silent about Thalelaeus, who offers us the sight of many miracles. I not only heard about him from others, but saw him myself, an undeniably marvellous sight. He built his little hut on a mound about twenty miles from Gabala, a small but very elegant city. There was a temple on this mound dedicated to demons, to whom were offered many sacrifices by the ungodly of old times, it is said, as they sought to propitiate by their worship the cruelty of those wretched and accursed spirits. They caused a great deal of harm to many people, not only those who lived there but to neighbouring people as well. And not only to human beings, but to asses and mules and oxen and sheep, not that they waged war against animals but that they used them to prepare traps for human beings.

When they saw him coming they tried very hard to frighten him, but had no success because he was fortified against them by faith and carried the war to them by grace. Filled with rage and madness, they attacked some trees which were planted there, for the mound had a number of flourishing figs and olives. They say that more than fifty of them were suddenly torn up. I heard this from several farmers nearby, who had formerly been bound under the yoke of ungodliness, but had now received the light of the knowledge of God through the teaching and miracles of Thalelaeus. When the pernicious and wretched demons failed to terrify this athlete seeking for wisdom, they prepared some other tricks against him. At night they would howl and flash lights in an effort to terrify him and send him mad. But he laughed at all their insults, until at last they were forced to leave him alone and flee.

He constructed two separate wheels of two cubits diameter, without spokes, and then using wedges and nails joined them together with boards in such a way as to form a barrel. He took three large beams to form a tripod which he fixed in the ground in the open air, and suspended the barrel in it by a rope tied round the boards. The space which he had inside was of two cubits high and one cubit depth. Sitting in it, or rather suspended in it, he spent ten years without a break. Since he had a very large body, when sitting down he could not keep his neck erect, but always sat in a curved position, with his knees against his face.

When I visited him I found him drawing inspiration from reading the Gospels. I asked him a few questions, wanting to know why he had started to live in

this way. He spoke in Greek, for he came from Cilix.

"Liable to sin in many ways as I am," he said, "and believing in the threatened punishments which hang over me, I thought out this way of life so that by punishing my body with some fairly hard penalties I might escape from the enormous size of the punishment to come. These punishments are involuntary, more severe not only in quantity but in quality. Punishments of the involuntary sort are very bitter. But voluntary punishments, even if very laborious, are much less grievous, because they are undertaken of one's own free will; they are not a labour which has been violently forced upon one. And if by means of these small penances I can diminish the punishment I deserve, it is a great gain for me."

I could not but admire the ingenuity of what he told me. He had not only broken out of the fenced enclosure which he had already made, but had thought up different ways of waging war. It was not just that he battled in this particular way, but that he understood the reasons for it and was able to teach others about it.

His followers say that many miracles were performed through his prayers. He cared not only for humans but also for camels, asses and mules. A whole community of people who had formerly been imprisoned in ungodliness were thus enabled to renounce the errors of their forefathers and accept the splendour of the divine light. With their help he destroyed the temple of the demons and built a great shrine to the victory of the glorious martyrs, proclaiming that those gods who were falsely called gods were dead. May it be granted through their prayers that when battle is consummated in victory, we may be aided by both Thalelaeus and the martyrs to embrace more diligently the struggle of the search for wisdom.

Chapter XXIX

MARANA AND CYRA

Having written about the lives of the best and most outstanding men, I think I should mention the valuable work of women who have striven no less valiantly, if not more so. They are indeed more worthy of being praised, for in spite of being physically weaker, they display the same diligence of spirit as the men in liberating the human race from the disgrace which was inflicted on our first parent. I will now write about Marana and Cyra, who surpassed all the others in enduring the strife.

They were born of a prominent family in Berhoea, and educated in a manner befitting their status. But despising all that, they occupied a narrow gully outside the city, and once inside blocked up the entrance with stones and clay. They wished their servants also to share in this kind of life, so they built a separate dwelling outside their enclosure for them to live in. The two women had a small window through which they could see what the others were doing, and they regularly urged them to prayer and to rise up to the love of God. They themselves had no house or even a hut, but of their own free will lived in the open air. There was a small hatch in their doorway through which they received such food as was necessary, and through which they conversed with any women who came to see them. The season of Pentecost was assigned to these conversations, at other times they preserved silence. It was only Marana who spoke to visitors, Cyra never heard any human voices at all. They wore iron about their persons, which was so heavy that Cyra, who was the weaker physically, was bent down under its weight, to the extent that she could barely stand upright. They wore long veils which trailed behind them, entirely covering their feet, and were tied down to their girdles in front to cover their faces, necks, breasts and hands.

I often was allowed in through their door to visit them. They ordered their door to be opened to me in deference to the dignity of the priesthood. I saw that the weight of iron they carried was more than many a brave and strong man would be able to carry. By making a forceful request I was able to see them removed, but after I had gone they put them back on again, a collar around the neck, chains around their loins, hands and feet also similarly weighed down. They lived like this not just for ten or even twenty years, but for forty-two. In their striving over such a long period they always felt as if they were just beginning their battle, and they found joy in their labours. They had grasped hold of the beauty of their bridegroom, which made all their labour easy, and urged them on to the goal of their struggle, for they found their delight in it, and earned the crown of victory. The forces of rain and snow and the heat of the sun caused them neither sorrow nor suffering, but they rejoiced in spirit because of these seeming hindrances. And they emulated Moses in his fasting. Three times a year they went without food for forty days except for a very small amount. Three times a year they emulated the way Daniel abstained from food, fasting for three weeks. (Daniel 10.2) They once fulfilled a wish to see the holy places of the passion of Christ, and on the way to Jerusalem they ate nothing, and even after they had arrived they

did not eat until they had completed their adoration. On the way back they also fasted, and it is a journey of not less than twenty days. When they wanted to visit the shrine to the victory of the wonderful Thecla in Isauria, so that they might fuel the flames of their love towards God in every possible place, they went and came back fasting in exactly the same way. Their love towards God made them celebrate with a sort of divine passion, the divine love they had for their bridegroom increased their enthusiasm. And these two ornaments of the female sex by living such lives have become examples to others, and have been crowned by the Lord with the crown of victory. I hope what I have written may be found useful, and having begged for their blessing, I pass on to write about someone else.

Chapter XXX DOMNINA

In emulating the life of the divine Maro, whom I have already written about, the admirable Domnina built a small hut in the garden of her mother's house. She made it out of reeds. With floods of tears she not only watered her cheeks but also the garment made of hair with which she covered her body. Around cock-crow she would go to the nearby church, along with other men and women, to offer praise to the God of all. She did this not only at the beginning of each day but at the end, setting an example to others by her conviction that a place consecrated to God was more suitable for worship than any other. By doing this she exerted a widespread influence, as well as persuading her mother and brothers that they should give themselves to this discipline.

Her food was lentils soaked in water. She undertook such labours that her body was dried up and only half alive. A lightweight skin garment, almost as thin as piece of paper, was what she threw over her slender bones, from which the flesh and fat was all wasted away because of her labours. She would not look at the faces of anyone who came to see her, whether they were men or women, nor would she show her face for anyone else to see. She was almost entirely concealed beneath her garment, and she would bend forward almost down to her knees when speaking in a very small, indistinct voice. Often, when she took my right hand and turned her eyes towards it, it was thoroughly soaked by the time she let it go before shaking the tears off her own hand. What can I say in praise of the great works she undertook in her search for

wisdom, her weeping, her lamenting, her groaning as if she were in the depths of poverty. The force of her love for God brought forth her tears, ignited her desire for divine contemplation, goaded her with pangs of remorse, and urged her onwards to her future departure from this earth.

But however much she was occupied night and day in such exercises, she did not overlook her concern for other schools of virtue, but encouraged the development of the most pre-eminent athletes, both those whom I have written about and those I have not. She took thought also for those who came to visit her, getting some of them to live near the pastor of the community, while she herself supplied all their necessities. She also persuaded her mother and brothers to gain a blessing by subsidising this venture. She even provided me with bread and fruit and steeped lentils when I came to this district (it is in the southern part of our region).

I have carried on my writings as far as this in an endeavour to describe all these kinds of virtue, since it behoves us to have examples offered us of lives which can be imitated, such as Domnina and the others whom I have mentioned. There are many other women, some of whom have embraced the solitary life, some who have chosen to live with groups of between two and five hundred or more, and a few who dine together, but who sleep on rush mats outside the institution, turning their hands to spinning, and consecrating their tongues to psalmody. There are countless schools of wisdom like this, not only in this region but indeed throughout all the East. Palestine, Egypt, Asia, Pontus and the whole of Europe are full of them. Christ the Lord holds virginity in great respect, and fertilises the natural flowers that are born of virginity, gently anointing them, and offering to the Creator flowers that will not fade away. He makes no distinction between male and female, nor allows any differences in their search for wisdom; there is a difference of bodies but not of souls. In Christ Jesus, as the Apostle says, there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3.28). There is one faith for both women and men, 'there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, on God and father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all' (Ephesians 4.5). The lifelong battle promises one kingdom of heaven to the victors, this is the reward for all who take up the struggle.

So, as I have said, there are many establishments of godliness both for men and for women not only among us, but also in the whole of Syria. Palestine and Cilicia, and in the land between the two rivers. They say that in Egypt there are more than five thousand men who have functioning

monasteries, where they praise God and celebrate him with psalmody, not only providing for their own necessary food by the work of their hands, but also providing hospitality, and giving alms to the needy.

But neither I nor all the writers in the world could possibly tell it all, and I think that it is unnecessary for everything possible to be recorded. Such a desire springs from those to whom the opportunity of fame has not been given. What has already been written is quite sufficient to set forth what is needed by those who are seeking for guidance.

So we have described a diverse selection of lives, both of men and of women, so that old men, young men and women might have set before them examples of the search for wisdom, and let each individual person choose the life story which most nearly gives expression to what is in their own heart, and make of that life a rule and benchmark for their own life. Let them imagine what their chosen example was like, let them imitate his eyes, his nose, his cheeks, his forehead, his head and the hairs of his beard, the way he sits and the way he stands, even the expression of his eyes whether they are happy and keen, or severe and angry. This is what everyone who reads these writings must do if they wish to imitate any particular life and make it their own. Carpenters mark their boards in red and cut off what they do not need, until they can see that their boards correspond to what is in their plans. In the same way, anyone wishing to imitate the life of another should set a plan before himself, cut off his superfluous vices, and develop the virtues in which he is lacking. This is the only reason we have undertaken these writings, in the hope of being of some use to anyone who will.

I beg all my readers to take pleasure without any effort in the labours of others, and to add their prayers to those labours. And I pray to those whose lives I have written that they do not forget me, living as I do far from their spiritual choirs, but draw me after them, raise me to the heights of virtue and make me a member of their choir, so that not only I may praise the riches of others, but that I may also have the opportunity of giving praise, glorifying in deed and word and thought the Saviour of all, to whom with the Father and the holy Spirit be glory now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

End of Book IX

De Vitis Patrum, Book X

By John Moschus

Translated into Latin by Ambrosius Camaldulensis

In Praise of the Author

This "Book of the Meadow", or Life of the Saints, was written by John, surnamed Moschus, of blessed memory. He was a presbyter and monk, and began his life of renunciation in the monastery of our holy father Theodosius, abbot and archimandrite of all the cenobia and monasteries of Jerusalem. Its subject is the virtues of the God-loving fathers, and other accounts of great benefit to the soul, that is, the words of the holy and righteous Christ-loving fathers and brothers. He lived for quite some time with the holy fathers who lived in the desert near the sacred Jordan, and gathered together [accounts of] their virtues, which he then included in this book. He lived for a while in the so-called "New" monastery, built by our great and holy Father Saba and his disciples, which remains with us to this day. When he heard of the tyranny

with which the Persians were oppressing the Romans after the murder of the Emperor Mauritius [died 602] and his children, he left the New monastery and went to the region of Great Antioch. Here he found the heathen in control, and moved on again to Alexandria from where he travelled through all the deserts roundabout. (He had previously been sent to Egypt for administrative purposes at the beginning of [the reign of] the Emperor Tiberius II [578-582]). He travelled as far as Oasis and visited the Fathers who were there in the neighbouring deserts. Here he heard that the holy places had been occupied and Romans were panic-stricken, whereupon he left Alexandria and took ship for the great city of Rome along with his beloved disciple Sophronius. They documented several islands in the course of their journey.

This blessed man was so gifted by the Lord that he would put into writing whatever he heard or saw of the lives of outstanding men, and the deeds of power they performed. This plan was put into action when he was at Rome. For knowing that the time of his departure was at hand, he wrote this book, not in the order in which he had seen them or heard of them, but linked together in writing according to the relationship of one to another, whether heard or seen.

When he was about to leave this troubled world, and pass to the world of rest and tranquillity, at the urging of his beloved disciple he gave him this book containing the lives and deeds, acceptable to God, of the holy fathers. He charged him also not to leave his remains at Rome, but to put them in a wooden coffin and try as far as possible to take them to Mount Sinai and bury them there with the holy fathers. If he should be prevented from doing this by ravaging barbarian bands, then he was to take them to the monastery of the holy Theodosius, where he began his renunciation of the world.

In obeying this command his beloved disciple and his fellow disciples (for there were twelve of them), carried John's body away, following the example of the great Joseph, who along with his brothers took Israel from Egypt to the land of his fathers, as Israel had bidden them.

He got as far as Ascalon when he learned that he could go no further towards Mount Sinai because of hostile attacks by the Agareni, so he took blessed John's remains to Jerusalem at the beginning of the octave of the Indiction. [September 1. The beginning of the Byzantine year.] There he sought out Georgius, the presbyter-ruler of the monastery of our holy father Theodosius, and told him all that John had urged upon him. Together with the brothers who came with him, and all the brothers of the monastery who were then in the

city, he discharged his duties towards the blessed John by burying him next to the holy fathers buried there in the cemetery of the holy Theodosius as he had been bidden. He himself passed the rest of his life in that same monastery.

This cemetery is in a cave where a story (not in the Gospel) tells us that the Magi rested after tricking Herod by avoiding him as they returned to their own country. In this cave our holy father Theodosius waged his spiritual battles and was granted the gift of casting out demons not only for the space of this short life, but also after his death, even to this day, to the glory and praise of Christ our true God and Saviour, to whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen

Prologue of John Moschus

To his beloved in Christ Sophronius Sophista

It is obvious to all, my beloved son, that the meadows present their most beautiful appearance in Springtime, with its pleasing variety of flowers of every sort, demanding the attention of all who gaze, impossible to ignore, beneficial in all sorts of ways, for they delight the eyes and give pleasure to the sense of smell. Part of this meadow indeed flourishes with the colour of roses, part grows white with lilies, easily attracting the attention of the onlooker away from the colour of the roses. Other parts shimmer with the colour of violets, copying in their own colour the imperial purple. The profusion of various differing sights and fragrances of countless flowers everywhere gratify the senses. Think of this present work like this, Sophronius, my holy and most faithful son, since you will find in it the virtues of the holy men who have enlightened our time "planted by the running waters", as the Psalmist says (Psalms 1.3). And though all of them are acceptable to God and of great grace, yet each one of them is distinguished by some particular grace more than the others, so that out of this great variety of virtues arises a charming picture of pleasing beauty. Out of these flowers I have picked the most beautiful, and woven a corona for you out of this imperishable and everlasting meadow, my most faithful son, which I offer to you, and through you to everyone.

For this reason it seems good to call this present work a Meadow, for the delight, comfort and usefulness which those who read may take from it. It is not only right belief and meditation on divine truth which lead to a life and morals of integrity, but also the examples of other people, and written

accounts of their virtuous lives. Therefore I have undertaken this task trusting in the Lord, beloved son, and hoping that it will commend itself to your charity. Just as a bee seeks out only what is useful and true so I have I described the lives of the holy fathers that souls may be enlightened.

Chapter I

The life of the holy old man JOHN and the Cave of Sapsa

There was an old man called John in the monastery of Eustorgius whom the holy Elias, Archbishop of Jerusalem, wanted to put in charge of all the monasteries in Jerusalem. John demurred, saying that he was wanting to travel to Mt. Sinai in order to pray there. The Archbishop urged him to be made an abbot first before going off to wherever he wanted. The old man still would not agree, but at last the bishop let him go on the strength of a promise that John would accept this responsibility on his return. He thanked the Archbishop and began his journey to Mount Sinai, taking his disciple with him. They crossed the Jordan and had hardly taken one more step when the old man began to feel stiff and shortly afterwards became feverish. The fever increased to such an extent that he was unable to walk, so they went into a little cave that they found, in order to rest. The fever got so bad that after staying in the cave for three days, he was still unable to move. The old man then had a dream in which he saw someone standing next to him saying: "Tell me, old man, where are you going?"

"To Mount Sinai", he replied.

"No, I beg you, don't go," came the answer.

The old man would not agree, and the vision faded, but his fever got even worse. The next night the same person appeared and said "Why do you persist in being punished like this old man? Listen to me and stop trying to go anywhere."

"Who are you," said the old man

"I am John the Baptist," came the reply, "and I warn you, don't go anywhere, for this narrow cave is greater than Mount Sinai. For the Lord Jesus quite often used to come into this cave when he was visiting me. Promise me that you will stay here and I will restore your health."

Hearing this, the old man freely promised that he would stay in that same cave. His health was immediately restored and there he spent the rest of his life. He made that cave into a church and gathered other brothers about him.

The name of that place is Sapsa, and it is watered by the nearby brook Cherith to which Elias was sent in the time of drought from the other side of Jordan.

Chapter II

The life of an OLD MAN who fed lions in his own cave

In this same area of Sapsa there lived another old man of such virtue that he welcomed lions into his cave and fed them by hand, so full of divine grace was that man of God.

Chapter III

The life of CONON, a presbyter of the monastery of Penthucula.

When we visited abba Athanasius in the monastery of our holy father Saba, he told us of an Alexandrian presbyter called Conon who was in charge of Baptisms. The fathers had decreed that the high quality of his character made him worthy of baptising those who came seeking for it. So he anointed with the holy Chrism and baptised those who came. But whenever he had to anoint a woman, he became so agitated that he wanted to leave the monastery. While battling with this thought, the holy John Baptist appeared to him, saying: "Endure, and persevere and I will lift this burden from you."

One day an attractive young Persian woman came to be baptised who was so beautiful that the presbyter could not bring himself to anoint her bare flesh with oil. When Archbishop Peter heard that the girl had already been there two days, he was exceedingly angry with the old man, and even wanted to delegate this ministry to a deaconess, but refrained from doing so as he did not want to be seen to be doing anything contrary to the canons. But Conon the presbyter took his cloak and went, saying that he would not remain any longer in that place. He had got as far as the hills, when behold, the holy John Baptist met him in the way and spoke to him gently, saying: "Go back to your monastery and I will lift this battle from you."

"I certainly will not go back," replied abba Conon indignantly. "You have so often made these promises and not fulfilled them."

Then the holy John made him sit down and take off his clothes. He made the sign of the cross three times on his navel and said: "Believe me, presbyter Conon, I had been hoping that you would have been able to receive a reward because of this battle. As it is, however, look, I have taken this battle away

from you, but you have forfeited any reward."

The presbyter returned to the cenobium, to take up once more his baptismal ministry. The next day he anointed and baptised the young woman, hardly even noticing that she was, in fact, a woman. He continued the ministry of baptism for another twelve years in such tranquillity of mind and body that he never experienced any excitement of the flesh, nor consciously thought of anyone specifically as a woman. And so in peace he lived out his days.

Chapter IV

The life of abba LEONTIUS.

Abba Leontius was the superior of the coenobium of our holy father

Theodosius. He told us the following story:

After fleeing from the infidels, the monks suffered persecution in a new monastery called a Laura. I went thither and stayed in the same Laura. One Sunday I went to church to receive the sacred mysteries and as I entered, I saw an Angel standing at the right hand of the altar. Terrified, I returned to my cell. And a voice came to me from heaven saying: "That altar has been made holy. Therefore I am commanded to remain with it for ever."

Chapter V

A story about three monks told by abba POLYCHRONIUS

Abba Polychronius a presbyter of this same Laura, told me the following story:

When I was in the monastery of Turrius near the Jordan I noticed that one of the brothers was very lax in fulfilling his Sunday duties. But a little while afterwards I noticed that he was fulfilling them with great zeal and devotion.

"You are doing well, now, brother," I said, "curing your own sickness."

"Father, I have but a short time to live", he said.

And in three days he was dead.

A brother in the same monastery of Turrius died, and the steward (dispensator) asked me to do him a kindness and help him carry his effects (vasa) to his office. As we did so I noticed him weeping.

"Why are you weeping so, abba," I asked.

"Today we are carrying my brother's things," he said. "But in two days' time

others will be carrying mine."

On the third day this brother rested in peace, as he had predicted. The Lord had established in him a sure hope.

Chapter VI

Another story of POLYCHRONIUS

Abba Polychronius the presbyter also told this story of the time when he was in the monastery of abba Constantinus, the superior of the monastery of St Mary the Birthgiver of God, known as the New Monastery.

A certain brother who died in the guesthouse at Jericho was being taken back by the brothers to be buried at the Turrius monastery. As soon as they began their journey with the body a star appeared over the head of the deceased as a companion for the journey, and did not disappear until they put him in the grave.

Chapter VII

The life of a certain OLD MAN, who refused to be made abbot in the monastery of Turrius

There was another old man in this same monastery of Turrius of such great and obvious virtue that the fathers of that monastery wished to make him their abbot.

"I am not worthy of such an honour", the old man said. "Take no notice of me. Just leave me to weep for my sins. I have no ability in the cure of souls. That is the business of such great and outstanding fathers as Antony, Pachomius and the holy Theodore."

The brothers would not accept this and urged him every single day.

"Let me pray about it for three days," he said at last, overwhelmed by their incessant arguments, "and whatever the Lord tells me to do I will do it."

This was on Good Friday. By the morning of Easter Day he rested in peace.

Chapter VIII

The life of abba MYROGENES, who had dropsy.

In the same monastery of Turrius there was an old man called Myrogenes,

who because of the great austerity of his life had developed dropsy. To the old men who came to visit him he always said: "Pray for me, fathers, lest one becomes dropsical inside. As for me, in this disease I pray to God daily that I may endure."

When Archbishop Eustochius of Jerusalem heard about him, he decided to send him a few things which might be needed, but he refused to accept any of them. The only message he sent to the archbishop was: "Pray for me, father, that I may be spared crucifixion for eternity."

Chapter IX

The wonderful charity of a certain holy FATHER

In this same monastery of Turrius there was an old man who was a great lover of almsgiving, even to the extent of holy nakedness. For one day a beggar came to his cell seeking alms. The old man had nothing to give him but one loaf which he offered to the beggar.

"It's not bread I want but clothing," said the beggar.

The old man wanted to help him so he took him by the hand and led him inside his cell. The beggar could not see anything inside but what the old man stood up in, but driven by his virtuous nature the old man opened the only moneybag he had by taking off everything he wore, saying: "Take these, good sir, and I will seek elsewhere for what I need."

Chapter X

The life of BARNABAS, the anchorite.

There was an anchorite in the holy caves of Jordan called Barnabas. As he went down one day to drink at the Jordan he got a thorn in his foot. He left it there, bearing always pain in his foot. He would not let any doctor see it, so that eventually it festered, and he had to go down to the monastery at Turrius where he accepted a cell. Daily the festering in his foot got worse, but those who came to see him said that the more he suffered outwardly the stronger he became in spirit.

After abba Barnabas left his cave to go to Turrius, another anchorite went into this cave and as he entered he saw an angel standing by the altar which Barnabas had built and consecrated.

"What is your purpose here?" he asked the angel.

"God has entrusted it to me because it has become holy," replied the angel.

Chapter XI

The life of abba AGIODULUS

Abba Peter, a presbyter of the monastery of our holy father Saba, told us this story about Abba Agiodulus:

When he was superior of the monastery of the blessed Gerasimus it so happened that one of the brothers who lived there died. The old man was unaware of this until the prior sounded the signal, the brothers lifted the body and at last he saw the body in the middle of the church. He was then greatly upset, because he had not been able to pay his respects to him before departing from this world. He went up to the bier whereon the deceased was lying and said: "Rise, brother, and give me the kiss of peace." He straightway rose up and kissed the old man.

"Sleep now," the old man then said, "until your resurrection by Christ the Son of God."

This same abba Agiodulus was once passing by the banks of the Jordan and began thinking and wondering what had happened to the stones which Joshua had set in the middle of the Jordan for those whom he was leading through it (Joshua 4.9). And as he was thinking, suddenly the waters divided this way and that, and he saw the twelve stones. He prostrated himself on the ground, gave thanks to the Lord and went his way.

Chapter XII

A saying of abba OLYMPIUS

"Give me a word," a brother asked abba Olympius, a presbyter of the monastery of St Gerasimus.

"Have no dealings with heretics," he said, "guard your tongue and your stomach, and wherever you go say constantly: 'I am a stranger and a pilgrim'"

Chapter XIII

The life of abba MARK, the anchorite.

Abba Mark the anchorite, who lived near the monastery of Penthucula for sixty-three years, had the ability to fast for a whole week, so that many

thought he was not made of flesh and blood at all. He worked day and night, but gave everything [he earned] to the poor. He accepted nothing from anyone. Some faithful men heard of him and came offering him blessed bread (agape).

"I can't accept that," he said. "These hands of mine provide food for me and all who come to me."

Chapter XIV

The BROTHER who was attacked by the spirit of fornication and became leprous.

Abba Polychronius also told us about a brother living in the coenobium of Penthucula who was very careful of himself, and continent. But once when he was attacked by the spirit of fornication, he found that he was not able to fight against it, so he left the monastery and went to Jericho where he satisfied his desires. Soon afterwards, as he was going in to a harlot's house, he found that he was covered in leprosy. He returned immediately to the monastery, giving thanks to God and saying: "God has stricken me with this chastisement that my soul might be saved." And he gave great glory to God.

Chapter XV

A miraculous deed of abba CONON

It was said of abba Conon that one day as he was going to Betamarim, he met some Jews who wished to kill him and ran towards him with drawn swords. As they approached, waving their swords at him, their hands suddenly became motionless, suspended on high. The old man said a prayer, freed their hands and sent them on their way, giving thanks to God.

Chapter XVI

A story which abba NICHOLAUS told about himself and his companions.

There was an old man called Nicholas living in the monastery of abba Peter near the holy Jordan who told us the following story:

Once when I was in Raythum three of us were sent on a journey to the Thebaid. In going through the desert we took a wrong path and found ourselves in the middle of a vast sandy expanse. Our water supply ran out after

a few days and we were parched with thirst. Fainting from thirst and the heat we were not able to go any further, but having come across some tamarisk trees in the desert we each threw ourselves down in the shade of the trees, expecting to die of our thirst. Stretched out in the shade I fell into an ecstasy and saw a fishpond full of flowing water, and two men standing beside a wooden vessel on the edge of the pond.

"Be kind to me, sir," I asked one of them, "and let me have a little bit of water, for I am fainting away."

He refused.

"Give him some," the other said.

"No, let us not give him any," was the reply, "for he is lazy and doesn't look after himself."

"Even if he is lazy and negligent," said the other, "let us give him some for hospitality's sake."

And then they did give to me and my companions.

As soon as we had drunk we felt our strength reviving and travelled for three more days without drinking anything until we arrived at a populated area.

Chapter XVII

The life of the old man MACNUS.

They say that the old man Macnus of the monastery of abba Peter lived fifty years in his cave, drinking no wine and eating only bread made from bran. But every week he communicated three times.

Chapter XVIII

The life of another OLD MAN in the monastery of Laura, who slept among lions.

Abba Polychronius the presbyter told us about another old man in the Laura of abba Peter who quite often went off and wandered about on the banks of the Jordan, and if he came across a lion's den he would sleep there. One day he picked up two lions' cubs in his cloak and brought them into the church.

"If we were keeping the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ", he said to the brothers, "these animals should really be frightened of us. But because of the sin which affects us all, we seem bound to be frightened of them."

The brothers went back to their cells greatly impressed by this magnificent

deed.

Chapter XIX

A story that abba ELIAS told about himself

Abba Elias told us that at one time he was living in a cave near the monastery of the Eunuchs in the holy Jordan region in order to avoid being in communion with Archbishop Macarius of Jerusalem.

"One day at about the sixth hour," he said, "with a boiling heat beating down from above (it was during the month of August), there was a knock on the door of his cave. I went out to find a woman there and I asked her what she wanted. She said that she was following the same kind of life as me and that her cave was about a mile away, and she pointed towards the south.

"'I have been wandering about in this desert,' she said, 'and I am fainting with thirst because of this terrible heat. It would be kind of you, father, if you could let me have a little water.'

"I fetched my water jar, gave her a drink and sent her on her way. But after she had gone, the devil began to attack me, putting lustful thoughts about her into my head. I was overcome, my burning desire was more than I could bear, and I picked up my walking stick and went out after her, in that heat which was so fierce that the stones were red hot, determined to fulfil my evil desires. But when I was still about two hundred yards from her cave, still burning with the heat of lust, I suddenly went into a trance and I was dragged down into a hole which opened up in the earth. I could see a putrid corpse lying there, decaying with an incredibly powerful stink, and I saw a man in sober garments pointing to it and saying: 'Look, this is how man, woman and child end up, enjoy them how you will, and however great your lust for them. Think how your sin would deprive you of the kingdom of heaven. How pitiable the human state! (*Vae humanae miseriae*) To forfeit the reward of all your labour for the sake of one hour of pleasure.'

"I fell to the ground, overcome by the exceedingly great stink. But this awe-inspiring man who had appeared to me came and lifted me up. And I returned to my cell, thanking God."

Chapter XX

The conversion of a certain SOLDIER through a miracle which God performed in him, and his profitable life.

One of the fathers told us what a certain soldier had told him during the war waged in Africa by the Romans against the Mauritians. Beaten by the barbarians, many were killed. He himself was chased by a barbarian who shook his spear with the intention of killing him. Realising this he prayed to God: "Lord God, who appeared to your handmaiden Thecla and delivered her from the hands of the ungodly, save me also in my need. If I am rescued from this bitter death, I will go into the desert and live the solitary life." He turned around and there was not a barbarian in sight. He went immediately to the Laura of Cupatha and remained there in a cave for thirty-five years, thanking God for his protection.

Chapter XXI

The death of an ANCHORITE and his murderer

Abba Gerontius, the prior of the monastery of our holy father Euthymius, told Sophronius Sophista and me the following story:

"Once when three of us were walking up into the mountains on the other side of the Dead Sea, another anchorite came walking along by the seashore. It so happened that some Saracens met him as they travelled through those regions, and after they had passed him, one of them turned back and cut off the anchorite's head. We could see all this from a distance as we were climbing the mountain. As we were weeping and mourning for the death of the anchorite, we suddenly saw a bird swooping down from above, which picked the Saracen up, carried him up high and dropped him to the ground, causing his death."

Chapter XXII

The life of another old man called CONON

There was another old man called Conon, a Cilician, in the coenobium of our holy father Theodosius. For thirty years he kept to a way of life which was to eat bread and water only once a week and to pray without ceasing. He never went outside the church.

Chapter XXIII

The life of the monk THEODULUS

We saw another old man in the same monastery called Theodulus who had once been a soldier. He fasted every day and never slept lying down.

Chapter XXIV

The life of an OLD MAN living in the cells of Cuziba.

There was an old man living in the cells of Cuziba, about whom the seniors of the place told us the following.

When he was living in his own village, if he knew of anyone who failed through laziness to cultivate his field, it was his custom to take seed and go by night without the owner's knowledge to sow the field for the poor. When he went to the desert and lived in the cells of Cuziba he carried out similar works of mercy. He would go along the road from Jordan to the holy City carrying bread and water, and if ever he saw anyone flagging from weariness he would carry their load even up as far as the Mount of Olives. He would then do the same for others on the road back to Jericho. You could have seen the old man sometimes carrying a large load sweating under the burden, sometimes carrying a small child on his shoulders, or even two quite often. He never rested. He would repair the shoes of either men or women, carrying with him everything needed for that. He gave others some of his water to drink, to others he gave bread. To anyone lacking clothing he gave the cloak off his back. It was lovely to see this old man working every day of his life. And if he found anyone dead on the road he would say the usual psalms and prayers over them and bury them.

Chapter XXV

A BROTHER of the monastery of Cuziba, and the words of the sacred offering, also of the abbot JOHN

There was a brother in the coenobium of Cuziba who had learned the words and ceremonial of the sacred offering. We were told about him by that Abbot Gregory who had once been a member of the palace guard watching over the Prince. One day this brother was sent to fetch the bread and wine (benedictiones), and as he was returning to the monastery he uttered the words of the sacred offering [i.e. "Canon of the Mass", or "Prayer of Consecration"] as if he were singing some ritual formula (quasi versus aliquos caneret). The

deacon placed this bread and wine on the altar, but when abba John the presbyter offered it (he who afterwards was bishop of Caesarea Palestine) he did not perceive the usual descent of the Holy Spirit. He was very upset and wondered whether the Holy Spirit had turned away from him because of some mental sin. He returned to the sacristy weeping, and fell flat on his face. But an angel of the Lord appeared to him saying: "The brother who fetched the offerings (oblationes) said the words of the sacred offering over them as he was on his way, which was the reason for them being already sanctified and perfected." From then on the superior decreed that no one should learn the words of the sacred offering unless he were ordained for this purpose, nor should anyone say them anywhere or at any time apart from a consecrated place.

Chapter XXVI

The life of brother THEOPHANES and his marvellous vision, and of communicating with heretics.

There was an old man of great merit in God's eyes called Cyriacus, who belonged to the laura of Calamon near the River Jordan. A pilgrim brother called Theophanes from the region of Dora came to him for counsel about his thoughts of fornication. The old man encouraged and instructed him with advice about modesty and chastity, which greatly edified the brother.

"Truly, father," he said, "if it weren't that in my part of the country I am in communion with the Nestorians, I would love to stay with you."

When the old man heard the name of Nestor, he was so overcome with fear that this brother would be damned that he fell down and prayed, and begged him to abandon this most evil and pernicious heresy and return to the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

"There is no hope of being saved unless we truly feel and believe that Holy Mary is the birthgiver (genetrix) of God," he said, "and this is true."

"That's all very well, father," said the brother, "but all the heretics say the same, that unless we are in communion with them we cannot be saved.

Unfortunately I don't know what to do. So pray to God for me that I may be quite certain which is the true faith."

The old man was delighted to hear what the brother was saying.

"Come and sit in my cave," he said, "and put your whole trust in God that he will reveal to you of his mercy what is the true faith."

He left the brother in his own cave and went out by the Dead Sea, praying to God for the brother. About the ninth hour of the next day the brother saw someone of truly awesome appearance standing next to him.

"Come, and see the truth," he said, and led him to a dark and stinking place throwing up flames of fire, and in the flames he saw Nestorius, Eutyches, Apollinaris, Dioscuros, Severus, Arius, Origen and others like them.

"This is the place prepared for the heretics, blasphemers, and those who follow their teachings," he said to the brother. "So then, if you like the look of this place persist in your teachings, but if you would prefer to avoid this punishment, return to the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as the old man told you. For I tell you, even if a person practises all the virtues there are, unless he believes rightly he will be crucified in this place."

At these words the brother came to himself. He went back to the old man and told him all that he had seen, and returned to the communion of the holy Catholic Church. He stayed with the old man, and after four years with him he rested in peace.

Chapter XXVII

The life of a PRESBYTER of the village of Mardandos

About ten miles from the town of Aegina in Cilicia there is a village called Mardandos, in which there is a church dedicated to St. John Baptist. An old presbyter presided here, a man of great virtues and worthiness before God. One day the villagers came to the bishop with a complaint about the old man. "Take this old man away from us, for he troubles us greatly," they said.

"What is he doing to you?" asked the bishop.

"He comes on Sundays to celebrate Mass sometimes at the third hour, sometimes at the ninth, whichever seems to suit him. And he does not stick strictly to the solemn order prescribed for the sacred oblation."

The bishop acted on this information to call the presbyter to an interview.

"Why are you, a man in authority, acting like this? You surely can't be ignorant of the statutes of holy Church?"

"Well of course you are quite right in what you say in order to get at the truth. But truly, I never know what I am going to do. On Sundays, after the night office, I sit down near the holy altar, and for as long as I cannot discern the Holy Spirit overshadowing the altar I do not begin the sacred celebration of the Mass. But when I am aware that the Holy Spirit has come, then I carry out

my sacred duties."

The bishop was overcome with admiration for the old man's integrity. He summoned the villagers, explained everything to their satisfaction, and set their minds at rest.

Abba Julius the Stylite, by way of a greeting to this same old man, sent him a piece of cloth rolled up with three coals of fire inside it. The old man got the message and sent the abba in return the same piece of rolled up cloth full of water.

Chapter XXVIII

A miraculous deed of abba JULIANUS THE STYLITE

Abba Cyriacus, the disciple of the aforesaid Julianus the Stylite told us the following story;

My father and brother and I heard of the fame of abba Julianus and left our own region in order to visit him. Now I was suffering from an unhealthy condition which nobody had been able to cure, but when I came to him the old man prayed and cured me on the spot. We all renounced the world and stayed with him, and the old man put my father in charge of the grain supply. One day my father went to abba Julius and said that there wasn't any grain left. "Go and gather whatever you can find, brother, and grind it for today," said the old man from the top of his column, "and God will take care of our tomorrow."

This command really upset him (for he knew that he had not given out any food at all), so he just went back to his cell. But an urgent message was sent to him from the old man, telling him to come to him at once and he did so but with a very bad grace.

"Brother Conon," said the old man, "go and prepare food for the brothers, using whatever you shall find."

In spite of his anger he took the keys of the grain store and went off thinking he would be able to serve up nothing but the dust of the earth. But when he unbarred the door and tried to open it, he was unable to do so because the storehouse was completely full of grain. Terrified by what he saw, he prostrated himself before the old man, seeking pardon.

Chapter XXIX

A miracle of the most holy EUCHARIST

About thirty miles from the city of Aegina in Cilicia there were two stylites about six miles away from each other. One of them belonged to the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The other, even though he had been on his column for much longer, followed the wicked teachings of Severian, and in various heretical ways was in the habit of denouncing his Catholic colleague. However, inspired by God, the Catholic asked that a particle of the other's Communion might be sent to him. Overcome with joy, he thought that he had converted the Catholic, and sent it immediately, without hesitation. The Catholic took this particle sent to him by the heretical follower of Severian and put it into a pot of boiling water, where it very soon disintegrated. Then he took the holy Communion of the Catholic church and threw it in. The boiling pot became cool immediately, and the holy Communion remained whole and unblemished. He carefully kept it, and showed it to us when we visited him.

Chapter XXX

The Life of ISODORE a monk of Melitinensis, and another miracle of the most holy EUCHARIST

Dade is the trading centre of Cyprus. There is a monastery there called Philoxene. When we visited it we met a monk from Melitinensis called Isodore. We noticed that he was weeping and groaning unceasingly. People kept on asking him to quieten down a little and moderate his weeping, but he would not.

"I am a greater sinner," he said, "than anyone else since the beginning of time" "Surely no one is without sin," we said to him, "but God alone."

"Truly, brothers," he replied, "I have never found any sinner like me in the whole human race, no greater sin than mine. And if you really want to know that I am telling the truth, listen to what my sin was, and please pray for me.

"I was a married man when I lived in the world, and we both held to the teachings of Severian. I came home one day to find that my wife was not there, and I was told that she had gone to a woman neighbour who was of the Catholic faith and religion in order to receive Communion. I ran quickly to try and stop her, but when I got to the house I found that she had already communicated. I was mad with rage, and seized her by the throat and made her vomit up the sacred Communion. I picked up the holy particle and threw it away into a dungheap. Shortly afterwards I noticed that that holy Communion

had taken on a brilliantly shining appearance. After two days, without a word of a lie, I saw a sort of a half-clothed Ethiopian man (virum quasi Aethiopem semicinctiis vestitum) who said to me: 'You and I are both condemned to an identical punishment.'

"Who are you, then,' I asked

"I am the one who struck the face of him who made us all, the Lord Jesus Christ, during his passion.'

"And this is why I am incapable of moderating my weeping."

Chapter XXXI

The conversion and life of MARY the prostitute

Two old men were travelling from Aega to Tharsus when they stopped for refreshment at a small cottage (stabulum, which also carries the meaning of 'brothel'). In the providence of God they found there three young men who had with them a prostitute. The old men settled themselves down apart and one of them got out his holy Gospel and began to read [aloud]. And, would you believe it, the prostitute left the young men when she saw the old man reading, and came and sat down next to him.

"You've got a cheek, you wretch," said the old man, waving her away, "to dare to come and sit by us."

"Don't, I beg you, father," she said, "don't look down on me, or drive me away. I know I am full of every kind of sin, but the Lord and Saviour of all, Christ our God, did not reject the prostitute who came to him."

"Yes, but that prostitute did not remain a prostitute," the old man said.

"I put my trust in the Son of the living God," she said, "that from this day onwards I won't keep on with this sinful way of life either."

She left the three young men and everything that she had, and followed those two old men. They took her to a monastery near the city of Aega. I saw her when she was an old woman of great wisdom, and learned all these things from her own mouth. Her name was Mary.

Chapter XXXII

The conversion and life of BABYLAS the mime, and also his concubines COMETA & NICOSA

There was a certain mime in Cilician Tarsus called Babylas and with him were

two concubines, one called Cometa, the other Nicosia. They lived in a very self-indulgent style, doing whatever the demons might put into their minds. One day, however, by divine providence they went into a church and heard the gospel being read, where it says: Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 3.2). Conscience-stricken, he wept with horror, crying out against his miserable self for the sins he had done. He ran out of the church and called to his two companions

"You know how self-indulgently I have lived with you," he said. "I have not been fonder of either of you more than the other, so everything I have belongs to both of you. Take all I have and divide it equally between you, for as of now I renounce the world to be a monk."

With one accord they both burst into tears.

"We have shared with you this life of pleasure to the endangering of our souls," they said. "Now that you are going to do this thing pleasing to God, are you going to send us away and do it all by yourself? No, certainly not. We shall share with you in the good things as well."

And so the mime enclosed himself in one of the towers of the city, and the two women sold everything, gave to the poor, took the habit of religion, and secured for themselves a little cell near the tower, where they too were enclosed. I met this man myself, and was greatly edified by him. He is exceptionally gentle, humble and merciful. Let those who read profit from what I have written.

Chapter XXXIII

The life of the holy bishop THEODOTUS

One of the Fathers told us about a bishop called Theodotus in the holy city, a man of great kind-heartedness. One feast day he sent dinner invitations to some of his clerics. There was one of them who did not want to go and ignored the invitation. The bishop said nothing. But next time he went to him in person and begged him to come and share the common table.

There is another story about this same bishop Theodotus to show how gentle and humble he was. Once when going on a journey with one of his clerics, he was being carried in a litter, whereas the cleric was riding a horse.

"Let's change over," said the patriarch to the cleric. "You get into the litter and I will ride the horse."

The cleric would not hear of it, declaring it would be shameful to put himself

above the bishop and ride in a litter while the bishop had to ride the horse. But the holy and humble Theodotus would not give up until he had persuaded the cleric that there could be no possible harm in it, and eventually persuaded him to agree.

Chapter XXXIV

The life of the godly ALEXANDER, patriarch of Jerusalem

There was another patriarch called Alexander in that same city who was very devout and kind of heart. One of his notaries stole some gold and fled in fear to the Thebaid in Egypt, where he fell into the hands of brigands while wandering about, and was led captive to a very distant part of Egypt. When Alexander found out about this he paid eighty-five numismas to ransom him from captivity, and continued to treat him kindly and lovingly once he had returned. One of the citizens of that city promptly remarked that there was nothing more profitable than to sin against Alexander.

Chapter XXXV

The life of ELIAS, archbishop of Jerusalem, and of FLAVIAN, patriarch of Antioch

Abba Polychronius said that the holy Elias, archbishop of Jerusalem, drank no wine, just as if he were a monk. And even when he had been made Patriarch he kept to the same rule.

The story is told of this same archbishop Elias and also of Flavian the archbishop of Antioch that the Emperor Anastasius [430-518] drove them both into exile because (they adhered to the doctrines) of the Council of Chalcedon [451. Anastasius was a Monophysite.] Elias was sent to Haila [in Egypt] and Flavian to Petra [near the Red Sea]. On one particular day both of them had the same presentiment.

"Today Anastasius is dead," they each said to themselves. "Let us both go too, and be judged along with him." And after two days they both departed to the Lord.

Chapter XXXVI

The life of EPHRAEM patriarch of Antioch and how he converted a Stylite monk from the wicked Severian heresy.

One of the fathers told us about Ephraem the holy patriarch of Antioch, who was extremely zealous and fervent for the faith. When he heard about that Stylite near Hierapolis who was a Severian heretic, he went to see him to try and turn him away from that wickedness. The godly Ephraem began to argue with him and beg him to accept the apostolic see and return to communion with the holy apostolic Church.

"I will not have anything at all to do with the Synod," the Stylite replied.

"What would it take to convince you, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the holy Catholic Church is free from all stain of heretical wickedness?" the holy Ephraem asked.

"Let's light a fire", said the Stylite, in order to frighten the patriarch, "and walk into it together, and let the one unharmed by the flames be the orthodox one, and the one who should be followed."

"It would be more fitting, my son," said the holy Ephraem, "for you to comply with your father, without making any further demands. Indeed, what you have asked is beyond the powers of my unfortunate person. Nevertheless I will do it, trusting in the Son of God, the author of your salvation. Bring me some wood," he added to those standing by, and when the wood had been brought he lit it in front of the column.

"Come down now," said the patriarch, "and let us go into it together, as you demanded." But he refused, stunned by the patriarch's determination.

"Wasn't it you who made this stipulation?" asked the patriarch. "Why are you now not willing to do it?" And he took off the patriarchal stole he was wearing, and drew near to the flames.

"O Lord Jesus Christ our God," he prayed. "who alone was worthy of being made flesh, and was born of our holy Lady Mary, ever Virgin, Birthgiver of God, let your truth be made known to us." And he threw the stole into the middle of flames. The fire kept on burning for three hours, the wood had all been consumed, and the stole was retrieved from the fire unharmed, showing no signs of ever having been in the fire.

In the face of what had happened, the Stylite no longer had any doubts about the truth. He anathematised Severian and his heresy, returned to the holy Catholic Church, received communion from the hands of the holy Ephraem, and gave God the glory.

The life of a BISHOP, who left his cathedral and came to the holy city, where he served God in disguise in the building trade

One of the fathers told us about a certain bishop who left his bishopric and went to the holy city, where he dressed as a workman and served God in the building trade. Now there was at that time a compassionate man given to good works called Ephremius, an Eastern overseer, who was engaged in repairing the public buildings which had been damaged by an earthquake. One day Ephremius had a vision in which he saw a bishop lying asleep, with a column of fire stretching from his head right up to the heavens. This happened not once, not twice, but many times over, and Ephremius was stupefied, for the vision was amazing, even terrifying. He wondered what it all might mean, not recognising him as that hired labourer with untidy hair and dirty clothes, looking like the lowest of the low, slaving away with no relaxation, worn out with toil and of a totally repulsive appearance. However, Ephremius summoned this workman and asked him who he was, trying to worm his name out of him and the country he came from.

"I am just one of the poor of this city," he replied. "I have no independent income, so I do what work I can and God feeds me as a result of my labours."

"Believe me," said Ephremius, divinely inspired, "I will not let you go until you have told me the whole truth about yourself."

"Promise me something then," he said, realising that he was cornered, with nowhere to hide. "Say nothing to anyone about me for as long as I remain alive, and I will tell you everything, except my name." And the overseer swore not to reveal anything for as long as the man was alive.

"I am a bishop," he then said, "and I have left my bishopric to come here. Nobody knows where I am. But I chastise my body with hard work and earn a bit of bread for myself. But as for you, give as much alms as you can. One of these days God will promote you to the apostolic see of this city, so that you may feed this people whom Christ our God has saved with his own blood. Give yourself to almsgiving, as I have said. Stand firm and contend for the true faith, for sacrifices such as these are pleasing to God," (and as he had prophesied so it came to pass.)

The godly Ephremius glorified God as he listened.

"How many hidden servants of God there are, known only to himself", he said.

Chapter XXXVIII

The death of ANASTASIUS, the godless emperor.

One of the faithful told us about the Emperor Anastasius, who exiled to Gaitan in Pontus, the patriarchs of Constantinople Euphemius and Macedonius, because they accepted the [teachings of] the holy synod of Chalcedon. This emperor saw in a dream a magnificent person dressed in a white garment standing in front of him, reading from what was written in a book that he was carrying. He pulled out five pages with the emperor's name written on them. "Behold, because of your perfidy I destroy fourteen", he said. And he tore them up.

And after two days, during a great storm of thunder and lightning, petrified with fear, he gave up his spirit in great agony. This was because of what he had wickedly done to the holy Church of Christ our God by exiling its pastors.

Chapter XXXIX

The life of a monk belonging to the monastery of abbot SEVERIANUS, and how a country girl wisely repulsed him, and prevented him from sinning with her.

After I had arrived at Antioch I heard one of the presbyters of that church telling this story -

Patriarch Anastasius told us about a monk of Abbot Severianus' monastery, who was sent on an errand to the region of Elutheropoleos, where he broke his journey and stayed for a while at the home of one of the faithful whose wife was dead but who had an only daughter. The devil, who is forever attacking human beings, put evil thoughts into that brother's mind, and his attack took the form of making the brother seek for an opportunity to assault the daughter. The devil not only tempted him but provided him with the opportunity, for the girl's father left on a journey to Ascalon on some necessary business, whereupon the brother, knowing that that there was no one in the house but himself and the girl, tried to take her by force.

"Calm down," she said, when she realised that he was all excited and rushing headlong into an evil deed. "There is all day and tomorrow before my father will be back. But just listen first to what I have to say. God knows I will do whatever you want."

And then she began to talk to him along these lines:

"How long have you been in the monastery, brother?"

"Seventeen years", he said.

"Have you ever had a woman?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"And do you really want to undo the labour of all those years for the sake of one single hour? How many tears have you shed in the struggle to keep your flesh pure and unstained for Christ our Lord? And do you want all that labour to go for nothing for the sake of a brief pleasure? In any case, if I should listen to you and you should sin with me, have you got the wherewithal to take me in and provide for me? "

"No."

"Truly, I'm telling no lies, if you overcome me you will be the cause of many evils."

"How?"

"In the first place, you will lose your soul, and in the second place my life will be required at your hands. For in the name of him who said 'Don't make me a liar' (1 John.1.10), I swear to you that if you overcome me I shall immediately hang myself, and you will be found guilty of murder, and you will be judged as a murderer. So, before you become the cause of so much evil, go back to your monastery in peace, and pray for me."

The brother came to his senses, had second thoughts, and went back to his monastery straight away. He prostrated himself in front of the abbot, and asked for pardon. And he begged that never again might he go outside the monastery. He spent three months in deep heartfelt contrition, after which he passed away to the Lord.

Chapter XL

The life of COSMAS, the eunuch

A story told us by abba Basileus, a presbyter of Bicanium -

When I was at Theopolis with patriarch Gregory, abba Cosmas visited us, a eunuch from the Laura of Pharan. He was an outstandingly religious man, extremely zealous in upholding the true faith and teachings, well versed in the knowledge of the divine Scriptures. He had hardly been there for more than a few days when he died, and the patriarch ordered his precious relics to be buried in his own monastery next to a certain bishop. I went there one day to pay my respects to the tomb of the old man, and found a poor man lying on

the tomb asking alms of those going in to the church. When he caught sight of me he prostrated himself three times as he prayed to the old man.

"Abba", he said to me, "this old man whom you buried these two months past was assuredly a very great person."

"How do you know that?" I asked

" Well, sir," he replied, "I was paralysed for twelve years but God cured me through him. And whenever I am in trouble he comes to me and brings me consolation and peace. And here's another miracle of his: from the day in which you buried him until now, I hear him crying out each night to the bishop [buried next to him] 'Don't touch me, you heretic. Don't come near me, you enemy of the holy Catholic Church of God.' Hearing this cry from the one who healed me, I went to the patriarch and told him everything exactly as it had happened, and begged him to lift the body of the old man from the place where it was and bury it elsewhere.

"'Believe me, my son,' said abba Gregory the patriarch, 'abba Cosmas cannot come to any harm from any heretic. All this has come to pass so that we should take note of the old man's virtue and zeal for the faith. As he was in this life so he is now that he is laid to rest. And he lets us know his opinion about the bishop, lest we should think that he had been orthodox and Catholic.'"

Abba Basileus also told us about a time when he was visiting this same old man in the Laura of Pharan.

"I was wondering, the other day," the old man said to Basileus, "what the Lord meant when he said to his disciples 'Let him sell his coat and buy a sword' (Luke 22.36) and when the disciples said 'Here are two swords' he said 'It is enough' (Luke 22.38). I was quite perplexed by these sayings and could not understand what they meant. I was so fixated on them that I left my cell even in the midday heat to go to the Laura of Turrius in order to question abba Theophilus on the subject. As I was going through the desert near Calamon I saw an enormous reptile coming down the hill towards Calamon. He was so big that as he moved, his back curved up like an arched vault, and he left footprints behind him in the earth even deeper. But I passed over these footprints unharmed, and I realised that the devil was trying to put a stop to my enquiry. The prayers of the old man had come to my aid. So I managed to get to Abba Theophilus and told him of my worries.

"'The two swords signify the two kinds of life, active and contemplative,' said Theophilus. 'He who has both of these will achieve perfection.'"

I myself visited this same abba Cosmas when he was in the Laura of Pharan, and I stayed there for twelve years. He was talking to me once for my soul's health and mentioned something from the sayings of holy Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria.

"If you come across something from the works of Athanasius," he said, "and you haven't got any paper with you to write it down on, write it on your clothing." This was typical of how great was the zeal which this old man had for our holy fathers and teachers.

This abba Cosmas was also said to have remained standing from first Vespers through the night till Sunday morning, singing psalms and reading, both in his cell and in church, never sitting down once, until at last when the services were complete, he would sit and read the Gospels until the [last] Collect was said.

Chapter XLI

The life of abba PAUL, from Nazarbus

We saw another old man in this Laura, an abba called Paul, a holy and most gentle man devoted to God, and of great abstinence. I don't remember ever having met anyone who was so blessed with the gift of tears and the power of giving comfort. Tears were always dripping from his eyes. This holy old man completed fifty years living in solitude without speaking, content with the [daily] portion of bread given him by the church. He came from Nazarbus.

Chapter XLII

The life of abba ANAXANONTES, the servant of God.

We met abba Anaxanontes in the same place, a tenderhearted and most abstemious man, who lived in his own cell a solitary life of such strictness that he would make twenty small pieces of bread (*oblacionen minutorum viginti*) last for four days. Indeed, sometimes that would be all he would eat for a whole week. Towards the end of his life, this venerable man contracted an illness of the stomach and bowel, so we took him to the house for the sick in the holy city which was under the direction of the patriarch. We were with him one day when abba Conon, the prior of the Laura of our holy father Saba, sent to him six coins and a linen cloth containing the Blessed Sacrament (*sudarium unam habens benedictionem*) and a message to say that he also was ill and

asked pardon for not coming personally. The old man accepted the Sacrament but sent the coins back.

"If God wishes me to continue in this life, father," he said, "I already have ten coins. When I have spent them I will let you know, and then you can send me these other ones. However, as you will soon know, father, in two days I shall be dead"

And so it came to pass.

We took him back to the Laura of Pharan and buried him there. He was a blessed man. He shared a cell with the blessed Eutochius, and when they were both dead their hermitage came to an end.

Chapter XLIII

The horrid death of the ungodly THALELAEUS, archbishop of Thessalonica.

There was an archbishop of Thessalonica called Thalelaeus, who feared neither God nor the judgment in store for him. Having no respect for Christian dogma and caring nothing for his priestly honour and dignity, he was a wolf instead of a shepherd. Denying the holy and consubstantial Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he disgracefully worshipped idols. The rulers of the church at that time condemned him unanimously, and drove him from his see. But it was not long before this worthless, wicked and totally godless man wanted to get his priestly dignity back. So in accordance with the saying of Solomon that all things obey money (Eccl. 10.19), he went back to his own city of Constantinople where there were Princes who were willing to 'justify the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous' (Isaiah 5.23). But God does not desert his holy Church. As Thalelaeus defied the Apostolic canons by refusing to accept the sentence passed upon him, so God condemned him. For on the day when Thalelaeus in magnificent dress was going to the Emperors so that they might issue an order that he should be reinstated, it so happened that he had a stomach upset and answered a call of nature by going to his private latrine in order to empty his bowels. When he had not emerged after two or three hours some of his assistants went in to tell him that it was time for him to leave, and found the unfortunate man upside down in the pit, with his feet sticking up in the air. When those associates of the ungodly Arius pulled him out, they found that the enemy of God had been snuffed out in a horrible and eternal death.

He had been trusting in the help of Princes in the hope of tyrannically

infiltrating the Church of God. But an angel of great and marvellous counsel, the angel of the holy Church of God, scattered away into oblivion those interior passions of his which had given birth to such nefarious wickedness. He relied on the help of Princes in the hope of bringing to pass things even worse than they were before. The man had no intention of walking in the way of righteousness, he had dealings with a demon of impurity, and occasioned harm to the Church of God. But the ruling angel of the Church of Thessalonica, together with the powerful Martyr Demetrius, prevented this unprofitable servant, and left him in the place where he was found, hanging by his feet pierced by nails, giving proof of the judgment whereby he was punished, and how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10.31)

Chapter XLIV

The life of an old MONK who lived near the city of Antinoe, and how he prayed for the dead.

When we visited the Thebaid, an old man told us about a monk of great virtue who had lived in a cell outside Antinoe for seventy years. He had ten disciples one of whom was very lazy. The old man frequently corrected him and warned him.

"Brother have a care for your soul", he would say. "You will have to die, and unless you amend your ways you will fall into the place of punishment."

But the brother continued to be disobedient and took no notice of what the old man said. After a while the brother did die, and the old man grieved greatly, knowing that the brother had died in a state of great carelessness and laziness. "O Lord Jesus Christ, our true God" he prayed, "Reveal to me the state of that brother's soul." And in a deep trance he saw a river of fire, and a great crowd of people in that fire, and the brother immersed up to the neck in the midst of them.

" Haven't I begged you to avoid this punishment, my son", the old man said, "by taking thought for the health of your soul?"

"I give thanks to God, father," he replied, "that at least my head is at peace. It is thanks to your prayers that I am standing on the head of a bishop!"

Chapter XLV

The life of an anchorite MONK on the Mount of Olives, and his veneration of

an icon of MARY, the most holy birthgiver of God.

Abba Theodorus Aeliotes told us about an anchorite on the Mount of Olives, a great (spiritual) athlete, battling strenuously with the spirit of fornication.

"Why can't you leave me alone?" he cried with a loud moan one day when the demon was attacking him particularly strongly. "You've been with me all my life. Get away from me!"

The demon suddenly appeared visibly before him.

"Swear to me," he said, "that you won't tell anyone what I am about to say to you, and I won't bother you any further."

"By him who lives in the high heavens," he replied, "I swear not to tell anyone what you say to me."

"Stop venerating this icon," the demon said, "and then I will stop attacking you."

Now this icon consisted of a lifelike painting of our holy lady Mary the birthgiver of God carrying our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Give me time to think about this," said the anchorite.

The next day he let this same abba Theodorus know about it. He told him everything that had happened. Theodorus was at that time living in the Laura of Pharan.

"It was very wrong of you, dear abba," the old man said to the anchorite, "to swear an oath to the demon. Nevertheless you have done the right thing in telling me about it. What you need to do now is to make sure you have no truck with any dealings in that realm, lest you renounce the worship of God, our Lord Jesus Christ and his Mother." He went on to say a great deal more to strengthen and comfort him before leaving him in his cell.

The demon appeared to the anchorite once more.

"What's this, you wicked old man?" he said. "Didn't you swear to me that you would not tell anybody? So why have you told all to that person who visited you? I'm telling you, you will be condemned as a perjurer in the day of judgment."

"I know that I have sworn an oath and broken it," the anchorite replied, "but that oath sworn in the name of my God and Creator I have broken in order that I should not be obedient to you. But as for you, the prime source of false counsel and perjury, you will not be able to escape the punishment prepared for you."

Chapter XLVI

The wonderful vision of abba CYRIACUS of the Laura of Calamon, and the two books of the ungodly Nestorius.

We visited abba Cyriacus, a presbyter of the Laura of Calamon near the River Jordan, who told us the following tale -

One day I saw in a dream a woman dressed in purple whose looks immediately inspired trust, and with her two venerable men of dazzling appearance. And I knew that the woman was our Lady, the holy birthgiver of God, and the two men with her John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. I went outside and begged them to come in and offer prayer in my cell, but they would not. I stayed like that for a long time, begging and praying, 'Let not the humble be turned away with confusion' (Psalms 74.21), and many other such prayers. When she saw me persisting in prayer and repeating the same request, she replied to me quite severely:

"You have an enemy of mine in your cell, and you still want me to come in?" she said. Upon which she disappeared.

I earnestly began to accuse myself and examine my conscience as to whether I had allowed some sin against her to enter my mind, for there was no one else in my cell. Only me. I argued away mentally for a long time but could not find any way in which I could have sinned against her. I could see that this was making me very depressed so I went and picked up a book, hoping that reading might drive away my mournful thoughts. The book I picked up was one I had borrowed from the blessed Isychius, a presbyter of the church of Jerusalem, but as I turned the book over I noticed that two treatises of the ungodly Nestorius were written at the end of it. I immediately recognised that this was the enemy spoken of by our Lady, the birthgiver of God, Mary ever virgin. I immediately got up and took the book back to the person who had lent it to me.

"Take your book back, brother," I said to him, "for it has not done me as much good as it has harm."

He wanted to know what harm it had done, so I told him the whole of what happened, whereupon he became so inflamed with zeal for God that he immediately tore the two Nestorian treatises out of the volume and consigned them to the fire.

"There shall no enemy of our Lady the holy birthgiver of God, Mary ever virgin, remain in my house" he said.

Chapter XLVII

The miracle of the HOLY BIRTHGIVER OF GOD against Gaianus the mime, who blasphemed against her in the theatre.

Heliopolis is a city in Phoenician Lebanon, where a certain mime called Gaianus put on a blasphemous show for the people, blaspheming especially against the holy birthgiver of God.

"What harm have I done to you?" asked the holy birthgiver of God, who appeared to him one day. "Why are you insulting me and blaspheming against me in front of so many people?"

However he made no attempt to amend his ways, but blasphemed all the more. The holy birthgiver of God appeared to him again and reproved him.

"Stop, I beg you," she said, "stop doing your own soul so much harm."

But his blasphemy became even worse. She appeared to him a third time, with much the same reproof. Again he refused to repent, again he uttered more blasphemies. She appeared to him again during his midday nap, saying nothing, but pointing to his feet and his hands. When he woke up he found that his feet and his hands were crippled. And this unfortunate man, lying there crippled, admitted to everyone the reason for his condition and how it had happened to him, and that the crucifying punishment for his blasphemies had been nothing but merciful.

Chapter XLVIII

Another miracle of the HOLY BIRTHGIVER OF GOD in which Cosmiana, the wife of the patrician Germanus, was persuaded to return from the Severian heresy to the true faith of Christ.

Anastasius the presbyter told us this story. He was the guardian of the holy tomb from which our Lord and God Jesus Christ rose from the dead. One Sunday evening, he was approached by Cosmiana, the wife of the patrician Germanus, asking to be allowed to venerate alone the holy and life-giving memorial to our Lord Jesus Christ. But when she approached the sacred shrine, our Lady the holy birthgiver of God appeared visibly to her accompanied by several other women.

"You are not one of us," she said. "How dare you enter here? You may not go in. You are not one of us." She was an adherent of that brainless Severian

heresy, but she implored insistently that she might be found worthy of entering in.

"Believe me, woman," said the holy birthgiver of God, "you shall not enter here unless you are in communion with us."

When she realised that it was because she was a heretic she was not allowed to enter, and that entry would continue to be forbidden unless she returned to the holy Catholic and apostolic Church of Christ our God and Lord, she immediately summoned a deacon who brought the holy chalices from which she received the holy body and precious blood of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. And then without any let or hindrance she was counted worthy of adoring the holy and venerable tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter XLIX

The wonderful vision of a Palestinian GENERAL and how he also was compelled to renounce the aforesaid heresy and communicate in the Church of Christ.

This same presbyter Anastasius told us how Gevemer, a Palestinian general, once came to venerate the holy resurrection of Christ our Lord. As he began to go into the holy shrine he saw a goat charging towards him, threatening him with his horns. He took fright and hastily turned back. The guardian of the holy cross, Azarias, was startled, as were the lictors with him.

"What's the matter, sir?" they said. "What's wrong? Why are you not going in?"

"Why have you allowed that goat in there?" he replied.

Astonished, they inspected the holy shrine but found nothing.

"Go on in," they said. "There's nothing like that in there."

Again he began to go in, and again he saw the goat rushing towards him preventing his entry. He did this several times, he being the only one to see the goat while the others saw nothing.

"Believe me, sir," said the guardian of the holy cross, "there must be something in your soul which prevents you worshipping at this holy, venerable and life-giving shrine of our Saviour. I urge you, confess your sin to the Lord. He has been showing you this miraculous sight because he is clement and merciful and desires your forgiveness."

"Indeed, I am guilty of many great sins," he said in tears. And he prostrated himself face downwards, remaining there for a long time weeping and

confessing to the Lord. But when at last he got up and tried to go in, again the goat prevented him.

"There must be something else preventing you," said the guardian.

"Could it be, perhaps," asked the general, "that I am prevented from going in because I am not a member of the holy Catholic Church, but belong to the communion of Severianus?" Then he asked the guardian to bring him the holy and life-giving mysteries of Christ our God. The holy chalice was brought, he made his communion, he went in and adored unhindered, seeing nothing of what had previously prevented him.

Chapter L

The vision of abba GEORGE the anchorite, and what he said.

Scythopolis is the second city of Palestine, and there we met abba Anastasius who told us about abba George the anchorite as follows:

I am the one who has been put in charge of the clappers used to call the brothers together, and one night when I arose to sound the signal I heard the old man weeping, and went out to him to ask him what the matter was and why he was weeping like that. He answered me not at all. Once more I asked him to tell me why he was weeping.

"Why shouldn't I weep," he said, groaning and sighing from the bottom of his heart, "when our Lord Jesus Christ refuses to change his mind towards us. For I seemed to be standing before someone sitting on a lofty throne, with thousands of people praying in front of him and begging him for something. But he remained unmoved by their prayers. Then a woman clothed in purple came near and fell down before him, begging him as her son to relent for her sake. But he remained inexorable nevertheless. This is why I am weeping and moaning, for I am afraid of what is to come."

Abba George was telling me this at dawn on a Thursday (*Quinta illuscencentē feria coenae Domini*). Next day, that is on the Friday (*parasceve*), at the ninth hour, a big earthquake caused severe damage to a city on the coast of Phoenicia.

This same abba Anastasius told us how abba George a little while later was standing at the window when he began to weep copiously.

"Woe betide us, brother," he said, "for we have no sorrow for sin but live in negligence, and I am afraid for the time when the Lord takes us and we stand before the gates to be judged."

And the next day fire appeared in the heavens.

Chapter LI

The life of JULIAN, an old man of the monastery of the Egyptians

Anazarbus is the second city of the province of the Cilicians. About twelve miles distant from it is a monastery known as "of the Egyptians". The fathers of that place told us that five years previously an old man called Julian had died, who had lived for seventy years in a very narrow cavern, with no possessions in this world except a cloak, a blanket, a wooden bowl and a book.

They also told us this about him, that for the whole of his life he lit no lamp, for the light of heaven so shone upon him during the night that he was able to read quite clearly.

Chapter LII

The saying of abba ELIAS, a solitary.

A certain brother went to abba Elias, a solitary in the coenobium of our ancient father Saba, and asked him for a word.

"In the days of our fathers," the old man said to the brother, "there were three virtues which the monks loved and strove after, detachment from material things, gentleness and continence. Nowadays there is greed, bitterness and impudence. Apply to yourself whichever of these pleases you."

Chapter LIII

The life of the old man CYRIACUS, of the monastery of St Saba

Abba Stephen told us about an old man called Cyriacus who lived in the monastery of our holy father Saba. He came down one day from Mount Tuthela and having stayed for a while beside the Dead Sea began to go back to his cell. It was so hot that the old man was nearly fainting, but he stretched out his hands to the heavens and said, "O Lord you know that I am so thirsty that I can hardly walk", and at once a cloud surrounded him and stayed with him until he had reached his cell, about twelve miles away.

This same abba Stephen also told us that some of the old man's family came to see him one day and when they got near to the place asked where his cell was.

After some people directed them they went to the cell and knocked on the door. When he recognised them the old man prayed to God that they need not see him, and opening the door he ran out so quickly that they hardly even caught a glimpse of him. He ran out into the desert and refused to return until he was satisfied that they had gone away.

Chapter LIV

The life of the monks of SCYTHIA, and of the old man AMMONIUS.

After this we travelled to Terenuthis and met abba Theodore of Alexandria. "My sons," he said to us, "just as the old men foretold, the monks of Scythia have lost a great deal of the great charity, abstinence and discretion which, believe me, they used to have. I saw how the old men there would not take any food unless visitors came to see them. One of these old men called Ammonius lived near me. I knew what his customs were, so I used to visit him every Saturday so that he would take some food during my visit. It was their general rule, that whenever anyone visited any of them, they would ask the visitors to pray, and during the prayers they would prepare the food and afterwards all dine together."

Chapter LV

The life of a certain OLD MAN dwelling in Scythia and abba IRENAEUS.

Abba Irenaeus told us about an old man living in Scythia who one night saw the devil providing hoes and mattocks and baskets for the brothers.

"Why these?" the old man asked the devil.

"I'm preparing a distraction for the brothers, " the devil replied, "so that they will busy themselves with these and neglect to pray and glorify God."

Abba Irenaeus also told us that when the barbarians invaded Scythia he left there and went to the Gaza region, where he accepted a cell in the monastery.

"The abbot there gave me a book to read," he said, "containing the deeds of the old men. As soon as I opened the book my eyes fell upon a passage in which a brother came to an old man and asked him to pray for him.

"'As long as you were one of us' the old man said, 'We prayed for you. But now that you have gone off on your own we pray for you no longer.'

"When I had read this passage, I closed the book and said to myself. 'Woe betide you, Irenaeus, for you have gone off on your own and the fathers are no

longer praying for you.' I took the book back to the abbot straight away and came back here. So, my sons, that's how I came to be here."

Chapter LVI

The life of JOHN, the disciple of a great old man who lived in the town of Caparasima

There is a region of Phoenicia called Ptolemais, in which there is a village called Caparasima. In this village there was a great old man who had a disciple called John, who had a great reputation as well, especially for his obedience. One day the old man sent him off on an errand, giving him a bit of bread to sustain him on the way. John went off and carried out the errand, then came back to the monastery and gave back the bread to the old man.

"My son," said the old man as he gazed at the bread, "why have you not eaten the bread I gave you?"

"Forgive me, father," he said, as he prostrated himself before the old man, "but you gave me no blessing when you sent me off, and you did not tell me the bread was to be eaten, so I didn't touch it."

The old man was amazed at the brother's discretion, and gave him a blessing. After the old man's death this brother fasted forty days and a voice from heaven came to him saying, "If you lay hands on anyone sick they will be cured." The next morning, by divine providence, there came a man and to him bringing his wife with him who was suffering from cancer of the breast. The man asked him to cure his wife.

"I am a sinner," said the brother, "and unworthy to do such things."

But the man persisted in begging him to agree to have pity on his wife. At last he did lay hands on her, and made the sign of the cross on her breast, whereupon she was immediately cured. From that time on God did many other signs through him, not only during his own lifetime, but even after his death.

Chapter LVII

The death of SIMEON the Stylite, and abba JULIANUS, also a Stylite.

Simeon the Stylite was about forty miles from the city of Aegis in Cilicia; he was struck by lightning and died. Now abba Julianus also was a Stylite, and quite contrary to his usual practice and at an unusual time he told his disciples

to put some incense in the thurible.

"What for?" they asked him. They begged him to explain.

"Because my brother Simeon has just now been knocked over by lightning and is dead," he said, "and look, his soul is going, leaping up with exultation."

Chapter LVIII

Another story about JULIANUS.

Abba Stephen Trichinas, superior of the monastery of our holy father Saba, told us this also about abba Julianus the Stylite -

Not far from the place where he lived, a lion had appeared which had become accustomed to killing numbers of the local population as well as foreigners.

So one day he called his disciple Pancras to him.

"Go about two miles south from here and you will find the lion lying down.

Say to him, 'Julianus humbly asks you in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, to go away from this province.'"

The brother went, found the lion lying down, spoke the words of the old man to him, and the lion immediately went away.

Chapter LIX

The life of THALALEUS of Cilicia.

Abba Peter, a presbyter of the same monastery, told us about abba Thalaleus of Cilicia who spent sixty years in the monastic life weeping continuously. He was always saying that our time here is given to us for penitence, and we will be held to account if we neglect it.

Chapter LX

The extraordinary deed of the HOLY VIRGIN by means of which her adolescent admirer was conscience-stricken and became a monk

When we were in Alexandria one of the faithful told us the following story - There was a holy virgin living a solitary life in her own home who worked very hard at her own salvation. She regularly gave herself to fasts and vigils, and gave alms freely. But the devil who hates everything good found the virtues of this woman so insufferable that he prepared a campaign against her by stirring up in a certain young man a devilish lust for her. He haunted the

space outside her house. When the woman tried to leave the house in order to go to church and pray, this young man harassed her with lustful and impure looks. He would not let her pass with subjecting her to seductive propositions and shameless suggestions, so that in the end the aggressive behaviour of this young man prevented her from leaving her house at all.

One day the woman sent her servant out to the young man

"My mistress wants you," she said. "Come inside."

He went in, delighted, eager for the shameful deed, to where she was sitting on the bed.

"Sit down," she said. "Tell me please brother, why do you harass me so grievously that I can't go out of my own house?"

"Truly, I love you very much," he said, "and whenever I look at you I am totally inflamed with desire."

"What can you see so beautiful in me that you should love me so?"

"It's your eyes. That's what has led me on."

When the woman realised that it was her eyes which had led him on she took a distaff and gouged her eyes out.

When it sank in to the young man that she had actually gouged her own eyes out, he was conscience stricken and went off to Scythia to become a monk.

Chapter LXI

The life of abba LEONTIUS of Cilicia.

Some of the fathers used to say of abba Leontius of Cilicia that he had a great devotion to our Lady, the holy birthgiver of God, and for forty years he was to be seen in a church dedicated to her. He had a wonderfully grave presence which he preserved at all times.

They described how he dealt with any beggars who came to him. If they were blind, he would put some money into their hands, but if they were not, he would put the money at the base of a column, or on a bench, or on the steps of the sanctuary, for the beggars to pick up. If any one asked him why he did not simply put the money into their hands, he would reply, "Forgive me father, but it is not me giving the alms, but my Lady the holy birthgiver of God, who provides food for both them and me."

Chapter LXII

The life of abba STEPHEN, a presbyter of the monastery of the Aeliotes.

One of the old men said of abba Stephen, a presbyter of the monastery of the Aeliotes, that the devil would trouble his thoughts as he sat in his cell saying "Leave this place. You are not doing any good here." He would reply, "I am not listening to you. I know who you are. It is not possible for anyone to be deceived by you for Christ the son of the living God himself is your adversary."

Chapter LXIII

The same.

It was also said of him that when he was sitting in his cell reading, the devil appeared to him visibly and said, "Leave this place. You are not doing any good here."

"If you want me to go," he said to the demon, "make this chair I am sitting in move about."

Now the chair he was sitting in was of wicker-work, and the devil made it move about all over the cell.

"In spite of your speed and cleverness," he replied as he observed the devil's tricks, "I have no intention of going away." He prayed, and the devil disappeared.

Chapter LXIV

The same.

Three old men visited abba Stephen the presbyter, and while they kept on talking about what might be of benefit to the soul Stephen said nothing.

"You are not saying anything, father," they said to him. "We are visiting you because we hoped to hear something helpful."

"Forgive me," he said, "but up to now I had not taken much notice of what you were talking about. However I will share with you this thought that I have: day and night I gaze upon nothing other than Jesus Christ hanging on the cross."

They were greatly edified on hearing this and so went on their way.

Chapter LXV

The same.

Abba Johannes Molybas told us another story about that blessed and venerable old man, the presbyter Stephen.

He became ill with a disease of the liver which resulted in that holy soul of his departing from the body. During his illness the doctors had ordered him to eat meat. He had a brother living in the world who was very religious and lived a godly life, but when he visited Stephen and saw him eating meat he was scandalised, and very sorrowful to think that from a life of great abstinence and continence he had lowered himself in his last hours to eating meat.

Later he fell into an ecstasy and someone appeared to him who said, "Why are you so scandalised by this presbyter simply because you saw him eating meat? Don't you realise that he was compelled to this by necessity, and did it purely through obedience? You had no business being scandalised, and if you want to know your brother's merits and glory, turn round and look behind you."

He turned round and saw Stephen crucified with the Lord.

"See the glory your brother has been given," said the voice in the apparition.

"Therefore glorify him who glorifies them who truly love him."

Chapter LXVI

The life of abba THEODOSIUS, solitary.

Abba Antonius, the superior of the monastery of the Aeliotas which he had built himself, told us that abba Theodosius had told him this story about himself -

Before I entered the solitary life I once fell into an ecstasy and saw a man whose brilliance outshone the brightness of the sun.

"Come," he said, taking my hand. "Your lot is to strive and fight."

And he led me into an infinitely large theatre which I saw was full of men in white robes on one side and in black on the other. He thrust me into the theatre, and I saw an enormous Ethiopian whose terrifying head reached up to the clouds.

"This is he whom you must fight with," said the man who had appeared to me. Terrified by the appearance of this enormous person, I began to tremble with fear, and pleaded with the splendid youth who had brought me in.

"What mortal man in all his weakness would be able to strive with him?" I said. "The whole human race rolled into one would not be able to prevail against him!"

"Nevertheless you must fight against him," said the dazzling youth. "Go for him with all speed and confidence, and once you have started, I shall be with you in support, and will give you the crown of victory."

I began the contest, we fought together, and the dazzling judge gave me the crown. And the large, shadowy crowd of Ethiopians fled howling, while those clothed in white who remained gave praise to him who had been my helper and given me a famous victory.

Chapter LXVII

The same

Abba Cyriacus, Theodosius' disciple, told us that this solitary had lived for thirty years in solitude, eating every two days, keeping perpetual silence, speaking to no one. He used signs rather than words if he needed to communicate. I witnessed this myself, for I stayed in the monastery of the Aeliotes for ten years.

Chapter LXVIII

The same

When Abramius, the superior of New St. Mary heard that Theodosius had no cloak to wear in winter, he bought one for him. While he was asleep, some time after receiving it (for the old man slept in his cell), some robbers came and pulled it off him and carried it away with them. But even after this deed he still said nothing.

Chapter LXIX

The life of abba PALLADIUS, and the old Thessalonican anchorite called DAVID.

Before Sophronius Sophista renounced the world, he and I once visited abba Palladius in Alexandria, a holy man and true servant of God whose monastery was in Thelazomenos. Both of us asked him to give us some teaching (verbum aedificationis), and he began immediately:

"My little children," he said, "the time is short, so let us strive for a little while and labour to enjoy the deathless benefits of eternity. Look to the martyrs, those heavenly fighters, and see how they overcame in all things with strength

and bravery. It was a previous age which recognised them but they live forever in our memories, and we can hardly admire their endurance enough. Everyone who hears of them is astonished at how great was the patience of the blessed martyrs, more than human nature would have thought possible. Some of them had their eyes torn out, some their legs broken, some their hands cut off, others their feet. Some were suddenly thrown into the fire and suffered crucifying agony as they slowly burned. It is certain that the ocean depths were the resting place of some, the rivers others. Others were thrown alive into the teeth of wild beasts like malefactors and criminals, suffering various terrible agonies before death as they became the animals' food. There were many other kinds of torments, defying description, thought up for the warriors of God at the suggestion of the demon enemy of the human race, livid with spite towards those very martyrs. O how bravely they endured! How great the faith with which they fought, overcoming the weakness of the body by their spiritual strength! They counted their present labours as nothing compared to the more excellent and splendid rewards which were their hope. All these things truly showed how wonderfully firm their faith was, through and through. Labouring a little while here they now enjoy the greatest bliss in eternity. This indeed was why they bravely bore the horrible punishments inflicted on their bodies at the instigation of our enemy the devil.

"So then, if we endure tribulation, and overcome by the grace of God, we shall be found lovers of God. For God is with us, fighting and conquering in us, soothing our toil and sweat for the sake of his own honour. Therefore, my little children, knowing what works and expectations the times demand of us let us become worthy through quietness and silence. In this time granted to us we must make use of the eminently good work of penitence, that we may be found worthy of the temple of God, and we shall be rewarded with no mean or short-lived honour in the world to come."

He also said, "Let us always be mindful of him who had no where to lay his head." (Matthew 8.20). And again, "Since Paul the Apostle says tribulation brings forth patience (Romans 5.3), let us ensure that our minds are open to the kingdom of heaven." And again, "Little children, love not the world nor the things that are in the world." (1 John.2.15)

And again, he said, "Let us keep watch over our thoughts, for that is the medicine of salvation."

We asked abba Palladius if he would increase our awareness by telling us in what sort of way would thoughts be expected to develop in the monastic state,

and he told us about an old man from Thessalonica:

"In my home area there was an anchorite from Mesopotamia called David about three miles outside the city walls. He was a man adorned with many virtues, merciful and abstemious, and had been enclosed in his cell for eighty years. For fear of the barbarians there were soldiers keeping watch on the city walls every night, and those who were looking out in the direction of the anchorite's cell noticed one night that it seemed as if fire could be seen through the windows of his cell. The soldiers thought that barbarians must have set fire to the old man's cell, but in the morning, the soldiers went down and were astonished to find the old man quite unharmed and no signs of fire in the cell. They were amazed to see the same appearance of fire on the night following, and not only the next night but frequently afterwards so that it became known to the whole city. Many people watched nightly on the city walls in the hope of seeing this fire, which continued right up to the day of the old man's death. Having seen this miracle myself not once, not twice, but many times, I said to myself, 'If God shows such glory to his servants in this life, how much more do you think he will show in the life to come, when "their faces shall shine forth as the sun"' (Matthew 14.43)? This was the spur which made me take the monastic habit, my little children, and choosing this way of life."

Chapter LXX

The life of the anchorite monk ADDAS of Mesopotamia.

The old man also told us that after this abba David, there was another monk called Addas, also a Mesopotamian, who built himself an anchorage in a great plane tree in another part of the region. He made a window in it through which he was able to talk to visitors. When the barbarians came and laid waste the whole province they happened to come by his place. As soon as one of them spied the old man he drew his sword in order to kill him, but having lifted up his hand to strike he was unable to bring it down, remaining motionless with his hand hanging in the air. When the other barbarians saw this they were amazed and begged the old man to cure their companion. The old man did pray, the man was released, and so he dismissed them in peace.

Chapter LXXI

The beautiful words of a MURDERER to a monk who was following him on

the way to his execution.

This same abbot Palladius told us of someone arrested and found guilty of murder in Arsinoe, a city of the Thebaid. After being tortured for some time he was at last sentenced to be beheaded. He was taken out of the city for six miles to the place where he had committed the murder and a monk followed on behind him in order to witness the execution.

"Haven't you got a cell and manual work to attend to?" said the condemned man when he saw the monk.

"Forgive me, brother," said the monk, "but yes, I do have a cell and work to do."

"Well, why aren't you sitting in your cell and weeping for your own sins, then?"

"You are right, brother. I am very neglectful of my duties, and find myself unable to summon up any compunction in my heart. That is why I have come to watch you die, in the hope that thereby I might find compunction."

"Go with the Lord, brother", said the guilty man, "and sit in your cell and give thanks to our Saviour Jesus Christ. Since he was made human and died for us sinners, human beings no longer suffer eternal death."

Chapter LXXII

A story of abbot PALLADIUS about an elderly murderer who falsely accused a young man of the crime.

Abbot Palladius also told us this story about an elderly layman who had committed murder and was held in custody by the magistrate in Alexandria. After being tortured he accused someone else of being his accomplice in the crime, a young man about twenty years old. They were both subjected to many tortures, the older man accusing the younger of being with him when the crime was done, and the younger denying it vigorously, swearing that his conscience was clear of the murder, and that he had not been with the older man at all. After the torture, they were sentenced to be suspended [with hands outstretched] from a wooden yoke. They were taken five miles outside the city to the place where it was customary for those guilty of this kind of crime to be punished.

Now there was a ruined temple of Saturn about three hundred metres (uno stadio) from the place. When the soldiers and spectators arrived there, they

intended to string up the young man first, but he threw himself on the ground and pleaded with the soldiers:

"In the name of the Lord, please grant me the favour of being hung up facing the East, so that I may look towards Him when I am hanging there."

"What do you mean?" the soldiers asked?

"Truly, sirs," replied the young man, "miserable though I am, it is only seven months since I received holy Baptism and became a Christian."

Hearing this the soldiers were moved to tears for the young man. But the older man, snorting with rage, said to the soldiers:

"In the name of Serapis let me be able to turn my face towards Saturn."

Hearing this blasphemy the soldiers left the young man and began to string up the old man first. When he had been well and truly suspended from the wooden yoke, behold, an Augustal official came rushing in.

"Don't kill the young man," he said to the soldiers. "Take him back [to the courtroom]."

The soldiers and everyone there were delighted. They took him back to the courtroom, where the Augustalis acquitted him. The young man contrary to all expectation was saved, and he went away and became a monk.

We have written this down not only for our own benefit but for the benefit of the readers, that we may be convinced that the Lord knows how to deliver the faithful in their tribulations.

Chapter LXXIII

The life of JOHN, an Alexandrian soldier

This same abbot Palladius also told us this story. There was a soldier in Alexandria called John who followed this rule of life: He would stay in the monastery every day from the morning up till the ninth hour, sitting alone in front of St Peter's steps, wearing a tunic (cilicium), weaving baskets, totally silent, speaking to no one. He was praying as he sat and worked with his hands, but the only words which he softly sang were Save me, O Lord, I pray, from my secret sins. Let me not be confounded. Having spoken he was then silent for about an hour, when he repeated this same verse again, so that he repeated it seven times altogether during the day, and did not say anything else. At the ninth hour, he took off his tunic and put on his military uniform (militarem habitum) and his weapons (indumen-ta), and so hastened back to his own barracks (signa, lit. 'standards' carried at the head of the legion). I stayed there myself for eight years and was greatly edified by his silence and

way of life.

Chapter LXXIV

A reliable statement from PALLADIUS, on the subject of heresy

The old man caught us one day and said to us: "Believe me, my little children, the only reason for schisms and heresies coming in to the Church is that we do not love God and each other with our whole heart."

Chapter LXXV

A miracle done by OUR LADY to the wife and daughter of a man of the faith who was accustomed to giving hospitality to monks.

When we visited Palladius on another day, he told us the following story: There was a man of the faith in Alexandria, very devout and generous, accustomed to giving monks hospitality. He had a wife, very humble, who fasted daily, and also a young daughter about six years old. He was a businessman, and one day he had to go on a journey to Constantinople, leaving his wife, daughter and one servant at home. As he was about to take ship, his wife asked him who would be their protector in his absence. "Our Lady the holy birthgiver of God," her husband replied. One day when the wife was sitting working, her daughter being with her, the servant hatched a plot to kill both the lady and her daughter, seize whatever he could and flee. Taking a knife from the kitchen he went towards the triclinium where they both were. When he got to the door he was suddenly stricken with blindness, nor could he either go in to the triclinium or return to the kitchen. He stayed like that for about an hour, trying in vain to go in, and at last began to call out to the lady "Please, can you come here!" he cried "No, you come here, rather," she said, seeing him standing in the doorway shouting out rather than coming in, unaware that he was blind. The servant again began to beg her to come to him, but she positively refused. "Well, send your daughter to me," he begged. "Certainly not," she said. "If there is something you want, you come here." The servant realised that there was nothing that could be done, turned the knife upon himself and fell to the floor. The lady screamed when she realised what he had done, and neighbours immediately rushed in. Some praetorian

officials also arrived and finding the servant still alive, learned everything, and glorified the Lord who had saved both mother and daughter.

Chapter LXXVI

The drowning of MARY, a woman who was a sinner.

Palladius also told us this story:

A certain sea captain once told me about a voyage of his when he had several male and female passengers aboard. Out on the high seas other ships seemed to be sailing well under a favourable wind, some to Constantinople, some to Alexandria, some to other places, but he could make no progress at all.

"We stayed put for about fifteen days," he said, "unable to move from where we were. We became very depressed and desperate, not knowing whatever could be causing this. As captain responsible for the care of the ship and everyone in her, I began to pray about it to God. And indeed on a certain day a voice came to me saying: 'Get rid of Mary and you will sail well.' 'What did that mean', I thought, 'and who is Mary?' And as I turned this over in my mind the voice came again, saying: 'I tell you, get rid of Mary and you will be all right.'

"O Mary!" I shouted over and over again, wondering what this was all about and not knowing who Mary was. But Mary herself heard me from where she was sitting and said: 'Did you want me, sir?'

"Could you come here, please," I said. She got up to come straight away, and when she had got to me I took her aside.

"Mary, my sister," I said, 'Are you able to see if it is my sins which are responsible for the plight you are all in? '

"In fact, Captain," she said, with a deep groan, 'it is I who am the sinner.'

"Why, what have you done, woman?" I asked.

"Woe is me", she said. 'There is no sin in the book which I have not been guilty of. And it is because of my sins that you have all been brought into this present danger.'

"And then the woman told me all about herself.

"I'm a miserable wretch, Captain," she said. 'I had a husband with whom I had two sons, but when one of them was nine and the other five, my husband died and I was a widow. But there was a soldier living near me whom I would have quite liked to have as a husband, and I gave him some signals to that effect (misique ad ipsum quosdam). But he wouldn't because he said he did not want

a wife who had two children by another man. But I was carried away with desire for him, and seeing that he would not have me because of my children, I killed them both and then went to him and said "See now, I no longer have any children". When he learned what I had done with the children he said: "As the Lord lives in heaven, I certainly will not have you!" So I fled, in fear that he would tell and I should be executed.'

"Even though I had heard this out of her own mouth, I was unwilling to throw her overboard, and tried to put off coming to a decision.

"'Look,' I said, 'I will go down into a lifeboat, and if the ship then begins to move we will know that it was my sins which were impeding her.' I called for the coxswain and said, 'Lower the boat'. But once I was in the boat, neither the ship nor the boat still made any movement. Coming back aboard again I said to the woman, 'Now you get down into the boat'. The moment she got into it the boat turned round five times and went straight to the bottom, carrying her with it. And after this the ship made such good progress that in three and a half days' sailing we made up for the fifteen days we had lost."

Chapter LXXVII

The story of three poor BLIND MEN, and how they came by their blindness.

My respected master Sophronius and I went once to the house of Stephanus the philosopher to benefit from his teaching. It was about the middle of the day and he lived near the church of the holy birthgiver of God known as the Dorothea, which our blessed father Eulogius had built near the great Tetrapylum. When we knocked at the philosopher's door, a maid opened up to us who said that he was asleep and we would have to wait a while.

"Let's go to the Tetrapylum and wait there," I said to Sophronius. It was a place held in great reverence in Alexandria, for it is said that Alexander, the founder of the city, brought the bones of the prophet Jeremiah out of Egypt and reburied them there. When we got there, about noon, we found no one inside except three blind men. Without making a noise we sat down near these three men to read our books. They were having a long conversation with each other.

"How did you come to be blind?" one of them asked the other.

"In my youth I was a sailor," he replied, "and while sailing from Africa on the high seas I suddenly became blind, and could not see where I was going for the whiteness in my eyes. And how did you become blind?" he asked the

other.

"I worked in glass production of various kinds," he said, "the fire damaged both my eyes, and I became blind."

Having questioned each other they both then turned to the third.

"Tell us how you also became blind," they asked.

"When I was young," he replied, "I hated work, I rejected it, I was just a layabout (*luxoriosus*). But I had nothing to live on so I took to stealing. I had committed many crimes, when one day I was standing in a certain place where I noticed a very richly dressed corpse being carried by. I followed the funeral procession to see where it would be laid. They went behind St John [s church], and laid the body in a tomb. They said the funeral prayers and departed. As soon as I was sure they had all gone, I went in to the tomb and pulled off all the rich clothing, leaving nothing but a linen cloth. As I was on my way out of the tomb, loaded up with many bundles, a wicked thought said to me, 'Take the linen cloth as well, it is such a good one.' Alas, I went back and took the linen cloth also, leaving the body quite naked. The dead man suddenly sat up before my very eyes, thrust out his hands towards me and gouged out my eyes. Terrified, I dropped everything, and found my way out of the tomb with great danger and difficulty. So now, I have told you how I too became blind."

My respected master Sophronius nodded to me when we had heard this tale, and we stole away.

"Abba John," he said, "we really have no need for any further study today. We have already been educated quite enough."

I have told this tale that you also might be educated: there is no ill doer who may hide from God. And we heard this tale from the very person it happened to.

Chapter LXXVIII

The astonishing miracle of a dead GIRL, who seized a grave-robber and would not let him go until he had promised to become a monk.

Abba Johannes, the father of the monastery of Gigantum, told us a similar story from the time when he had been at Theopolis:

It is not so long ago that I had a visit from a certain young man.

"Help me, for the love of God," he said, with many tears and convulsive sighs.

"I need to do penance."

I could see that he was very penitent and deeply sad.

"Tell me the reason why you are so filled with compunction," I said. "Don't hold anything back, for God is surely able to help you."

"Abba," he said, "I am truly a great sinner."

"Believe me," I said, "Just as there are a great many different kinds of wounds, so there are many different kinds of medicine. If you wish to be cured, tell me truly what you have done, so that I can give you a penance which is suitable. For there is one sort of cure for fornication, another for murder, another for avarice, another for lying, another for anger. No need to go through the rest of the vices for you, but there are various remedies for all the vices of the soul just as there are various remedies for all the bodily ailments."

But he could do nothing but groan even more and strike his breast with tears and convulsive sighs. Such was his distress and sorrow that his heart failed him and he was quite unable to say a single word. I tried to concentrate his mind on his desperate grief and his unbearable sins, unable as he was to describe his disaster, or what had happened to him or what he had done.

"Listen to me, my son." I said, "Put a little order into your thoughts and describe to me what you have done. Then perhaps our Lord may be able to offer you some help. For of his ineffable mercy and boundless compassion he has suffered all things for our salvation. He was a friend of publicans and welcomed the harlot who came to him. He accepted the robber, and was called the friend of sinners. He will gather you into his hands also, my son, as you turn to him in penitence. 'For he desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live'". (Ezekiel 33.11).

Then he made an effort to control his tears and sighs a little.

"I am a sink of iniquity, father," he said "fit neither for earth or heaven. Two days ago I heard that a young girl belonging to one of the richest families of this city had died, and was being buried with many costly garments in a tomb outside the city. From force of a most wicked habit I went by night to the tomb, went in and set about robbing her. I took everything she wore off her, not even sparing her loincloth, which I also removed, leaving her naked as the day she was born. I had begun to leave the tomb when she suddenly sat up in front of me, stretched out her left hand and seized my right and said 'You most wicked man, aren't you ashamed to have stripped me bare? Have you no fear of God and the reward of everlasting damnation? Ought you not at the very least to have had respect for the dead? And if you are a Christian, do you think it would have been right for me to stand naked before Christ? Have you no

respect for the female sex? Was it not this sex which gave you birth? Have you not violated your own mother in what you have done to me? You wretched man, what shall you plead before the tremendous judgment seat of Christ when faced with this crime you have perpetrated on me. While I was alive no stranger ever so much as saw my face, but now I am dead and buried you have stripped me and seen my naked body. O, to what depths of human misery have you descended! How will you be able to hold out your hands to receive the holy and precious body of our Lord Jesus Christ? What will be in your heart?"

"I was totally overcome by panic and horror as I witnessed and heard all this. "Let me go," I finally managed to say with fear and trembling, "and I won't ever do this again."

"Certainly not," she said. "You came in here of your own free will, but you shall not go out again just as you please. This place will be a tomb for both of us, and don't think that you will die quickly. You will suffer here for many days before you painfully deliver up your wicked soul."

"I wept and begged her to let me go for the sake of Almighty God, promising and swearing an oath that I would never do such a wicked and shameful thing ever again. And at last after my floods of tears and sighs she gave me her reply.

"If you wish to live and be freed from my grasp you must promise me that if I let you go you must not only refrain from such wicked and profane deeds in future, but resolve immediately to renounce the world and become a monk, and serve Christ in penitence for the evil you have done."

"I swore.

"In the name of God who will receive my soul," I said, "I will not merely do what you say, but after leaving here I will never go back home but go with all speed to a monastery."

"Put my clothes back on," the girl then said, "and leave me in the same state as you found me."

"I did so, she stretched herself out, and lay there, dead."

With this tale from the young man fresh in my ears I comforted and encouraged him, urging him to penitence and continence. I tonsured him, gave him the monastic habit and enclosed him in a mountain cave, where I left him giving heartfelt thanks to God and struggling manfully for the salvation of his soul.

Chapter LXXIX

The great and astonishing miracle of the most holy EUCHARIST, in the time of Dionysius the bishop of Seleucia.

When we came to Seleucia we called on abbot Theodore, the bishop of that city. He told us the following story:

This is something that happened under my predecessor, Dionysius of holy memory, bishop of this city. There was a businessman in the city, very rich, and very religious, though a heretic, for he was a follower of Severus. [465-538, Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch]. He had a servant who was a faithful communicant of the holy and apostolic Church, and according to the custom of that province on Maundy Thursday (die Sancto Coenae Dominicae) he received Communion, wrapped it in a fair linen cloth and put it in a safe. It so happened, however, that after Easter this man of faith was sent to Constantinople on business and gave the key of the safe to his master, forgetting that he had left the holy Communion in it.

The master opened the safe one day and found the linen cloth with the holy particles of Communion wrapped up in it. He was worried about this and did not quite know what to do with them. He was reluctant to consume them, seeing that they were of the holy Catholic Church, whereas he was a follower of Severus. So he put them back in the safe, thinking that his servant would consume them when he came back.

But when Maundy Thursday came and the servant had still not come back, he thought that perhaps he should burn them, rather than keep them there for a second year. But when he opened the safe he found that the holy particles had germinated, producing stalks and ears of corn. He was overcome with fear and trembling, picked up the holy particles, and together with his whole household shouting Kyrie eleison ran to the holy church, and to the most holy and venerable bishop Dionysius. This great and terrible miracle, exceeding anything that might be thought or reasoned about, or invented, was witnessed not by one or two or three or even several more, but by the whole church, citizens and peasants, natives and visitors, travellers by land and sea, men and women, old men and children, young men and seniors, masters and servants, rich and poor, princes and subjects, wise and foolish, virgins and monks, widows and married women, rulers and ruled. They too shouted Kyrie eleison, though some praised God in other ways, but all truly gave thanks to God for his ineffable miracles. And many who believed because of the miracle were

added to the holy Catholic and apostolic Church.

Chapter LXXX

The spring which was granted by God to the brothers of the monastery at Scopulus through the prayers of their abbot THEODOSIUS.

We arrived at the monastery of abbot Theodosius at Scopulus, which is a mountain between Seleucia and Rosus Cilicia. The fathers showed us round the monastery, which is about an arrow's flight in length, and pointed out to us a copious and beautiful spring.

"This spring, brothers," they said, "is not natural, but was granted to us by divine favour. For our holy father Theodosius fasted greatly and poured out many tears, and with many prayers and prostrations obtained from God the gift of this water for our use and consolation. Before this spring our fathers often went thirsty, but God who listens to the needs of those who fear him of his infinite bounty gave us the blessing of this water through the prayers of our holy father.

"And yet two years ago some of the brothers asked the father of the monastery to build a bath house in the monastery. The abbot did not really like the idea, but pandered to their weakness and agreed. The bath house was duly built in the monastery, and after it had been used only once, that great and lovely spring, gift of God, dried up. And to tell you the truth as Christians, we fasted and said many prayers and made many prostrations that we might have the spring back again, but without success. A whole year went by without any water in the spring, leaving us in great difficulty. But as soon as our kind and gentle father pulled down the bathhouse, God gave us back the water."

Chapter LXXXI

The well which was filled with water when a picture of abba THEODOSIUS was lowered into it.

These same fathers told us the following story:

There is a woman of the faith in the Apamaean region who dug a well not so long ago. It cost her quite a lot of money, requiring a lot of labour, but when it had been dug to a great depth and no water was found, she was very upset and distressed because of all the labour and expense. However a woman appeared to this worried woman in her dreams, saying, "Send to Scopulus and get a

picture of abba Theodosius. Through him God will provide your water." The next day the woman sent two men to get a picture of the holy man. When it was lowered into the well, the water immediately began to flow so that the well was soon half full. They gave us some of this same water to drink, and we drank and glorified God.

Chapter LXXXII

The life of JOHN, an old man of the monastery of Scopulus.

We were able to meet with John, an old man in this same monastery. The fathers of the place told us that he was a very great Christian, a terrible foe of demons. He was able to cure immediately anyone who came to him possessed of an evil spirit.

Chapter LXXXIII

More about JOHN

The fathers of the place also told us the following:

About twenty-four miles away from the monastery there is an industrial complex (emporium) on a promontory called Narrow. A certain sea captain worked here and built a ship of about two hundred and seventy thousand litres cubic capacity [thirty thousand modii, corn measures or pecks, about 2 gallons each]. With a large team of workmen (he employed about three hundred of them) he tried for two weeks to launch the ship but could not get it to move anywhere near the sea, for it had been bewitched by some very evil people. The captain was in great anguish and despair and did not know what to do. But by the providence of God, John was travelling in these parts. The captain saw him, and recognised him as a holy man.

"Pray for this ship, abba," he begged, "we can't launch it because of magic arts."

"Go home and prepare a meal for me," the old man said, "and God will come to your aid." But he was only saying this in order to get the captain home.

As soon as he had gone the old man went alone to the ship, prostrated himself three times, prayed to God and made the sign of the cross over the ship three times in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then he went to the captain's home.

"Go back to your ship and launch it into the sea," he said.

The captain believed the old man's word. He went back with just a few people to help drag it, and the ship was soon launched into the sea.

Chapter LXXXIV

The life and death of an ANCHORITE, a servant of God in the same monastery.

The fathers of this same monastery also told us this story:

There was an anchorite in these mountains, greatly beloved of God, who led a solitary life for many years. Without anyone being aware of it he died in a narrow little cave; we all thought he had gone to another part of the desert. But he appeared one night in a dream to our present good father, abba Julian, best of pastors.

"Take some people with you," he said, "and come and bring me back from the place where I am lying in Mount Cervus."

So our father took some of us with him up the mountain he had named. We searched for several hours but could not find the anchorite's remains, for the entrance of the cave was hidden at that time by snow and brushwood.

"Let us go down again, my sons", said our superior, when we were unable to find the anchorite. We were just about to go when, behold, a goat appeared and stopped a little way away from us, and then began to dig in the earth with its hoofs.

"Believe me, my sons," he said, when he saw the goat, "this is where the servant of God is buried." So we dug and found his body incorrupt, which we took down to the monastery and buried with honour.

Chapter LXXXV

How wheat in this same monastery was spoiled by germination when almsgiving was stopped.

Another tale they told us:

It was the custom on Maundy Thursday for all the orphans and poor people of the district to come here and receive half a pint (medium sextertium) of wheat, thirteen pieces of blessed bread, a pint of wine, and half a pint of honey. Three years ago there was a great shortage of wheat. In this district you could only buy twelve pints of it for one unit of currency (numisma).

During Lent some of the fathers approached the abbot.

"Let's not give the customary wheat to the poor, father," they said, "lest the monastery suffers, for wheat is in such short supply."

"Let us not break with the blessing of our father Theodosius," the abbot replied, "Look, this is the old man's mandate. It ill behoves us to transgress it. Surely he himself will look after us."

But the brothers persisted in their opinion.

"He will not be able to make up for what we might be able to give, " they said.

The abbot was very sad but allowed them to do what they wanted. So the usual blessings did not take place that Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Later, the person in charge of the storehouse opened the doors and found that all the wheat in it had germinated, so that we had to throw it into the sea.

"He who brings to naught the wishes of our father," said the abbot, "must suffer the consequences, and reap the reward of disobedience. We would have given away fifty pecks, pleased our father Theodosius by our obedience, and given some help to our brothers among the poor. As it is, we have lost about a thousand pecks of wheat. What have we gained, my sons? How much harm have we done to ourselves? We have done two things wrong. First, we ignored the mandates of our father; second, we have trusted not in God but in our storehouse. Let us learn from this, brothers, that it is God who rules the whole human race, and also that our holy father Theodosius cares unseen for us his sons."

Chapter LXXXVI

Another ANCHORITE from the same monastery, who died immediately after receiving holy Communion

Abba Egiarius told us this story:

I left Aega after the solemnity when the winter had become a bit more severe, and came to the monastery of Scopulus. This is what happened when I was there. There was an anchorite living a solitary life in those parts who used to come on Sundays to receive the sacred mysteries. Only once did he cause scandal when for five weeks he stayed away, not coming to the monastery as was his usual custom, which distressed the brothers of the monastery very much. But on the Sunday when I was there, he did turn up. The brothers of the monastery were glad to see him, prostrated themselves and asked pardon, as he likewise prostrated himself and asked pardon of them, so restoring charity all round. Then when the anchorite had received the body and blood of our

Lord Jesus Christ he went to the middle of the church and fell down dead, even though he had previously shown no sign of any illness. The fathers of the monastery realised that the anchorite had foreseen the day of his death, which is why he had come so that he might pass to the Lord having nothing against anyone.

Chapter LXXXVII

How the body of the anchorite JOHN, called the Humble, was found

We visited a certain village six miles from Rosus where two old men who were not monks (saeculares) gave us hospitality in a church which they had founded themselves. This village was at the foot of a mountain. In the church they showed us a marble monument which read: 'Christians, a great anchorite lies in this monument.'

"Do you know where he comes from?" we asked them.

"Seven years ago," they said, "all of us who live in this village noticed a light on the top of the mountain like a burning fire, and we wondered who could have lit it. After observing this for several days we went up there one day but could find no traces of any fire - no fire, and no sign of anything having been burnt. But the following night we saw the fire again. For three months we kept on seeing it. At last one night we took some of the villagers, armed in case of wild beasts, and went up the mountain to where the light appeared, and stayed near it until daylight. When morning had fully come, we could see a small cave in the place where we had seen the light. We went in, and found an anchorite, dead. He was wearing cilicium and pallium (tunic and mantle) and held a silver cross in his hands. We also found a parchment with this written on it: I AM JOHN THE HUMBLE, DIED ON THE DAY OF THE FIFTEENTH INDICTION, by which we calculated that he had been dead for seven years, though his body was as whole as if he had just died that day. We brought him down to the church and buried him with honour.

Chapter LXXXVIII

The life of abba THOMAS apocrisarius of the coenobium of Apamia and the miracle of his dead body.

When we visited Theopolis, one of the presbyters of that church told us about abba Thomas, who was the apocrisarius (business manager, bursar, cellarer) of

the coenobium in Apamia. This old man came once on business to Theopolis, and after staying there for a while, he died in Daphne, in the church of St Euphemia. The clergy there buried him as a stranger in the strangers' burial ground, and the next day they buried a woman whom they put on top of him. This was about the second hour; but at the sixth hour the earth threw her up. The caretakers of the place were astonished when they saw what had happened, but towards evening reburied her in the same grave. Next day they found her on top of the grave, so they took the body and put in another tomb. A few days later they buried another woman on top of abba Thomas, the clerics of that place not being aware that Thomas would not allow anyone to be buried on top of him. And again, the earth threw her up. At last they realised that the old man would not allow a woman to be buried on top of him, and they went and reported this to the Lord patriarch. He arranged that the whole city should go to Daphne with candles, and carry the remains of the old man into the city while singing psalms. They put the body of this holy man in the cemetery where the bodies of many of the martyrs had been laid and built a small oratory over him.

Chapter LXXXIX

The body of a holy ANCHORITE found on Mount Amanus

While we were at Theopolis, one of the fathers told us that one day he had had to go over Mt Amanus, where he came across a cave. He went in and found an anchorite on bended knees, with his hands stretched up in the air, and his hair reaching down to the floor. Thinking he was alive, he prostrated himself in front of him.

"Pray for me, father," he said. Getting no reply he got up and went a bit closer, to greet him and embrace him, but as soon as he touched him he realised he was dead. He left him and went out, and had not gone very far before he saw another cave. He went in and found an old man there.

"Welcome, brother," said this old man. "Did you go into the other cave?"

"I did indeed," he replied.

"You didn't take anything away from there?"

"No".

"It is absolutely true, brother, that it is fifteen years since he died, and he looks as if he had been dead no longer than hour."

The old man made a prayer for him, and the visitor went on his way glorifying

God.

Chapter XC

The death of two ANCHORITES on Mount Phterigius.

There were two anchorites on Mount Phterigius above Rosus near the river Piape, not far from the monastery of Theopolis in Scopulus. One of these was an old man, the other was a young man, the elder's disciple. The old man died and his disciple prayed and buried him on the mountain. After a few days, the disciple went down the mountain to where there was some habitation and found a man working in a field.

"Do me a kindness, brother," said the disciple, "bring your spade and hoe and come with me."

The farm worker followed him immediately, and when they got up the mountain the disciple showed him the old man's grave.

"Dig here," he said.

When he had dug a grave the disciple stood in prayer and embraced the man "Pray for me, brother," he said, and went down into the grave where he stretched himself out on the body of the old man and immediately gave up his spirit.

The man covered the grave over again giving thanks to God. He had gone down the mountain again for no more than a stone's throw when he said to himself, "Surely I ought to ask a blessing from these holy men," but when he turned back, the grave was nowhere to be found.

Chapter XCI

The life of abba GREGORIUS the anchorite, and his disciple THALELAEUS

One of the fathers told us about abba Gregorius who went about naked in the desert for thirty-five years.

It was said about him that when he was in the mountains above the monastery of abba Theodosius in Scopulus he had a disciple who died. Not having any tools to dig the earth and bury his disciple, the old man went down the mountain to the sea, where he found a ship putting in to shore. He asked the captain and crew to go with him up the mountain to bury the brother. They willingly granted the old man's request, gathered up the necessary tools, went up the mountain and dug a grave to bury the brother in. One of the sailors

called Thalelaeus was so overcome by compunction because of the old man's virtues that he begged to be allowed to stay with him.

"You would not be able to put up with the hard labour of penitence," the old man said.

"I'm quite sure I could" (*ita sane tolerare possum*), he replied.

So he stayed with the old man for a year, working very hard at the holy exercises. At the end of the year he prostrated himself before the old man.

"Pray for me, father," he said. "Through your prayers God has taken away from me all the difficulty. I no longer get tired, I am no longer bothered by inclement weather, neither summer heat nor winter cold, but remain absolutely peaceful."

The old man gave him his blessing, and after a further two years and a half, brother Thalelaeus, foreseeing his own death, made a request to the old man.

"I beg you, take me to Jerusalem so that I can adore the holy Cross and the holy resurrection of Christ my Lord and God, for the Lord is about to take me to himself at this time."

So the old man took him with him to the holy city. They worshipped at the venerable holy places and went down to bathe in the holy Jordan. Three days afterwards brother Thalelaeus slept in the Lord and the old man buried him in the monastery of Cupatha. Abba Gregorius the anchorite died a little while after, and the fathers of that monastery buried him in the church.

Chapter XCII

The life of brother GREGORIUS of Cappadocia and how the body of PETER, a solitary of the holy Jordan, was found.

The following tale was told to us, that is to brother Sophronius Sophista and me, by our father abbot Gregorius, the archimandrite of the monastery of our holy father Theodosius, in the desert near the holy city of Christ our Lord.

I had a brother here called Gregory of Cappadocia, who worked however in Phaselus (a subsidiary cell of brothers?) Now one day when the brothers were making bread, brother Gregorius lit the fire under the oven, but having lit it could not find anything to clean it with, for the brothers had hidden the cloth by way of teasing him. So he went into the oven and cleaned it out using his own clothing, and was not in the least bit harmed by the fire. But when I heard about it, I rebuked the brothers for putting him to the test like that.

Our father abbot Gregorius also told us that once when brother Gregorius was

feeding the pigs in Phaselus, two lions came after the pigs, but he picked up a stick and drove them back to the holy Jordan.

The same father told us that when he was beginning to build the church of St Quiricus in Phaselus and digging out the foundations, he had a dream about a monk of very ascetic appearance, carrying a palm, and with a meagre robe of woven rushes draped over his shoulders (*gerens in humeris parvulum colobium de psiathio*).

"Tell me, abba Gregorius," he said in a most gentle tone of voice, "is it right that after so many labours, so much abstinence, you have left me out of the church you are building?"

"Far be it from me to do so," he replied, in deference to the voice and appearance of the man.

"But that is exactly what you have done."

"Who then are you, sir?"

"I am Peter, a solitary of the holy Jordan."

Next morning abba Gregorius hastened to dig in various places around the church until he found a body lying there identical to what he had seen in his dream. When the church was built, he put a splendid tomb in the right hand side of the church and put the body in it.

Chapter XCIII

The life of abba SISINIUS who renounced his episcopate, and his disciple.

Our father Gregorius also told us the following:

"I went once to visit abba Sisinius. He it was who renounced his episcopate for the sake of Christ and went to live a solitary life near the fortress of Bethabara, about six miles from the holy Jordan. When I got there, I knocked at the door, which after a very long time was answered by his disciple.

"The fact is," he said, "that the old man is very ill, dying. But he has prayed God that he might not die until he heard that you had arrived in this district."

"For I had been on my way to the most religious Emperor Tiberius in Constantinople, on business for the cenobium. The disciple went to tell the old man of my arrival, and returned after a long delay.

"Go in, father," he said.

"When we went in, however, we found that the old man had fallen asleep in peace. And I realised that as soon as he knew that it was I who had been knocking on the door, he had passed over to the Lord. I embraced him, and

this dead man said in a soft and gentle voice, 'Welcome, my abbot,' and again fell asleep. I made his death known locally so that they might come and bury him, and when they had come and were digging a grave, the disciple said to them:

"Do me a kindness, and make it a little wider, big enough for two.' And when the grave was dug, he lay down upon a rush mat and rested in peace. So we buried them both together, the old man and his disciple."

Chapter XCIV

The life of abba JULIANUS bishop of Bostrensis

Our father archimandrite Gregorius also told us about abba Julianus the bishop of Bostrensis.

When he left the cenobium to be made bishop of Bostrensis, some people in that city who hated the name of Christ decided to poison him. They bribed the servant who administered the wine, and gave him some poison to put in the cup when he brought it to the bishop. The servant did as he had been directed, and brought the poisoned chalice to the bishop. The holy man took it, but by divine providence realised there was treachery. He said nothing to the servant, but put the cup down in front of him and sent for all the city fathers, among whom were the ones who had instigated this treachery.

"If you thought to poison this humble Julianus," this blessed man said in a most gentle voice, not wishing to actually name those responsible, "look, I drink this poisoned cup in the presence of you all." He made the sign of the cross three times over the cup, saying "In nomine Patris et Filii, et Spiritus sancti I drink this cup." And he drank it all in the presence of them all, and was quite unharmed. When they saw this, they prostrated themselves and sought pardon.

Chapter XCV

The life of PATRICIUS, an old man of the monastery of Scopulus

There was a very old man indeed in the coenobium of our holy father Theodosius, (he said he was a hundred and thirty). He came from Sebaste, his name was Patricius and he was of a very quiet and peaceful disposition. The fathers told us that he had come from the monastery of Abazanus where he had been prior, but had relinquished that position, fearing that he was in

danger of Judgment, for he said that only great men ought to be shepherds of the sheep who had the gift of reason. He came here in order to live under obedience, judging that to be more favourable to [the salvation of] his soul.

Chapter XCV

More about the same, and also about JULIANUS, a blind Arab.

There was another old man, a blind Arab called Julianus, who at one time was scandalised by Macarius the archbishop of Jerusalem and refused to be in communion with him. Abba Julianus decided one day to send a message to abbot Simeon in the miraculous mountain (this mountain was about nine miles away from Theopolis).

"I am blind," he said, "and cannot see where I am going. I have no one to help me, but I can no longer remain in communion with Macarius. Tell me what I should do, father, about this brother who is a fornicator and that other person bound to him with an oath."

"Don't leave," abba Simeon replied to abba Julianus, "and don't separate yourself from holy Church. But take note of this, my brother, when anyone falls into heresy, there is a great old man in your coenobium called Patricius, who stays near the west wall of the church opposite the sanctuary, in last place behind everyone else, and he says that he makes a holy offering of prayer for everyone. And they do say that his prayer is very holy indeed."

Chapter XCVII

The life and death of two BROTHERS who vowed never to be separated from each other

Abba John Rutilus the anchorite said that he had heard from abba Stephen the Moabite that there were two brothers in the coenobium of the holy abba Theodosius, that great leader of monks, who vowed to each other never in life or in death to be separated from each other. They were an example to everyone in the coenobium until one of them was overwhelmed by sexual temptation.

"Let me go away, brother," he said, "for I am obsessed with thoughts of sex and cannot get rid of them. I want to return to the world."

"No, don't, I beg you," said his brother, "don't throw away the fruits of all your labour."

"Either let me go, or else you come with me, for I must satisfy my desires." But the brother did not want to part from him, so he went with him into the city. The first brother went for some entertainment with a prostitute, the other remained standing outside, pouring dust upon his head and beating his breast, until his brother had finished his evil deed and come back out of the brothel. "Just what have you gained from your sin, brother?" he asked. "What harm have you done to yourself? Let's go back to the coenobium." "I can't go back to the desert. You go back. I must stay in the world." He begged and begged with no success. His brother refused to go back with him to the desert, so they both stayed in the world together, doing manual labour for a living.

Now at this time Abba Abraham, who later became bishop of Ephesus, and who had recently built in Constantinople a monastery known as 'Abraham's', was building his own monastery, which became known as 'Byzantium'. These two runaway brothers were working on the site, labouring for the stonemasons. When they got their wages, one brother went day by day into the city and spent his money in riotous living (luxuria), the other fasted and prayed and did his work quietly without talking to anyone. When the other workmen saw him neither eating or speaking, but always as if wrapped in thought, they told the holy abba Abraham about him and the way he was carrying on. That truly great Abraham called him to his cell.

"Where do you come from, brother," he asked, "and what exactly are you up to?"

The brother told him everything from beginning to end, and why he was putting up with all this for the sake of his brother.

"Perhaps God will accept my tribulations for the salvation of my brother," he said.

"God has given you your brother's soul," said Abraham as he let him go. And as he left the cell, behold, his brother came rushing up to him.

"Brother, take me back to the desert so that I may save my soul," he said.

He immediately embraced him, and they went off to a cave near the holy Jordan, where they enclosed themselves. After a short time during which the brother who had been overcome by temptation made great strides in spirit towards God, he passed away to the Lord. The remaining brother stayed in that cave in fulfilment of his vow, until such time as he died himself.

More about the remaining brother.

After the death of his brother, an old man from the monastery of Calamon came to see him.

"Tell me, brother," he said, "In all the time of your solitary life and your spiritual exercises what did you get out of it?"

"Go away and come back in ten days, " he replied, "and I will tell you."

So the old man went away and came back in ten days only to find that the brother had passed to the Lord. But he also found a potsherd on which was scratched 'Forgive me, father, but when I was saying the opus dei and the prescribed psalms I never let my mind dwell on earthly things'.

Chapter XCIX

The life of ANTONIUS, an old man of the monastery of Scopulus.

The fathers of the monastery of our holy father Theodosius also told us the following:

"It is some years now since a certain old man called Antonius died. He gave great attention to fasting during his lifetime and lived at a distance in a place called Cotulas. One day in the desert there were some Saracens coming towards him, and one of them saw him and drew his sword meaning to kill him. When he saw the Saracen coming towards him however, he looked up to heaven and said, "Lord Jesus Christ, your will be done". And the ground immediately opened up and swallowed the Saracen, so the old man was saved and went back to the monastery glorifying God.

Chapter C.

The Life of PETER, a monk of Ponticus

The fathers of this place also told us that there was a monk from Ponticus there called Peter who was adorned with many splendid virtues. Theodore the bishop of Rosus told us that Peter one day met him at the monastery of Turrius, where he was staying at that time.

"Do me a favour, brother Theodore," he said, "come with me to Mount Sinai which I have made a vow to visit."

"All right, let's go," he said, although he did not really want to.

"Come, brother Theodore," he said, after they had crossed the Jordan, "let us

pray that neither of us will eat anything until we get to Mount Sinai."

"Truly, father, I would not be able to do that," he said. But the old man prostrated himself and prayed and did in fact eat nothing until they got to Sinai, where he first of all partook of the sacred mysteries before taking food. In the same way, as they travelled from Sinai to visit the holy Menas [assistant to the archbishop] at Alexandria the old man ate nothing. There again he communicated first before eating. From there they came back to the holy city, and the old man ate nothing on the way. In this holy place where Christ our God rose from the dead he eagerly received the most holy mysteries, and then took food. So in this long and difficult journey the old man ate only three times, once on Sinai, once in Alexandria, and once in the holy city.

Chapter CI

The Life of PARDUS, a monk of Rome

The fathers of this monastery also told us about another old man who had recently died, called Pardus, who came from Rome. When he was a young man, he had been a muleteer, and once when he had gone to Jericho with his mules, he was resting in a hostelry when one of his mules kicked a little boy and killed him while Pardus wasn't looking. Abba Pardus was terribly upset by this and went to Arnon where he became an anchorite, and kept on grieving incessantly.

"I have committed murder," he would say, " and in the day of judgment it is as a murderer that I shall be condemned."

Now there was a lion there near the river. Every day Pardus would go to the lion's den, teasing and provoking the lion, hoping that it would come out and devour him, but the lion never did him the slightest harm. The old man began to realise that he was not going to have any success.

"I shall lie down on the track which the lion takes to the river," he said to himself, "so that when he goes down to drink, he will make a meal of me."

The lion came out soon after he had lain down, and as if endowed with the gift of reason, he quite peacefully jumped over the old man and did him no harm at all. By this the old man was persuaded that God had forgiven him his sins. He came back to the monastery again and lived in great abstinence, edifying everyone by the example of his lifestyle until the day he died.

Chapter CII

The account of SOPHRONIUS SOPHISTA, of what happened to him while on a journey.

Abbot John the scholar, abbot Quiricus and several other fathers and myself were all with Sophronius one day when in response to a question he said: "I was walking along this road when a number of dancing young people formed a ring around me singing: 'Welcome, Sophronius! Sophronius is king!'"

Chapter CIII

The life and virtues of abba STRATIGIUS.

The fathers of the monastery said of abba Stratigius, who also was a father of this famous monastery of our holy father Theodosius, that he was possessed of three virtues to a greater extent than any other of the monks of our time - fasting, vigils, ceaseless striving (iuge opus)

Chapter CIV

The life of abba NONNUS, who was a presbyter

While we were in the coenobium of our holy father Theodosius, the abbot Theodosius who was bishop of Capitulias told us about abba Nonnus the presbyter.

"One night before the signal had been given for the night office I was lying in my bed when I heard a gentle voice saying, Kyrie Eleison. After this had been repeated fifty times I wanted to see who it was that was saying this. And looking through the window of my cell, I saw an old man in the church bending his knees to make prostrations. There was a star shining over his head enabling me to see that it was Nonnus."

Another of the old men in this coenobium told us the following about abba Nonnus:

"One night before the signal was given I left my cell to go to the church, and I saw the old man standing outside the church praying, with his hands stretched out to the heavens. And his fingers shone like lamps of fire. I was badly shaken, and went away."

Chapter CV

The life of the holy old man CHRISTOPHORUS, who was a Roman.

When we were in Alexandria we went to visit abba Theodore, who was at St Sophia near the Lighthouse, who told us the following story:

I first renounced the world when I was in the coenobium of our holy father Theodosius, in the desert near the holy city of Christ our God. I met there a great old man called Christophorus, who was a Roman, before whom one day I prostrated myself

"Do me a favour, father," I said, "and tell me how you went on when you were young."

After being asked again and again, the old man eventually realised that I was enquiring for the good of my own soul, and agreed to my requests.

"I was full of great zeal, my son," he said, "when I first renounced the world, and embraced the monastic life with great eagerness. During the day I took part in the regular times of psalmody, and at night went down into the cave where the holy Theodosius and the other holy fathers were accustomed to pray. I went down the eighteen steps into the cave one at a time, prostrating myself a hundred times on each one. When I got down there I stayed until the signal was given, then went to the synaxis with the fathers. I did this work for eleven years without a break, with many fasts, continence, obedience and with nothing apart from the barest essentials.

"Then one night as I was going down according to my usual custom, doing all my usual acts of reverence, I got to the floor of the cave and fell into an ecstasy, and saw the floor of the cave full of candles, some of which were lit and some not. I saw two men wearing cloaks on top of white habits tending to the candles.

"Why have you put these candles here,' I asked, preventing us from coming in to pray?"

"The candles belong to the fathers,' they said.

"Then why are some alight and some not?' I asked.

"There are some who want their candles lit and some who don't,' they said.

"Tell me, please,' I said, 'is my candle lit or not?"

"Pray, and we will light it,' they said.

"I pray constantly,' I said. 'What more can I do?"

"As I said this I came to my senses, and looking round, could see nobody.

"Christophorus,' I said to myself, 'there is much greater labour for you to do yet.'

"Next morning I left the monastery and travelled to Mount Sinai, taking nothing with me but the clothes I stood up in. I worked there for fifty years at the end of which a voice came to me:

"Christophorus, Christophorus, go back to your own coenobium where you strove so valiantly, and there you will be gathered to your fathers.'

And soon after he had told me all this, his holy soul rested in peace.

Theodore also passed on to us the following story, which abba Christophorus had told him:

"One day I went in to the holy city in order to venerate the holy cross. After I had done so and was going out, I saw a brother in the doorway of the chapel of the holy cross. I also saw two crows impudently flying around in front of his face, flapping their wings in his eyes and preventing him from going in. I knew at once that these were demons.

"Tell me, brother,' I said, 'Why are you standing in the middle of the doorway without going in?'

"Forgive me, father,' he said, 'but it's my thoughts. One of them says: go in and adore the precious cross, the other says: no, just go away make baskets, and come back to worship another day.'

"Hearing this, I took him by the hand and led him in to the chapel, and immediately the crows flew off. I got him to adore the holy Cross and the holy resurrection of Christ our God, and sent him away in peace."

The old man told me these things, said Theodore, because he saw that I was burdened with a lot of tasks to perform and neglectful of my prayer.

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Chapter CVI

The story of abba THEODORE, about the monk from Syria, who was a Severian.

Abba Theodore also told us the following:

There is a guest house here near the Lighthouse between St Sophia and St Faustus and the man in charge invited me one day to go and stay there for a few days. So I went, and found that one of the guests there was a monk from Syria who had nothing except his tunic and mantle and a few loaves of bread. He was standing in a corner, saying psalms day and night, and speaking to no one. When Sunday came I approached him.

"Come with me, brother, to St Sophia," I said, "so that you can communicate

in the holy and venerable mysteries."

"No, I am not coming," he said.

"Please, why not?"

"I am a follower of Severianus, and I don't communicate in the Church."

On being told that he would not communicate in the holy and apostolic Church, and yet being aware that he seemed to have an excellent way of life full of virtues, I went away grieving to my cell and shut the door. I prostrated myself before God for three days and prayed with many tears.

"Christ our God and Ruler," I prayed, "who of thy immense and ineffable mercy turned from heaven and came down for our salvation, who became flesh of our holy Lady, Mary ever virgin and birthgiver of our God, show me who has the right and proper belief, us who belong to the holy Church, or those who follow Severianus."

On the third day a disembodied voice came to me.

"Go, Theodore, and you will see his faith."

So next day I went and sat near him, waiting to see something to explain the meaning of what the voice had said. As God is my witness, my son, I saw a dove as black as soot as if it had flown down the chimney, dirty and bedraggled. And I realised that his faith was just like this sooty and disgusting bird that I could see.

This holy soul truly told us all this with many tears and sighs.

Chapter CVII

The life of abba GERASIMUS.

About a mile away from the Jordan there is a monastery known as abba Gerasimus' monastery. When we visited it the old men living there told us about abba Gerasimus.

One day as he was walking by the banks of the Jordan he met a lion in the way, roaring loudly. He was holding in the air one swollen paw covered in bloody matter, caused by a sharp sliver of reed embedded in it. When the lion saw the old man he stood still and held out the wounded paw with the reed in it, as if weeping and asking to be cured. When the old man realised the plight the lion was in he took the lion's paw, probed the wound and drew out the reed along with a quantity of pus, carefully cleaned the wound and bandaged it and sent the lion on his way. But when the lion realised he had been cured, he refused to desert the old man but followed him everywhere like a disciple

following a master. The old man was amazed at the gratitude which a wild beast was capable of, and looked after it from then on, feeding it on bread and soaked vegetables.

Now this monastery had an ass, which they used for carrying water from the Jordan to supply the brothers' needs. And it became the old man's custom to let the lion guard the ass while it was grazing. The lion would go with the ass down to the banks of the Jordan and watch it while it grazed. One day, however, the lion wandered off for quite a distance, just when a camel driver from Arabia came along, saw the ass, caught it and took it away with him. Finding the ass missing the lion returned to the monastery and hung his head, obviously grief-stricken, before abba. Gerasimus, who thought that the lion must have eaten the ass.

"Where is the ass?" he said.

But the lion, just as human being might do, looked away and said nothing.

"Well the Lord be blessed if you haven't eaten it!" said the abba. "So everything that the ass used to do you will have to do from now on."

So the lion henceforth had to carry a harness containing four amphorae in which he carried water for the monastery.

One day a soldier came to the old man to ask his blessing. When he saw the lion carrying water and learned the reason for it, he took pity on the lion, and offered the old man three numismas to buy another ass for this task, so that there would be no need for the lion to do it. Soon after this transaction was completed and the lion relieved of his burden, the camel driver who had stolen the ass came back carrying wheat for sale in the holy city and he still had the ass with him. As he was crossing the Jordan he met the lion, and as soon as he had seen it he let the camels go and fled. But the lion recognised the ass, ran up to it and took the ass's halter in his mouth just as he used to do. He joyfully led the ass and three camels back to the old man, roaring loudly, because he had found the ass which was lost. So the old man who had thought that the lion had swallowed the ass now learned that the lion had suffered a great injustice. He called the lion "Jordan", and he never left the old man but continued to live in the monastery with the brothers for more than five years. In the providence of God the lion was not in the monastery when the old man passed to the Lord and was buried. But a little while after the lion came into the monastery and abba Sabbatius, Gerasimus' disciple, noticed the lion looking for the old man.

"Jordan," said Sabbatius, "our father has left us both orphans and passed to

the Lord. Try and get used to it, and come and take some food."

But the lion would not eat, and kept on looking about this way and that way, searching for the old man, roaring loudly, unable to bear the old man's absence. Abba Sabbatius and the other old men stroked his neck and told him over and over again that the old man had passed to the Lord and had left us, but whatever they said they were unable to lessen his grief or his roaring. The more they tried to cherish and console him by their words, the greater his grief, the louder he roared and lamented, showing in his voice, his face and his eyes his distress at not seeing the old man.

"Come with me, seeing that you don't believe us," said abba Sabbatius to him at last, "and I will show you where our old man has been laid." So he led the lion to where the old man was buried, about five paces outside the church.

"This is where our old man is buried," said abba Sabbatius to the lion, as he stood above abba Gerasimus' grave. And Abba Sabbatius prostrated himself over the old man's grave. The lion understood what was said to him, and when he saw abba Sabbatius prostrate on the grave, weeping, he too lay down, striking head forcefully on the ground and roaring. And suddenly, there he died, on the old man's grave.

Now all this happened not that a lion should be thought to have a rational soul, but because God wishes those who glorify him to do so not only in this life but also after death, and to show us what kind of dependence the beasts had upon the first man, before he was disobedient to the command and was expelled from the paradise of delights.

Chapter CVIII

The life of a PRESBYTER, who was a virgin, and also his WIFE, a virgin likewise.

In the island of Samus, there is a coenobium known as Charixenus' monastery, and there we met the prior, abba Isodore, a man of great virtue, of great charity towards everyone, notable for his simplicity and humility, who we know was made bishop of that region a little later. This is what he told us: About eight miles from the city there is a village with a church, in which there is a rather wonderful presbyter. In spite of his protests, his parents compelled him to take a wife, although he did not want to. He was still a young man and legitimately married to a wife, but not only did he refrain from the enticing delights of passion, but also persuaded his wife to live chastely and modestly.

They both learned the psalter by heart, and sang the psalms together in the church, keeping their virginity to the end.

One day a false accusation was made to the bishop against this presbyter, and the bishop, who was unaware of his way of life, had him taken out of the village into the prison in which clerics who had erred were locked up and given remedial treatment. On the first Sunday on which he was in prison a most beautiful youth appeared to him.

"Come, sir presbyter," said the youth, "go into the church and offer the holy oblation."

"I can't. I'm locked up," he replied.

"I will unlock the prison. Come, follow me."

And he unlocked the doors and went out in front of him. Once they were out, he walked to the village, a mile distant.

When daylight came, the governor of the prison went to see his prisoner, and when he saw he wasn't there he ran to the bishop.

"The presbyter has escaped," he said, "even though the key has never left my possession."

The bishop guessed where he might have fled to, sent one of his servants off.

"Go and see if the presbyter has gone back to his own village," he said. "But don't speak to him for the time being."

The servant went off and found that the presbyter was in the church offering the holy oblation. He went back to the bishop and told him that that was where the presbyter was, and that he was making the offering. The bishop became more and more angry and swore that next day he would deprive the presbyter of his office in total disgrace.

But the following night the same figure appeared to the presbyter as before.

"Come," he said, "let us go back to the place in the city where the bishop locked you up."

And he took the presbyter with him and led him back to be locked up in the prison, without the governor being aware of it. The next day the bishop learned from the governor that the presbyter had come back into custody without his knowledge. The bishop sent and enquired from the presbyter how it was that he had got out of the prison and got back in again without the governor being aware of it.

"A very beautiful and well dressed young man," he said, "on the staff of your episcopate, so he said, opened the doors for me and walked before me for the mile to my village early on the Sunday morning, and came to bring me back

the night after."

The bishop summoned all his staff, but the presbyter recognised none of them. Then the bishop knew that it was an angel of God who had done all this, so that the virtue of the presbyter should no longer be hidden, but that all should learn from it and glorify God who glorifies those who glorify him. Greatly edified, the bishop let him go in peace, but with many harsh words for those who had accused him unjustly.

Chapter CIX

The life of abba GEORGIUS, who never became agitated.

Abba Theodosius, a gentle and humble man who was bishop of Capitoliadis, was a disciple of abba Georgius, one of the fathers of the monastery of abba Theodosius. Theodosius watched him for the space of twelve years to see whether Georgius would ever become agitated about anything, but he never once saw him at all upset, no matter how much in all that time there was any idleness, negligence, decadence or disobedience going on.

"For who governed his eyes," he said, "like our holy father Georgius? Or who closed the doorways of his ears like this blessed man? Who bridled his tongue like this father of ours? What shining light ever illuminated the earth as our father lit up the hearts of us all?"

Chapter CX

The sayings of a certain outstanding holy OLD MAN, an Egyptian.

My friend Sophronius and I went to a monastery eighteen miles from Alexandria to see a man of great virtue, an Egyptian.

"Give us a word, father," I said, "by which we may live, for my friend Sophronius has a desire to renounce the world."

"You do well, my son," he said, "to renounce the world and save your soul. So remain in the cell you have chosen, soberly and watchfully, keeping silent and restful, and praying without ceasing. Continue to hope in God, my sons, that he will send you the knowledge of himself which may illuminate your souls." Again he said: "Flee from human company, my sons, if you wish to be saved. People today never cease trying to manipulate others, and to go around every possible city and region in order to gather for themselves the rewards of avarice and empty fame, and fill their souls with vanity."

Again he said: "Let us flee now, my sons, for the time is drawing near."

Again he said: "Alas, alas, how much we weep, how much we do penance, for the fact that we are not willing to repent!"

Again he said: "When we are praised we don't know how to accept it with humility, when we are reviled, we can't put up with it. Something happens to make us feel pleased with ourselves, something else fills us with misery, but you never gain any lasting good from either self-congratulation or misery.

Again he said: "Our great and wonderful fathers gave nourishment to many; I am unable to take care of a single sheep, but am subject to the bites of wild beasts."

Again he said: "This is how the demons work: They tempt a soul into sin, then cast him into despair in order to destroy him utterly. They are forever saying to the soul. 'When you are dead, won't your name perish forever?' But if you keep your soul in sobriety, you will on the contrary cry out, saying, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' (Psalms 118.17). This greatly provokes the demons and they cry out, 'Flee into the mountains like a sparrow' (Psalms 11.1), but our reply to this is, 'But he is my God, my Saviour and my defence, therefore I shall not be moved' (Psalms 62.6)"

Again he said: "Be the doorkeeper of your own heart, forbidding entry to strange thoughts. Always ask, 'Are you one of ours or do you belong to the enemy?'"

Chapter CXI

The deeds of a certain BALD MAN, dressed in sackings

When my friend Sophronius and I were in Alexandria, we were going one day to the church of Theodosius when we met a bald man in the village, dressed in a sack coming down to his knees. He gave the appearance of being stupid or mentally lacking.

"Give me some money," abba Sophronius said to me, "and we will test the virtue of this man coming towards us."

So I offered him five nummi which he took and gave to this simpleton, who took it saying nothing. As we followed him discreetly, he turned off from the road and lifted up to heaven his right hand holding the money. He then prostrated himself before God, put the money down on the ground and went his way.

Chapter CXII

The life and death of LEO, a Cappadocian monk.

When that man of faith, Tiberius Caesar, was emperor, we went up to Oasis, where we met a monk called Leo, a man of Cappadocia highly versed in divine matters. Many people had told us many admirable things about him. And certainly, after we had had some intimate conversation with him and experienced the holiness of this great man, we were wonderfully edified, especially by his humility and silence, the meagreness of his possessions and the charity which he showed towards everyone.

But this venerable old man used to say, "Believe me, my sons, I have the power to be a king (regnare habeo)."

"No, you believe us, abba Leo," we would say, "no one from Cappadocia has ever become a king. This thought of yours is out of order."

"It is true, my sons," he repeated, "that I do have the power to be a king." And no one could move him from this position.

Now during the invasion of the Mazices, after they had plundered and laid waste the whole province, they arrived at Oasis, killed some of the monks and took most of them captive. Among them were abba Johannes (he was lector of the great church of Constantinople), abba Eustathius of Rome, and abba Theodorus of Cilicia. The three of them were rather infirm.

"If you take me to the city," said abba Johannes to the barbarians, after they had bound him, "I will ensure that the bishop will give you twenty-four numismas for us."

They agreed, and one of the barbarians led him to the city so that he could see the bishop. Abba Leo and several other fathers were in the city, and for that reason had not been attacked. So Johannes went in to the bishop and asked for the ransom of twenty-four numismas, but the bishop found that he could not scrape together more than eight. He offered these eight to the barbarian, but he would not accept them.

"Either you give me the twenty-four numismas or I keep the monk," he said. So they had no option but to hand abba Johannes, weeping and sighing, back to the barbarian, who took him back to the camp.

But after three days abba Leo took the eight numismas and went out to the desert place where the barbarians were.

"Why don't you take me, along with these eight numismas," he said, "and let these three men go. They are very frail and would not get very far through the

desert. It would kill them, and you would have gained nothing. Whereas I am perfectly healthy and would be able to give you service."

And the barbarians agreed to take Leo and the eight numismas and to let the three men go. Abba Leo went with them to their own place, and when he got to be past the age of being able to serve them, they beheaded him. And so abba Leo fulfilled the Scripture, 'Greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for his friends' (John 15.13). Then at last we understood what he had meant when he said, "regnare habeo", for indeed, he who lays down his life for his friends does indeed reign as a king.

Chapter CXIII

The advice of abba JOHANNES DE PETRA.

I took my companion Sophronius with me to abba Johannes of Petra.

"Speak a word to us, " we asked him.

"Love stripping yourself of all possessions," he said, "and love self-control. Believe me when I tell you that when I was a young man in Scete, one of the old men was suffering from his spleen, so four of the monasteries in that place were asked if they could supply a little bit of vinegar, but none of them had any. That was what their poverty, asceticism and self-control was like (paupertas, nuditas et continentia).

Chapter CXIV

The life of abba DANIEL of Egypt.

A holy man told us the following about abba Daniel of Egypt.

This old man went up to Therenutis once to sell his work, where a young man made him a request.

"For the Love of God, sir (senior)," he said, "come to my house and pray for my wife who is sterile."

The old man agreed to his request, went home with him and prayed over his wife. By the will of God the woman conceived, and there were those who did not fear God who began to spread scandalous rumours about him.

"It was the husband who was the infertile one," they said. "The woman was impregnated by that old man."

This rumour came to the ears of the old man, and he wrote a letter to the husband.

"Let me know when your wife gives birth," he wrote.

So when the woman gave birth, the young man sent word to the old man, saying, "God and your prayers, father, have caused my wife to give birth."

So abba Daniel went to visit the young man.

"Prepare a meal," he said, "and invite your friends and relations."

When they had all dined, the old man took the baby into his arms.

"Who is your father, my child?" he asked the infant.

"This man" said the infant, pointing at the young man. And this little infant was only twenty-five days old.

Chapter CXV

The advice of abba JOHANNES of Cilicia

Abba Johannes of Cilicia, the prior of Raythum, said to the brothers:

"My sons, just as you have fled from the world, fly also from the sins of the flesh.

And again he said: "Let us imitate our fathers who lived in this place in silence and such great austerity of life."

And again he said, "Let us not pollute this place, my sons, which our fathers cleansed of demons."

And again he said, "This place is for monks, not businessmen."

And again he said, "I found some old men here who lived for seventy years in this place living on nothing but herbs and dates."

And again he said, "I have lived here seventy-six years, withstanding many evil and horrible attacks from the demons."

Chapter CXVI

The BROTHER who was falsely accused of stealing a numisma

When we were in Raythum, abba Andreas Messenius told us the following story.

When I was a young man, I went with my abbot from Raythum to Palestine where we stayed with a certain old man. This old man had one numisma which he had put down somewhere and then forgotten where he had put it, and accused me of stealing it.

"Brother Andreas has stolen my numisma," he said to the fathers of that place.

As soon as my abbot heard about this he summoned me.

"Tell me, Andreas," he said, "Did you steal the old man's numisma?"

"I'm sorry, father," I said, "but I did not."

Now I had a cloak which I went away and sold for one numisma, which I took back to the old man and prostrated myself before him.

"Forgive me, father," I said, "for Satan deceived me and I did steal your numisma" Now there was a layman standing by.

But the old man said, "Don't worry, my son. I have lost nothing."

"For the Lord's sake, father," I said, prostrating myself again, "take the numisma. Here it is. And pray for me. For Satan entered into me and I stole the coin and caused you all this trouble."

"But, my son, I have not lost anything" he said for the second time.

Then the layman, seeing that I could not understand this said, "The fact is, brother, that when I arrived here yesterday evening I found this old man weeping, and prostrating himself and asking forgiveness in great distress.

"For pity's sake," I said, whatever is the matter?"

"I have grossly slandered my brother," he said, "accusing him of stealing a numisma, but look, I have found it."

And the old man was greatly edified by the fact that even though I had not stolen the numisma, I had offered to give him another, saying that I had indeed stolen it.

Chapter CXVII

A brother possessed by a demon, healed by abba ANDREAS.

A brother possessed by a demon went to abba Simeon Stylites on his wonderful pillar begging him to pray for him and cast out the demon.

"Where do you live?" asked Simeon

"In Raythum," he replied.

"I am astonished," said the old man, "that you have gone to the enormous trouble of making this long journey to come and see me, a sinful man, when you have so many great fathers in your own monastery. Go back and ask abba Andreas to pray for you. He will cure you."

So the brother went back to Raythum, and prostrated himself before abba Andreas, as Simeon had said.

"Pray for me, father," he said.

"Abba Simeon can take the credit for any cure," said abba Andreas as he

offered a prayer. The brother was immediately cleansed and gave thanks to God.

Chapter CXVIII

The life of MENAS, a monk deacon in Raythum

Abbot Sergius of Raythum told us the story of a certain deacon brother called Menas.

Menas once had to go out on an errand but went back to secular life. We don't know what happened to him there except that he abandoned his monastic habit and became a secular. Quite some time after, he journeyed to Theopolis, and on the way back to Seleucia, he saw in the distance the monastery of the holy abba Simeon Stylites.

"I'll go and have a look at this great Simeon," he said to himself. "I've never seen him before."

As he drew near to the pillar, Abba Simeon saw him and by divine inspiration knew that he was a monk and an ordained deacon. He called his servant to him.

"Bring me some scissors," he said. And they brought them.

"Blessed be God, tonsure that man," he said, pointing out the brother from among the crowd standing around the pillar.

He was awestruck by the old man's words and seized by great fear, but he submitted to the tonsure saying nothing, aware that God had revealed to the old man who he was.

When he had been tonsured, Simeon said. "Say a prayer, deacon", which he did.

"Go back to Raythum, from where you came" Simeon then said.

"I am afraid that the fathers' frowns will be more than I can bear," he said.

"Believe me my son," said Simeon, "you need not fear. The fathers will take you back with joyful faces and grateful hearts. They will be full of joy and exaltation that you have turned again. And know this, my son, God will perform a sign in you, to convince you that his immense and ineffable goodness has forgiven you your sin."

So he went back to Raythum where the fathers welcomed him with open arms and reinstated him in his holy office. And one Sunday while he was administering the holy and life-giving blood of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, suddenly one of his eyes went blind. And the fathers knew by

this sign that God had pardoned his sin, according to the word of the great Simeon.

Chapter CXIX

A demon dressed as a monk visits the cell of a certain old man in Raythum.

When we visited abba Eusebius, a presbyter of the monastery of Raythum, he told us of how a demon dressed as a monk knocked on the door of an old man's cell.

"Offer a prayer," said the old man when he opened the door.

"Now and always and unto the ages of ages, Amen," said the demon.

"Offer a prayer," the old man repeated.

"Now and always and unto the ages of ages, Amen," the demon said again.

"Offer a prayer and say, 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages, Amen.'"

As soon as the old man had said this, the demon vanished as if driven back by fire.

Chapter CXX

Three MONKS, found dead by Pharanite fishermen

Fishermen from Pharan told us the following story.

One day we crossed the Red Sea to Buchrin, and after we had caught some fish we turned back and came to Pereleus. We wanted to cross over to Raythum, but were held up for ninety days by contrary winds and stormy seas. Walking about in the great desert, however, we found the bodies of three anchorites under a rock, dressed in tunics and with their sheepskin cloaks placed nearby. We gathered them up and took them to the ship and immediately the sea calmed and the contrary winds became favourable. We crossed over with a following wind and came to Raythum where the fathers buried them with the ancient fathers.

Chapter CXXI

The life and death of GREGORIUS, of Byzantium and of GREGORIUS of Pharan, his disciple.

The fathers of this place told us about Gregorius of Byzantium and his

disciple Gregorius of Pharan, who lived on an island in the Red Sea. The island had no water supply, but they carried water for their use from the mainland. They had a raft which they went out in to get water. One day they left the raft in the sea moored to a large stone, and at night time a huge wave broke the rope and the raft was lost. These fathers were left without any means of getting water. Eight months later some monks from Raythum came and found them both dead. And on the wall of their inner chamber were found written the following words: ABBA GREGORIUS OF PHARAN DIED HAVING GONE TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS WITHOUT WATER. I HAVE GONE THIRTY-SEVEN DAYS WITHOUT DRINKING. We found that both their bodies were incorrupt, and took them to be buried in Raythum.

Chapter CXXII

Two monks who came naked into church for Communion, unnoticed by anyone except abba STEPHEN.

When we visited abba Stephen the Cappadocian in Mount Sinai he told us the following story:

Some years ago when I was in Raythum I was in Church on Maundy Thursday, and after the offering of the sacred oblation with all the fathers present, I saw two anchorites come in. They were naked, but none of the fathers noticed their nakedness except me. When they had received the body and blood of the Lord, they went out of the church and were about to go away. I went out as well, however, and prostrated myself before them.

"Do me a kindness," I said, "and take me with you," so they knew that I had seen them naked.

"No, stay where you are and be at peace," they said.

I begged them once more to take me with them.

"You can't come with us, " they said, "stay where you are. The place where you are is a good place."

But they did say a prayer with me, and then as I watched they walked on the water of the Red Sea and crossed over to the other side.

Chapter CXXIII

The life of abba ZOZIMUS, of Cilicia.

We travelled to where abba Zozimus was staying on Mount Sinai. He it was

who had renounced the episcopate and retired to his cell. He was a man of great abstinence, and he told us this story:

When I was a young man, I left Sinai and went to Ammoniacca with the intention of staying there, and I found an old man dressed in a monastic tunic (colobium de sibino). As soon as he saw me and before I could greet him he said, "Why have you come here Zozimus? You can't stay here. Go away."

"Please tell me, father," I said, realising that he knew me, and prostrating myself, "How is it that you know who I am?"

"Two days ago a man appeared to me and said, 'Look, a monk called Zozimus is about to visit you. Don't let him stay with you. It is my will to entrust the church of Babylon in Egypt to him.'"

The old man fell silent and left me, walking off about a stone's throw. He spent the next two hours in prayer then came back to me and kissed me on the cheek.

"Beloved son," he said, "you are very welcome, for God has led you here in order to commit my body to the earth."

"How many years have you been here, abba?" I asked.

"I have completed forty-five years." And his countenance appeared to me as if lit up by fire. "Peace be with you, my son, and pray for me."

And saying this he gathered himself together and fell asleep. I dug a grave and buried him, and two days later I departed, glorifying God.

Chapter CXXIV

Another story of this man.

This old man also told us the following :

About twenty years ago I took my disciple Johannes with me to Porphyrites, intending to settle there. Having arrived, we found two anchorites there and stayed near them. One of them called Paul was from Galatia, the other called Theodorus was from Malta and had been at the monastery of abbot Euthymius. They both wore clothing made from oxhide (ex pellibus bubalorum). I stayed there for nearly two years; we were all about four hundred metres (duobus stadiis) apart from each other. One day my disciple John sat down on a serpent which stung him so that he died, with blood pouring out of him profusely. In great anguish I went to the anchorites, who saw me coming, in great agitation and affliction. They called out to me before I had said anything to them at all;

"What's the matter, abba Zozimus?" they said, "Is your brother dead?"

"He is indeed dead", I said.

They came with me and saw where he was lying on the ground.

"Don't be so sad, abba Zozimus," they said. "Divine help is at hand."

They called out to the brother. "Brother Johannes, arise, your old man has need of you."

And immediately the brother got up from the earth. They carried out a search for the beast, and when they had found it they broke it in two.

"Abba Zozimus," they then said to me, "Go back to Sinai, for the Lord wishes to entrust the church of Babylon to your care."

We went back immediately. A few days after we had got back, the abbot sent me and two others to serve (under the patriarch of) Alexandria. The most blessed Apollinaris of Alexandria made all three of us bishops, one to Heliopolis, one to Leontopoleos, and me to Babylon.

Chapter CXXV

The lovely deed of abba SERGIUS the anchorite.

One of the fathers at Sinai told us about abba Sergius the anchorite.

When he was at Sinai, he was put in charge of the burdones (beasts of burden). On a journey one day they suddenly saw a lion on the pathway.

Drivers and beasts (burdonarii burdonesque) took fright and fled. But abba Sergius took a eulogia (?sacred text) from his wallet and offered it to the lion "Accept this eulogia of the fathers," he said, "and go back so that we can proceed."

The lion took the eulogia and departed.

Chapter CXXVI

The splendid response of abba ORENTUS of Mount Sinai.

The holy fathers of that place told us about abba Orentus, who came in to church one Sunday wearing a coarse woollen cloak inside out, so that outwardly it presented a most ugly sight. As he stood in choir some of the officials (dispensatores) approached him.

"Why have you come into church with your cloak inside out," they said to him, "shaming us in front of the strangers who are with us?"

"You have turned Sinai inside out," he replied, "without anyone saying

anything to you, and yet you are asking me why I have turned my cloak inside out. Get away with you, put right what you have turned inside out and I will put right what I have turned inside out."

Chapter CXXVII

The life of abba GEORGIUS of holy Mount Sinai and of an OLD WOMAN from Phrygian Galatia.

Amma (abbatissa) Damiana, a solitary, the mother of Athenogenus, the bishop of Petra, told us about a certain abbot in the holy Mount Sinai called Georgius, a man of great virtue and abstinence. One Holy Saturday this Georgius as he sat in his cell, conceived a great desire to celebrate Easter Day in the holy city, and to receive the holy mysteries in the church of the holy Resurrection of Christ our God. He spent the whole day turning this thought over in his prayers. When the evening was well advanced, his disciple came to him.

"Father," he said, "give the word for us to go to the synaxis."

"You go," said the old man, "and when it is time for holy Communion come and tell me and then I'll come."

But when it came time for holy Communion in the church of the holy Resurrection, he found himself there near the blessed archbishop Peter, who gave him holy Communion along with the other presbyters. The Archbishop noticed him and turned to Menas, his syncellus or assistant.

"When did the abbot of Mount Sinai arrive?" he asked.

"I didn't notice him throughout all the time of your prayers. I have only just seen him now."

"Go and tell him not to go away. I would like him to come and take food with me."

And he took this message to the old man.

"God's will be done," said Georgius.

When the service came to an end, he worshipped at the holy shrine and found himself back in his cell. And his disciple was knocking on the door saying,

"Come and receive Communion, father." So the old man went into the church with his disciple and once more received the holy mysteries

Meanwhile Peter the archbishop was saddened that he had not been obeyed, and when the solemnities were over, he sent a message to abba Photinus, the bishop of Pharan and to the fathers of Sinai that Georgius should be sent to him. When the messenger had arrived and delivered the letter, the old man

sent to the patriarch three presbyters, that great man, abba Stephen of Cappadocia, whom we have mentioned above, abbot Zozimus whom we have also mentioned, and Dulcitius of Rome. They carried a letter from the old man:

"Far be it from me, my most holy lord, to hold your Angel (i.e. 'messenger') in contempt, but your beatitude should know that in six months time both you and I will pass over to Christ our Lord and God, and then I shall give you all due veneration."

The presbyters also told him that it was very many years since he was last in Palestine. They also brought a letter from the bishop of Pharan who likewise confirmed that for nearly seventy years he had not been away from Sinai. The holy and most gentle Peter then summoned all the bishops and clerics who had been there as witnesses, who said:

"We all saw him and greeted him with a holy kiss."

After six months were up, the old man and the patriarch both rested in peace, just as the old man had prophesied.

Here is another story amma Damiana told us:

One Good Friday, before I was enclosed (as an anchoress), I went to (the church of) Saints Cosmas and Damian and spent the whole night there. Late during the night, an old woman from Phrygian Galatia came in and gave everyone in the church two small coins (minuta). This was at the time when a niece of mine, and of the most faithful Emperor Mauritius, had come to pray in the holy city and had stayed there for the whole year, and I had taken her with me to Saints Cosmas and Damian, so that we were in church together.

"Look," I said, "here comes this old woman who gives everyone two small coins." (For she had often given them to me.) "Don't be proud. Take them."

"Must I accept hand-outs?" she said indignantly.

"Just take them. She is a holy woman of great virtue. She fasts all week, and whatever profit is left over from her work, she distributes to those in church. She is an eighty-year-old widow. So take the two coins and give them to someone else, so long as you don't spurn this old woman's sacrificial offering."

As we were talking together, the old woman came by, giving out the coins. She gave them to me without saying anything, but as she gave them to my niece she said, "Take these and buy food."

After she had gone, we realised that God had revealed to her that I had told

my niece to accept the coins and give them to the poor. So she sent one of her servants out to buy some lupini (?small buns) with the two coins and ate them. And she took God to witness that they tasted as sweet as homey, so that she was amazed and glorified God who gives such graces to his servants.

Chapter CXXVIII

The life of ADELPHIUS bishop of Arabessus, and blessed JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

We went to visit abba Athanasius in the monastery of our holy father Saba. He told us that he had heard the following story being told by Athenogenus, the bishop of Petra, the son of amma Damiana:

My aunt (avia mea) Joanna had a brother called Adelphius, bishop of Arabessus. She herself was abbess of a monastery of women. This bishop went out one day to visit his sister in her monastery. As he went in to the courtyard (atrium) of the monastery, he saw a sister possessed of a demon lying on the pavement. The bishop called out to his sister:

"Doesn't it worry you that this sister is being troubled and besmirched like this? You surely must know that as abbess you have authority over all your sisters?"

"What can I do against a demon?" she replied.

"What do you think you have been doing all these years?" replied the bishop, who then made a prayer and cleansed that sister of the demon.

Athanasius also passed on to us this story just as bishop Adelphius' venerable sister Joanna had told it.

When the most holy bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, was exiled to Cucusum, he came to stay in our house, which was the means of giving us a great trust in God and love for him.

"When the most blessed John died in exile," my brother Adelphius said, "I was incredibly sad that such a great man, famous throughout the world, a shining light of the Church of God, should die in exile from his throne. So I begged God with many tears to reveal to me his present state, whether he had been numbered among the patriarchs. I prayed for a long time and was carried up into an ecstasy, and I saw a magnificent man holding out his hand to me and leading me into a most glorious and illustrious place where he showed me all the doctors of the church. I looked around everywhere, to see if I could

find him whom I sought, my greatly beloved John. But after showing me all of them and identifying each one by name, he led me outside, still holding me by the hand. I followed him sadly, because I had not seen blessed John among the fathers and leaders of the Church. But as I was going out the doorkeeper stopped me.

"What is the matter? Why are you sad?" he said. 'Nobody who ever comes in here goes out sad.'

"The cause of my sadness,' I said, 'is that I did not see my beloved bishop John of Constantinople among all the other doctors.'

"Do you mean John chief among penitents?"

"Yes, him.'

"Nobody alive in the flesh can see him. For he is right there by the throne of the Lord."

Chapter CXXIX

The life of a STYLITE

Abba Athanasius also told us that he had heard abba Athenogenus, the bishop of Petra, talking about a certain Stylite who lived in his region. Everyone who came to him had to speak to him from below as he had no ladder. If any brother ever said to him that he wanted to reveal his secret thoughts he would tell them in a gentle voice to come to the step of the column and he would go to a different place on the column where they could converse with each other, though the Stylite was always above and the brother below. But nobody else who was there was able to hear what they were saying.

Abba Athenogenus also said that there were two lay people very close to each other who were in the habit of visiting the Stylite together over many years. Neither of them ever went without the other. But it so happened one day that one of them came by himself without the other's knowledge. He knocked at the Stylite's door for many hours, but the old man would not open to him, so that eventually he gave up and went away. On his way back he met his friend who was also on his way to see the Stylite, so they joined up again and came back together. But when they knocked at the door the old man ordered that the one who had come last should go in alone. He went in, and asked the old man to let his companion in too. But the old man said that he was not able to receive him. For quite some time he refused all his pleading and perseverance, but said at last; "It is God who has turned him away. That is why I cannot

receive him." And he died two days after they had returned home.

Chapter CXXX

The teachings of ATHANASIUS and his wonderful vision

Abba Athanasius said: "Our fathers practised continence and poverty and detachment from all things up to the time of their death. But we have stuffed our stomachs and moneybags full."

He also said: "Our fathers made it their business to avoid distractions to the soul. But in our days we have them aplenty, as well as our manual work"

Abba Athanasius also told us this about himself:

"I was wondering once about what was worth striving for and what was not. And I went into an ecstasy, and someone came to me and told me to follow him. He led me into a place full of light and glory and set me in front of a doorway, the like of which it is beyond my power to describe, for we could hear inside a countless multitude praising God. We knocked on the door and someone inside heard us and called out:

"What do you want?"

"We want to come in,' said my guide.

"No one who lives carelessly can enter here. But if you want to come in, go back and strive to be able to count all the vanities of the earth as nothing worth."

Chapter CXXXI

The life of abba ZACHAEUS of holy Sion

Procopius, a learned man (scholasticus) from Porphyrites, told us about abba Zachaeus:

My two sons fell ill in Caesarea, where there was a widespread epidemic. I was very worried about my sons that they might die, and I did not know what to do.

"Even if I send for them," I said to myself, "and bring them back here, it is still not possible to escape the wrath of God. But if I leave them there, they may die and I shan't see them again."

Unable to make up my mind I said, "I will go to abba Zachaeus and do what he says."

So I went to holy Sion, which is where he had always lived, but could not find

him. I went into the courtyard of (the church of) holy Mary the birthgiver of God, and found him standing in a corner of the courtyard, where I told him about my sons. He heard me out, and then turning to the East he lifted up his eyes to heaven, saying nothing for the next two hours, until at last he turned towards me.

"Have faith and don't worry," he said, "Your sons will not die from this disease."

And it turned out as the old man said. As I have said, it was Procopius, a learned man, who told us this.

Chapter CXXXII

More of the same.

We visited abba Cyprian, nicknamed Cuculas, whose monastery was outside the gate of Caesarea, and this is what he told us:

When that savage and horrible epidemic laid waste this city, I shut myself up in my cell and prayed to God to have mercy on us and turn away the threat of his wrath, and there came a voice to me saying, "Abba Zacchaeus is the mediator of this grace."

Chapter CXXXIII

A holy MONK who rendered a Saracen hunter immobile for two days.

One of the heathen Saracens living in Clysmus told us the following story: I once went to abba Antony's mountain with the intention of hunting him down and I saw from afar this monk sitting on the side of the mountain, holding a book and reading from it. I went up towards him, intending to strike him down, perhaps even to kill him. When I got near to him he held out his right hand towards me and said, "Stop!" And for two days and two nights I stayed there unable to move from the place where I was.

"For the sake of the God whom you worship," I said at last, "let me go."

"Go in peace," he said, and at last I was able to move from the place where I was.

Chapter CXXXIV

The life of THEODORE the anchorite.

There was an anchorite near the holy Jordan called Theodore. One day he came to my cell.

"Can you do me a kindness, abba John?" he asked. "I wonder if you could find a book for me containing the whole of the New Testament."

After a search I found out that abba Petrus had one, he who was afterwards bishop of Chalcedon. I went to see him and he showed it to me. It was on parchment, (in membranis), very beautiful.

"How much is it worth?" I asked.

"Three numismata," he replied. "Are you wanting to buy it? Or is it for someone else?"

"In actual fact, (crede mihi), father, it is an anchorite who wants it."

"If it is an anchorite who wants it, let him have it for nothing. And take these three numismata as well. If he is pleased with the book let him keep it, but if not, well, you have three numismata. Buy something else for him, whatever you like."

So I took the book to the anchorite who accepted it and went off back to the desert. After about two months he came back to my cell.

"Look, abba, John," he said, "I am very troubled in my mind about having this book without paying for it."

"Don't worry about it," I said. "Abba Petrus has plenty of money and he is a very kind man. Just be glad for it."

"No, I can't rest until I have paid for it."

"Have you got the money to pay for it?"

"No, but lend me something to wear." For he was naked.

So I gave him a tunic and cloak, and he went off to get work on the reservoir that Johannes the patriarch of Jerusalem was constructing in Sigma, where he earned a wage of nine minuta a day. He used to come to me in the monastery of the Aeliotēs, where after having worked all day he ate only nine lupini. Eventually out of his wage of nine minuta he saved up three numismata.

"Take the money, and the book, back to its owner," he said. "Give him the money if he is willing to take it, but if not, give him back the book."

I carried this message back to abba Petrus, who did not want to accept either the money or the book. But I persuaded him to take the money, lest he be seen to despise the anchorite's hard work.

In the end he did accept it, and I hastened to return the book to the anchorite who went back to the desert with great joy.

Chapter CXXXV

Five VIRGINS who decided to leave the monastery and were attacked by a demon.

My brother Sophronius and I visited the monastery of the Eunuchs near the holy Jordan where Abba Nicholas, a presbyter of that monastery, told us the following:

In my region (he was from Lycia), there is a monastery of about forty virgins. Five of the virgins in this monastery agreed among themselves to get out of the monastery one night and get themselves a man. So they agreed on a night, and when all the nuns were asleep they got dressed and went out. Immediately all five were attacked by a demon. They went no further out of the monastery but confessed their sin and gave thanks to God, saying, "Thanks be to God, the giver of all good gifts, who allowed this attack on us lest our souls perish."

Chapter CXXXVI

The kindness of abba SISINIUS, towards a Saracen woman.

Abbot Johannes, a presbyter, of that same monastery related to us what abba Sisinius had told us about himself.

One day I was singing Terce in my cave near the holy Jordan, when a Saracen woman came into the cave, placed herself near me and began taking her clothes off. I did not allow that to disturb me, but went on to finish my psalmody in all peacefulness and the fear of God.

"Sit down so that I can talk to you," I then said to her, "and then I shall do what you decide."

Once she had sat down I continued speaking to her.

"Are you a Christian or a gentile?" I asked.

"Christian," she said.

"And don't you know that those who fornicate will be punished?"

"Yes, I know full well."

"Well, why do it then?"

"Because I'm hungry."

"Don't commit fornication," I said, "Come to me every day, and as God provides, I will give you food."

From then on she came to me daily and for as long as I stayed at that place I

shared with her whatever food God sent me.

Chapter CXXXVII

Abbot Johannes' story about abba CALLINICUS.

This same abbot Johannes told us this story:

When I was a young man, I had a great desire to visit the most well known and greatest of the fathers, so that they might bless me and instruct me. Once I had heard about that great abba Callinicus who was enclosed in the monastery of abba Saba, I asked one of the brothers who knew him to introduce me to him. Once we had got there somebody was standing at the old man's window talking with him for what seemed like hours, so that I was beginning to think he would never see me and that he would not want to see me anyway. But at last he moved away and allowed me to go up and greet the old man and be blessed by him.

"Pray for this your servant also, father," said my companion, "for he is among the finest of those who come here."

"I know him already, my son," said the old man, for twenty days ago as I was going down to the holy Jordan he met me on the way asking me to pray for him.

"And what is your name?" I asked him.

"Johannes," he said.

"That's how I know him."

So by this I knew that at the very moment when I had been making up my mind to go and see him, God had revealed my name to him and who I was.

Chapter CXXXVIII

Abba SERGIUS, the anchorite, and the foreign monk who was baptised.

This same old man told us the following story:

When abba Sergius was in Roban, after he had left Sinai, he sent a young monk to us at this monastery for us to baptise him. I asked how it was that only now he was to be baptised, and Abba Sergius' servant said: "At the time when abba Sergius came to us wanting to stay with us in the desert, he sent this young man to us to be prepared for becoming a monk. I questioned him closely lest he commit himself to this way of life in too much of a hurry and without due testing. But when I was satisfied of his commitment, I took him to

the old man. When he saw him, before anything could be said, he took me aside:

"What does this brother want?" he asked

"He wants to stay with us."

"Take it from me, brother, he is not baptised. Take him to the monastery of the Eunuchs and get him baptised in the holy Jordan."

Astonished at what he had said, I questioned the brother about who he was and where he came from. He said he came from the West, his parents were pagans, and he did not know whether he had been baptised or not. So then we instructed him in the catechism, got him baptised in the Jordan, and he remained in the monastery, giving thanks to God.

Chapter CXXXIX

The prediction abba Sergius made about GRE- GORIUS, the prior of the monastery of Pharan

Abba Sergius the anchorite had a disciple called Sergius Armenius who told us that abba Gregorius had asked him again and again to introduce him to the old man. So there came a day when he did take Gregorius to meet the old man, who lived near the Dead Sea. As soon as abba Sergius saw him he greeted him warmly, brought water and washed his feet, spent the whole day talking to him about the spiritual development of the soul, and did not let him go until the next day.

"Do you know, father," I said after Gregorius had gone, "I am scandalised that I have brought great numbers of bishops, presbyters and other people to you, but you have never washed the feet of any of them except abba Gregorius."

"My son," he said, "What abba Gregorius had done I know not, but what I do know is that today I saw a patriarch coming into my cave, for I saw him wearing the pallium and carrying the book of the Gospels."

This came true, for six years later we witnessed abba Gregorius, by the providence of God, being made patriarch of Theopolis as the old man had predicted.

Chapter CXL

The life of that same GREGORIUS, patriarch of Theopolis.

One of the old men said of this patriarch Gregorius of Theopolis that of all his

virtues the greatest were almsgiving, forgetfulness of injuries, and the gift of tears. He had the greatest compassion for sinners. And we often had proof of these things.

Chapter CXLI

The wise reply of abba OLYMPIUS.

A brother once came to abba Olympius in the monastery of abba Gerasimus near the Jordan.

"Abba," he said, "How do you manage to put up with excessive heat and all these insects as you sit in your cave?"

"My son," he replied, "I suffer these now, so that I may be delivered from future torment. I suffer from the insects now, that I may avoid the worm that does not die. I endure this heat now in fear of the punishment of eternal fire. For these things are temporal, those are eternal."

Chapter CXLII

Another wise reply, from abba ALEXANDER

There was another brother who came to abba Alexander, the superior of the monastery of abba Gerasimus.

"Abba," he said, "I want to leave this place where I live, for I am weighed down with depression (acedia) and weariness of mind."

"That, my brother," said abba Alexander, "is a sign that you do not keep either the kingdom of heaven or the torments of eternity in the forefront of your mind. If you were thinking earnestly of these things in your cell you would not be experiencing any depression."

Chapter CXLIII

The life of DAVID, the robber chief, after he became a monk.

When we were in the city of Antioe in the Thebaid, we visited the sage Phibanon, who, much to our benefit, told us about a certain robber called David. He had robbed a great number of people in the region of Hermopolis, many of whom he killed; his crimes were without number. There was no one who could be compared to him for the cruelty of his deed; he was the most famous of all.

One day as he returned with about thirty of his companions from committing his robberies, he suddenly became conscience stricken for the wickednesses he had committed, and leaving his companions he went to a monastery and knocked at the door.

"What do you want?" asked the doorkeeper.

"I want to be a monk," said the robber chief.

The doorkeeper went in and told the abbot, who came out and noticed that the robber chief was already fairly well advanced in age.

"You could not live here," said the abbot, "for the brothers have to put up with very hard work and severe abstinence. You have been used to a very different way of life and would hardly be able to endure the privations of a monastery."

"Just take me in, so that I can do all those things."

"You would not be able to put up with it," said the abbot, persisting in his refusal.

"You should know that I am David, the robber chief, and I have come hither to do penance for my sins. But if you don't accept me, I swear by him who dwells in heaven that I will go back to my former way of life, gather together my companions and come and kill the lot of you, and destroy this monastery." This threat was enough to make the abbot take him in, tonsure him and give him the habit. This novice then began to fight the spiritual battle like a veteran, and outshone everyone else in the monastery by his abstinence and obedience and the practice of humility. All the monks, of whom there were about seventy, admired him and looked to him as an example of holiness and every kind of virtue.

Then one day as he sat in his cell, an angel of the Lord was sent to him.

"David, David," said the angel, "God has wiped out your sins, and from now on you will be a miracle worker."

"I can hardly believe," he replied, "that God in such a short time can have forgiven all my sins which are greater and more in number than the sands of the sea."

"The priest Zechariah did not believe me either," said the angel, "when I promised he would have a son (Luke 1.18), and I did not spare him but bound his tongue to teach him not to be sceptical about what I was saying to him. Nor shall I spare you. From now on you will be dumb." David prostrated himself on the ground.

"I spoke when I was in the world," he said, "doing my wicked deeds and spilling human blood, but now I only want to serve God and offer him praise,

so will you then bind my tongue so that I cannot speak?"

"You will speak in fulfilling the prescribed psalmody," said the angel, "but other than that you will be dumb."

And so it came to pass. God did many signs through him. He could speak to sing the psalms, but not a word could he say at any other time.

The man who told us this affirmed that he had seen this man, and he glorified God.

Chapter CXLIV

The teachings of one of the OLD MEN who were in the Cells.

This is what one of the old brothers in the Cells said:

Let us not hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt subjecting us to the pernicious tyranny of Pharaoh.

Again he said: Would that people put as much effort into seeking what is best as they do into following the ways of evil. They eagerly frequent public stage-shows and frivolous pornographic displays; they become avaricious, boastful and dishonourable. Would that they would channel that effort into seeking after righteousness. We should never be forgetful of the high regard God has for us and what power we have over the demons.

Again the old man said: There is nothing greater than God, nothing equal to him, and nothing which is not infinitely smaller. So what can be more powerful or blessed than having God as our helper?

Again he said: God is everywhere, and hastens to the help of those who are striving in devotion and spiritual warfare. He does not honour those who merely profess to be holy, but those who prove it by what they do. If God is there how can anyone be betrayed or come to any harm?

Again he said: The strength of a person does not come naturally, but lies in the pursuit of perfection and the help of God. Let us take good care of our souls, my sons, as much as we do our bodies.

Once more the old man spoke: Let us bind to ourselves the remedies for the soul – devotion, justice, humility, submission. Christ our God, the great healer of souls, is at hand and wills our cure. So let us not neglect or despise him.

Once more he spoke: God wishes us to be sober and frugal. But we wretches have allowed ourselves to be led astray into amusements and pleasures.

Again the old man said: Let us commend ourselves to God, as St Paul said, as those who are alive from the dead (Romans 6.13), not looking to the past, but

forgetting what has gone before and pressing towards the mark for the prize of our high calling (Phil.3.13-14)

"Why is it that I am always passing judgment on my brothers?" one of the brothers asked the old man.

"It is because you do not know your own self," he replied. "If you knew yourself you would be blind to the vices of your brothers."

Chapter CXLV

The life of the blessed GENNADIUS, the patriarch of Constantinople and of his lector, Charisius.

We went to the cenobium called Salama, nine miles distant from Alexandria, and met two old presbyters there who told us that they were presbyters of the church of Constantinople. They told us about the blessed Gennadius, patriarch of Constantinople who was of a most gentle nature, pure of body, very abstemious.

They told us how he had been greatly troubled by a scandalous cleric called Charisius whom he summoned to an interview in an attempt to get him to amend his ways. But the man gave no signs of any improvement, so he ordered him to be whipped, as the paternal care of the church required.

Neither admonishment nor whipping, however, produced any change for the better. (He indulged in magical practices and even in murder.)

Now Charisius was a lector in the church of the holy martyr Eleutherius, so the bishop called upon an apocrisarius (one who had the power of discernment of spirits) to pray to the blessed martyr, saying, "Holy Eleutherius of God, your servant Charisius is a great sinner. Either reform him or else kill him."

The apocrisarius went in to the oratory, stood before the altar, and stretched out his hands towards the martyr's tomb.

"Patriarch Gennadius brings a message to you, Eleutherius, O holy martyr of Christ, through me a sinner, that your servant has committed many sins. Either reform him or else kill him."

Next day Charisius that worker of wickedness was indeed found to be dead, and all were astonished and glorified God.

Chapter CXLVI

The vision of EULOGIUS, the patriarch of Alexandria

While we were in this same coenobium abbot Menas, the father of the monastery, talked to us about Eulogius the holy patriarch of Alexandria: One night when he was celebrating matins and lauds in the Episcopal oratory, he noticed Julianus the archdeacon standing near him. He was annoyed at this sight, because Julianus had dared to come in without having been announced, but he said nothing. The psalms finished, he prostrated himself on the floor, and as he did this the person who appeared to be Julianus did the same. After the prayer Eulogius got up, but Julianus remained lying on the floor. The bishop turned towards him.

"Why don't you get up?" he asked.

"Unless you give me a hand to lift me up", was the reply, "I can't do it."

Eulogius stretched out his hand out to help him up and continued with the psalmody. But as he turned round a little while later he saw no one there. So when matins and lauds were over he called for his chaplain (cubicularius).

"Why didn't you tell me the archdeacon was coming in? He came in to me this night without being announced"

But the chaplain said that he had not seen anyone at all coming in. The patriarch did not believe him

"Call the doorkeeper," he said, and the doorkeeper arrived.

"Didn't Julianus the archdeacon come in here?" he asked. The doorkeeper swore that no one had either come in or out, and the bishop could say no more.

When morning was come the archdeacon came up to pray.

"Why don't you keep to the rules, archdeacon Julianus," said the bishop. "You came in here last night without being announced."

"For Heaven's sake (per orationes domini mei)," said the archdeacon, "I did not come up here last night, nor have I left my house at all apart from just now."

Then the great Eulogius realised that the person he had seen was Julianus the holy martyr, urging him to repair his shrine which for a long time had been neglected, falling apart, and almost becoming a ruin. And for the love which he had for the martyr, Eulogius speedily stretched out his hand and rebuilt the shrine, dedicating it anew, and furnishing it with all kinds of decorations, as befitted the shrine of a sacred martyr.

Chapter CXLVII

The vision of EULOGIUS, the patriarch of Alexandria about Leo, Roman

Pope

Abbot Menas, the father of the monastery, told us that he had heard abbot Eulogius the patriarch of Alexandria telling the following story:

When I went to Constantinople, I enjoyed the fellowship of Sir (dominus) Gregory, the archdeacon of Rome, an exceptionally great man, who told me a story about the most holy and blessed Leo, Roman Pontifex. He said that it had been recorded in the Roman church that when Leo had written to the holy Flavianus, the bishop of Constantinople, his letter against the heretics Eutyches and Nestor, he had placed it on the tomb of Peter the prince of apostles, accompanied by prayers and vigils and fasts.

"If I have all too humanly written with insufficient care or even missed anything out," he prayed to the chief of the apostles, "do you correct it, for to you was given this see and this church by our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

After forty days the Apostle appeared to him as he prayed.

"I have read, and made corrections," he said.

He took the letter from the tomb of the blessed Peter, opened it, and found it corrected by the apostle's own hand.

Chapter CXLVIII

The vision of Theodorus bishop of Darna concerning the most blessed LEO.

Theodorus the most holy bishop of the city of Darna in Libya told us the following:

When I was chaplain to the holy pope Eulogius, I saw in a dream a man of most worshipful appearance and aristocratic demeanour.

"Announce my arrival to the holy pope Eulogius," he said.

"Who is it who is asking to be announced?" I said.

"I am Leo, the Roman pontifex," he said.

So I went in and announced him.

"The most holy and blessed pope Leo, who occupies the see of Rome, wishes to speak with you."

On hearing this, pope Eulogius got up and ran quickly to meet him. They greeted each other, said the prayers and sat down.

"Do you know why I have come to see you?" the divine and exalted Leo said to the holy Eulogius.

"No"

"I have come to thank you for the magnificently orthodox (rite) reply you wrote to my brother Flavianus, the patriarch of Constantinople. You have enlarged upon the meaning of my own declaration, and brought to naught the prayers of the heretics. Be well assured, brother, that you have given your divine labours and studies not only to me, but even to Peter the supreme chief of the apostles, and also to him who above all others is of the truth, Christ our God."

I witnessed this vision not once only but twice and thrice. This threefold apparition reassured me and I ran to tell the holy pope Eulogius about it.

When he had heard it he wept and lifted up his hands to heaven

"I give you thanks, Christ our God and master," He said, "for that you have seen fit to let me be a herald of your truth, unworthy though I am, and in your most high and ineffable kindness, through the prayers of your servants Peter and Leo, you have stooped to accept the two mites of my own modest and insignificant endeavours."

Chapter CXLIX

The most astonishing story which Amos the Patriarch of Jerusalem related about LEO, the Roman pontifex.

When abbot Ammos went down to Jerusalem and was made patriarch, all the fathers of the desert monasteries went down to pay their respects (adorare) to him, among whom were my abbot and I. This is what he had to say to us:

"Pray for me, my fathers, for a great and heavy burden is laid upon me. The dignity of this priesthood fills me with terror above measure. Peter and Paul and their like may well be able to rule over rational souls, but I am but a miserable sinner. More than anything else I fear the burden of my ordination, for I have found it written that the blessed and angelic Pope Leo, who presided over the Roman Church, kept up a vigil of prayer for forty days at the tomb of the apostle Peter, beseeching him to intercede before God for his sins to be forgiven. At the end of the forty days the apostle Peter appeared to him.

"'I have prayed for you,' he said, 'and all your sins are forgiven, except for what pertains to your sacred office. This alone you will be required to answer for, whether you have done well or perchance done otherwise.'"

Chapter CL

The life and holiness of the BISHOP of the town of Rumellum

This is what abbot Theodorus of Rome told us:

Far from the city of Rome there is a small town called Rumellum, and in this little town there was a bishop of great virtue and merit. One day certain citizens of that town went to the blessed Agapetus, pastor of Rome, with an accusation against their bishop of using the sacred vessels to dine from.

Although this was all he had to go on, the Pontifex was aghast, and sent two of his clerics to arrest the bishop and walk him back to Rome, where he was immediately imprisoned. The third day of his imprisonment was a Sunday.

And when the Pope was still in bed as Sunday was dawning, he saw in a dream someone standing in front of him.

"On this Sunday it is not for you to offer the saving Sacrifice, nor for any other of the bishops in this city except for that one bishop that you have put in prison. I desire that he should make the offering today."

The Pope awoke, and wondered doubtfully about the vision he had seen.

"Such terrible accusations I have listened to about him, and he to make the offering?"

A second time, the voice of the vision came to him.

"I have told you, the bishop in your prison is the only one who may make the offering."

He still hesitated, until the message was repeated for a third time. The Pontifex hastily stirred himself into action, summoned the bishop before him and interrogated him.

"What sort of a man are you?" he asked

"I am a sinner," he replied and would not say any more. The Pope could see that he could not be persuaded to say anything else.

"Today you must make the offering," he said.

So the bishop stood in front of the holy altar, with the Pope beside him and the deacons standing about them, and began the holy solemnity of the Mass. And when he came to the prayer of oblation he did not finish it, but began it again a second time, then a third, and then a fourth. Everyone by this time had become very unhappy about the delay.

"What is this all about?" said the Pontifex. "You have said the prayer for the fourth time without getting to the end of it."

"Forgive me, holy father," replied the bishop. "But I have not discerned the usual descent of the Holy Spirit, which is why I have not completed the

prayer. But let that deacon standing nearby carrying the fan be removed. I have no authority to remove him myself."

The divine Agapetus commanded the deacon to go, and immediately both bishop and Pope discerned that the holy Spirit had come. And the canopy over the altar came down of its own accord and hid from view the Pope, the bishop, and all the deacons around the holy altar for the space of about three hours. By this miracle the venerable Agapetus then recognised the holiness of this bishop, and regretted the suffering he had caused him because of what he now knew to have been a false calumny. From then onwards he determined never to act hastily on any accusation, but to proceed to a mature and considered judgment after great deliberation.

Chapter CLI

The story which abba John of Persia told about the blessed Pope GREGORY bishop of the city of Rome.

We visited abba John of Persia who told us the following story about the great and blessed Gregory, bishop of Rome:

I went to Rome in order to worship at the tomb of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and I was standing one day in the middle of the city when I heard that Pope Gregory was about to come by that way, so I determined to reverence him. As the Pope came towards me he saw that I was coming forward to reverence him, and as God is my witness, brothers, he prostrated himself on the ground before me, and would not get up till he saw that I had got up first. Then he greeted me with great humility and gave me three numismata with his own hand, bidding me to give them wherever I thought necessary. So I glorified God who had given this man such humility and pity and charity towards all.

Chapter CLII

The life and sayings of MARCELLUS of Scete, abbot of the monastery of Monidion.

We visited abbot Marcellus of Scete in his monastery of Monidion, where this man of authority (senior), wishing to be of benefit to us, told us the following: When I lived in my own country (he was from Apamia), there was a charioteer there called Phileremus. On the day when he had been beaten, his

supporters turned against him.

"Phileremus does not win the crown in this city!" they chanted.

Later on I came to Scete [the desert of the monks] and whenever I was tempted to go back to my own country and town I said to myself: "Phileremus does not win the crown in this city!" And thanks be to God this thought kept me there for thirty years, until such time as the barbarians came and laid Scete to waste, taking me prisoner and selling me in Pentapolis.

Abbot Marcellus also told us the following story about himself, as if he were talking about some other old man in Scete:

One night he got up as usual in order to sing psalms and he had scarcely begun when he was disturbed by a piercing sound like a trumpet of war.

"Where is this trumpet sound coming from, making such a terrible noise?" he said to himself. "There are no soldiers here, and we are far from the field of battle."

And as he turned these questions over in his mind, he heard the voice of a demon standing near him.

"Oh yes, there is war," it said. "So if you don't want to fight and do battle, go back to sleep and you won't be attacked."

Again the old man said:

"Believe me, my sons, there is nothing like perpetual meditation on the psalms to turn the demons and Satan, the author of their perdition, against us, or to upset, annoy, irritate, wound, cast down and dishearten them. The whole of Scripture is for our benefit and is a serious annoyance to the demons, but no part of it as much as the psalms. For if one section of the people is singing the praises of the Emperor, those who are not joining in do not get upset about it. But if they turn to insulting and threatening behaviour against those who don't join in, then they should expect retaliation. Similarly, the demons do not get as upset by other parts of Scripture as they do by the psalms. For when we meditate on the psalms, we partly pray for ourselves as we praise God, and partly we hurl curses at the demons. That is, we are praying for ourselves, when we say, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, after your great goodness, and according to the multitude of your mercies wipe out my offences' (Psalm 51.1); or again, 'Cast me not away from your sight, and do not take your holy spirit away from me'; or again, 'Cast me not away in my old age; when my powers are failing, do not abandon me' (Psalm 71.19). But we are harassing the demons when we say 'Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered, and let those that hate him flee before his face' (Psalm 68.1); or again, 'I saw the

ungodly proud and exalted among the cedars of Lebanon; I passed by and lo, they were no more, I sought them and their place could not be found' (Psalm 37.35-36); or again, 'Let their swords enter into their own hearts'; or again, 'He opened a pit and dug it, and he is fallen into the hole he made. His mischief shall be turned upon his own head, and his iniquity shall descend upon his own crown'" (Psalm 7.15).

Again the old man said: "Believe what I am telling you, my sons: for anyone who renounces the world and takes up the monastic life there is great praise and honour and glory, for the things of the spirit (intellectualia) are greater than the things of the flesh (sensibilia). By the same token, for the monk who abandons the habit there is nothing but confusion and ignominy, even though he were to be made Emperor."

Again he said: "In the beginning man was made in the image of God, but after he fell away from God he was in the image of the beasts."

Once more he spoke: "Just as our nature is prone to disordered desires, brothers, so does the purposeful yoke of abstinence tame them."

Again the old man said: "Make proof of the good life by experience, without any fear of that being invalid."

Once more he spoke: "Don't be surprised that although you are human you are capable of becoming an Angel. Glory on a par with the Angels is set before us, even as we are promised nothing but agony as we strive towards it."

Again the old man said: "Nothing draws monks towards friendship with God like the beauty and truth of chastity, which is pleasing to God, as the holy and divine Spirit testifies through the blessed Paul. Chastity encourages you to persevere with integrity in waiting ever upon the Lord without distraction." (1 Cor. 7.35)

Again he said: "My sons, let us leave marriage and the procreation of children to those who are intent upon the things of the earth and desire what the present offers without a thought of the future life. They do not strive to acquire eternal goods and cannot tear themselves away from temporal and transient things."

Again he said: "Let us make haste to take flight from a carnal way of life, just as carnal Israel took flight from the slavery of Egypt."

Once more he spoke: "We have the most beautiful and pre-eminent gifts of God set before us, my brothers, in exchange for the harmful pleasures of the world."

Again the old man said: "Let us flee from avarice the mother of all evil."

Chapter CLIII

The reply of a MONK of the monastery of Raythum to his brother in the world.

There were two brothers living in the world in Constantinople, very religious, and very strict in fasting. One of them renounced the world, went to Raythum and became a monk. After a while the other brother came to Raythum to pay his monastic brother a visit. In the course of his stay he saw this brother taking food at the ninth hour.

"Brother," he said, scandalised, "when you were in the world you never ate before sunset."

"Quite so," the monk replied, "but when I was in the world my ears fed me, for I gained enormous nourishment from the vain praise and glory given me by men, which made the labour of fasting easier to bear."

Chapter CLIV

The life of THEODORE, a secular man, but a man of God.

Abbot Jordan, the solitary, said that with two other anchorites he had visited abba Nicholas near the river Betasimus (between holy Elpidium and the monastery known as the Strangers, where he lived in a cave). We found that there was a secular with him. We were asking abba Nicholas about how to save our souls, but he turned to the secular:

"You say something to us on that subject," he said.

"What could I say that would be of any benefit to you?" he said. "I wish that I could even say something of benefit to myself."

"Nevertheless, say something," the old man said.

"For twenty-two years I have never eaten before sunset, except on Saturdays and Sundays," he said. "I used to work in the household of a very rich, wicked and avaricious man. I was with him for fifteen years, working night and day, for a pittance which he did not part with willingly. Through all those years he bullied me mercilessly. But I said to myself, 'Theodore, if you put up with this man for the wages he is paying you, he will be preparing you for the kingdom of heaven. Moreover I have kept my body pure from women to this very day.' Hearing this, we were greatly edified.

Chapter CLV

The story of abbot JORDAN about the three Saracens who killed each other,

Abbot Jordan also passed on to us the following story which abba Nicholas had told him:

During the time of the most faithful emperor Mauritius, Namanes, the leader of the Saracen people, was going about plundering in the area where I was, near Arnon and Aidon. I happened to see three Saracens who had with them an extremely handsome youth of about twenty years, whom they had taken prisoner and bound. When this young man saw me he began to weep and begged me to rescue him from them, so I did beg the Saracens to release him.

"We are not going to release him," one of the Saracens replied in Greek.

"Take me and let him go," I said, "for he is not able to endure this affliction."

"We are not going to release him," he repeated.

"Will you not take a ransom for him?" I asked, making a third attempt. "Give him to me, and I will pay you whatever you ask."

"We can't give him to you, for we have promised our priest that we would give him anyone we found of outstanding beauty, to be offered up in sacrifice. Now go away, for if you hinder us for much longer your head will roll on the ground."

So then I prostrated myself on the ground.

"Christ our God and Saviour save your servant," I prayed.

And immediately the three Saracens were possessed by devils, and they drew their swords and killed each other. I took the young man with me to my cave and comforted him. He refused to leave me, but renounced the world and lived with me for seven years in the monastic habit, until he fell asleep.

Chapter CLVI

The reply of a certain OLD MAN to two philosophers.

Two philosophers once came to an old man and asked him for some edifying conversation, but the old man said nothing.

"Haven't you got anything to say to us, father?" they asked.

"I know that you are enthusiastic about fine words," he replied, "But I say that you philosophers are not enthusiastic about truth. How long will it take you to learn to speak as if you did not know how to speak? What your philosophy needs is to meditate perpetually on death and to become accustomed to silence and stillness."

Chapter CLVII

The story of two MONKS of the monastery of the Syrians in Subenorum, about the dog who showed a brother the way.

Sophronius Sophista and I went to the monastery of Calamon near the Jordan, where Alexander was the abbot, and met there two monks of the monastery of Subenorum in Syria. This is what they told us:

Ten days ago a pilgrimage organiser (?susceptor peregrinorum) arrived at Subiba Besorum, asking for alms and giving a blessing (eulogia). He made a request to the abbot of the monastery.

"It would be a great favour if you could send to the nearby monastery of the Syrians for them to come and receive the blessing, and also pass the message on to the monastery of Charembe so that they too can come."

So the abbot sent a brother to the abbot of the Syrians in Subenorum.

"Come to the monastery of Besorum," he said to the abbot, "and send a message to the monastery of Charembe, so that they can come too."

"I'm sorry, brother," said the abbot, "but I have no one I can send. Could you be so kind as to go there yourself and tell them?"

"I've never been there before," he said, "and I don't know the way."

So then the old man spoke to his little dog:

"Go with this brother to the monastery of Charembe with the message he wants to give them."

So the dog went off with the brother until they stood at the monastery door.

And those who told us this story showed us the very dog, which they still had with them.

Chapter CLVIII

The ass which served the monastery of Mardes

There is a very high mountain near the Dead Sea called Mardes, where anchorites dwelt. Their garden was about six miles away at the bottom of the mountain on the shores of the Dead Sea, so they kept a paid gardener there. Whenever they wanted to send to the garden for olives they saddled their ass and gave him a command:

"Go down to the gardener and bring back olives."

The ass immediately went down to the garden by itself, stood outside the gate

and kicked it. At once, the gardener came out and loaded it up with olives and sent it off with its burden. The ass can be seen day by day, going up and down, serving the needs of the old men alone, and paying heed to nobody else.

Chapter CLIX

The life of SOPHRONIUS, the solitary, and the teachings of MENAS, the superior of the coenobium of Severianus.

Abbot Menas, the superior of the coenobium of Severianus said that abba Sophronius, the solitary, lived naked near the Dead Sea for almost seventy years, his only food being herbs.

And he also said this about him: that he once heard him saying, "I have prayed to the Lord that the demons may not come anywhere near my cave. And I have seen them coming, standing almost three miles away, and not daring to come any closer."

Abbot Menas would also say to the brothers of the coenobium, "Let us flee from the conversation of the world, my sons, which is very dangerous for young monks."

Again the old man said: "People of every age should embrace penances, young and old alike, that they may earn the reward of enjoying eternal life with glory and praise, the young because in the flower of youth when concupiscence holds sway they have put their necks under the yoke of chastity, the old because by reason of their long life they have been able to turn an inveterate inclination to evil towards better things."

Chapter CLX

How a demon appeared to a certain OLD MAN in the shape of the blackest of boys.

Abbot Paul, the superior of the coenobium of abbot Theognotus, told us that an old man had told him the following:

I was in my cell one day, working with my hands (I was weaving a basket and repeating psalms), when I saw a little Ethiopian boy come in through the window, stop in front of me and begin doing acrobatics.

"Aren't I a great acrobat?" he asked. I kept on saying psalms and did not reply.

"Don't you find my acrobatics pleasing?" he said.

But again I did not reply.

"I suppose you think you are doing great things, you evil old man. But I'm telling you, you have been making mistakes in the sixty-fifth, sixty-sixth, and sixty-seventh psalms."

I got up and prostrated myself before God and worshipped him, and the demon vanished.

Chapter CLXI

The life of abbot ISAAC, and how a demon also appeared to him in the shape of a young man.

There is a mountain about six miles distant from Lycos, a city of the Thebaid, where some of the monks live in caves, others in cells. We went there and met abba Isaac, a Theban, who told us the following:

Fifty years ago I was making a mosquito net when I made a mistake in my work and I could not find out where it was, let alone repair it. I spent the whole day utterly defeated, unable to discover what I had done wrong. I was almost in despair, when I saw a young man come in through the window.

"You've made a mistake," he said, "but give me your work and I will put it right."

"Get out," I said. "You'll not get me to do that."

"But you will be damned if you do your work badly"

"No call for you to worry about that."

"But I am just sorry for you because your work is lost."

"Both you and he who sent you have come here with evil intent."

"No, it is you have drawn me here, and you are mine."

"What do you mean?"

"For the last three Sundays you have communicated while harbouring uncharitable thoughts towards your neighbour."

"You're lying"

"I'm not lying. You are angry with him because he is so slow (propter lentitudo). And I am the one in charge of anger and the memory of insults. So, therefore, you are mine."

At this, I left my cell immediately, went to my brother, prostrated myself before him and begged his forgiveness, whereupon we were reconciled. When I returned to my cell I found that the demon had destroyed the mosquito net completely and also the rush mat on which I prayed, so envious of our charity had he become.

Chapter CLXII

The reply of abba THEODORE of Pentapolitanus on the question of relaxing the rule of abstinence from wine.

Fifteen miles from Alexandria there is the monastery of Calamon, between the Eighteenth monastery and Maphora. Sophista Sophronius was with us and we interviewed abbot Theodore of Pentapolitanus.

"When any of us go visiting someone, father," we asked, "or when anyone comes to visit us, is it a good thing to relax the rule of abstaining from wine?"

"No" replied this senior monk.

"How is it then that the ancient fathers used to relax this rule?"

"The ancient fathers, great and strong as they were, knew how to relax and then tighten up again. For our generation, my sons, it is not safe to relax and then tighten up, for if we once relax our rule of abstinence, we would be incapable of returning to the austerity of our religious life."

Chapter CLXIII

The life of abba PAUL of Helladicus.

Abbot Alexander, father of the monastery of Calamon, told us the following; When I was with Paul of Helladicus one day in his cave, somebody knocked at the door. Paul opened the door and went out with some bread and steeped chickpeas for the visitor to eat. I supposed it was some pilgrim, but when I looked out the window I saw it was a lion.

"Why are you giving him food, father?" I asked. "What's the reason?"

"I warned him never to harm anyone, neither man nor beast, but that he should come to me daily and I would give him his food. He has been doing this for seven months now, twice a day, and I feed him."

I visited him again a few days later to buy a wine jar from him (for making them was his work)

"How are you, father," I said. "And how's the lion?"

"Not good," he said.

"How's that?"

"Yesterday he came here for his food and I saw that there was blood all over his chin. 'What's this?' I said. 'You have been disobedient and eaten flesh. God bless me! I am not going on feeding you. You are taking the fathers' food, and

all the time you are eating flesh! Away with you!' But he seemed reluctant to go. So I took a thin rope, folded it into three, and gave him three sharp blows with it, after which he did go."

Chapter CLXIV

The reply of VICTOR the solitary to the monk who was timid

A brother came to abba Victor, a solitary in the monastery of Elusa with a question

"What should I do, father, for I am troubled with timidity of mind?"

"It is a sickness of the soul. The weaker your eyes are, the greater effort you have to make to enjoy what light there is. If your eyes are healthy, less effort is needed. In just the same way, if your soul is fearful, temptations appear bigger than they really are and disturb you immoderately. But if your soul is healthy, temptations are more easily endured."

The life of a robber whose name was CYRIACUS

One of the faithful told us about a robber called Cyriacus who used to carry out his robberies round about Emmaus in Nicopolis. He was so violent and cruel that he was known as "the wolf". He had a band of robbers with him who were a mixture of Christians, Hebrews and Samaritans.

One Holy Week a group of people from the Nicopolitan district went up to the holy city to have their infant children baptised. Once the ceremony was over they were making their way back home to celebrate the holy day of Resurrection when the robbers stopped them, their leader not being with them. The men all ran away and escaped, but the robbers, all of them Hebrews and Samaritans, threw the newly baptised infants on to the ground, seized the women and raped them.

As the men fled, they met the leader of the robbers, who asked them why they were running. When they had told him what had happened, he took them with him back to his companions, where he found the infants still lying on the ground. When he had learned who was responsible for the atrocity, he cut their heads off and gave the children back to the men. (They could not take the women back for they had been defiled.) So the leader of the robbers saved the men and children and conducted them back home.

Some time later the leader of the robbers was captured and spent the next ten

years in prison. None of the magistrates ordered his execution, but eventually he was granted a pardon.

"It is due to those infants that I escaped a bitter death," he always used to say.

"For I often used to see them in my dreams saying to me: 'Don't be afraid. We will make excuses for you.'"

I spoke with him myself at a later date, as also did Johannes, the presbyter of the monastery of the Eunuchs. And he himself confirmed the story, giving glory to God.

Chapter CLXVI

The life of a ROBBER turned monk, who later, having taken back his secular clothes, was beheaded.

A story from abbot Sabbatius:

When I was in the monastery of abbot Firminus a robber arrived and spoke to abbot Zozimus Cilices.

"I am guilty of many murders," he said, "and I beg you for the love of God make me a monk, so that now at last I may give up crime."

So the old man instructed him, made him a monk and gave him the holy habit.

After a while he spoke to the robber and said:

"Believe me my son, you had better not live here, for if the governor hears about you he will have you arrested and executed. You are also at risk from any of your enemies. Take my advice and let me take you to the coenobium of abbot Dorotheus near Gaza and Maiuma." So he went, and after having been there nine years and learnt the psalter and all the details of monastic observance, he went back to the monastery of Firminus and said to abbot Zozimus:

"Take pity on me, father. Give me back my secular clothes and take back my monastic habit.

"Why my son?" he said in dismay.

"As you know, father, I have spent nine years in the coenobium, fasted according to my ability, lived chastely, and have been disciplined in silence and in the fear of God. I know that of his infinite goodness, God has forgiven me many of my sins, but I am constantly aware of a little boy standing in front of me saying: 'Why did you kill me?' I see him in my dreams, in church, when I go to Communion, and when I am in the refectory. There is never a moment when he gives me any peace. So, father, I wish to go, and give myself up to

death for this little boy. For I am guilty of having killed this little boy, for no reason, for nothing."

So he took back his secular clothes and departed. As soon as he got to Diospolis in these clothes he was arrested and executed the next day.

Chapter CLXVII

The life and death of abba POEMEN, solitary

Abbot Agathonicus, the superior of the fortified coenobium of our holy father Saba, told the following story:

I went one day to Ruba to visit abba Poemen the solitary. After I had found him and revealed to him my thoughts he left me alone in a cave. It was winter, very cold at night, and I suffered terribly from the freezing conditions. In the morning the old man greeted me.

"How has it been, my son?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, father, but I have had a dreadful night because of the cold."

"My son, I did not feel the cold at all."

This astonished me, for he was almost naked.

"Do please tell me how it is that you felt nothing of this extremely bitter cold."

"A lion came and slept near me to keep me warm. Nevertheless, I tell you, brother, that I really deserve to be devoured by wild beasts."

"Tell me why, I beg you!"

"In our home province," (for we were both from Galatia) "where I was once a shepherd, I refused to give hospitality to a passing pilgrim, and he was devoured by dogs. I could have kept him safe, but I didn't, and sent him on his way where he was torn to pieces. So I am only too aware that I ought to die the same sort of death."

And so it came to pass. Three years later he was torn to pieces by wild beasts, as he prophesied.

Chapter CLXVIII

The sayings of ALEXANDER, one of the old men.

Here is what abba Alexander said to the brothers:

"Our fathers embraced the desert and toil. We, however, prefer cities and relaxation."

Again the old man said: "In our fathers' time these were the virtues which

flourished: nakedness and humility; in us there is nothing but avarice and pride to be found."

Once more he said: "Our fathers never washed their faces, but we frequent the public baths and watering places."

Again the old man said: "Alas, my sons, we have lost the angelic way of life."

Abba Vincentius his disciple said to him, "Indeed, father, we are weak."

"Why do you say we are weak, Vincentius? Our bodies are as strong as Olympic athletes, believe me. It is our souls which are weak."

Again he said: "We are very good at eating and drinking well and also dressing well. We don't understand how to abstain or humiliate ourselves."

Once more he said: "Woe to you, Alexander, woe to you! Great will be your confusion when all the others will receive the crown of glory."

Chapter CLXIX

The life of a blind OLD MAN in the monastery of Abbot Siscus

There was an old man who was blind living in the monastery of abbot Siscus in Scete. His cell was about a mile away from the well, but he never permitted anyone to fetch his water for him. Instead, he made a rope and fixed one end of it to the well and the other to his cell. The rope lay on the ground and when he wanted water he walked along the rope. Whenever the wind stirred up the sand and buried the rope, he held it in his hand and uncovered it, and again laid it on the ground and walked along it. When one of the brothers asked the old man to let him carry the water, he replied: "My son, I have been drawing water in this way for twenty-two years, and would you now rob me of this my labour?"

Chapter CLXX

The life of a holy WOMAN, who died in the desert

From the monastery of Sampson, about twenty miles from Jerusalem, two fathers once went on pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. This is what they told us when they came back:

When we were on our way back from worshipping in the holy mountain, it happened that we took a wrong path and wandered completely alone in the desert for several days. At last, however we saw that we were walking towards a narrow cave in the distance. We could see a small pool of water, with grass

growing round it, and signs of human habitation.

"There must surely be a servant of God in this place," we said to each other. When we went in, we could not see anybody but we could hear someone crying. After a further search we found a sort of a bed with someone lying on it. We came nearer and asked this servant of God to speak to us. When we got no reply we went nearer and lifted him up, only to find that though the body was still warm the soul had departed to the Lord. So we realised that he had died the moment we entered the cave. So we dug a grave in the cave, and one of us took off the cloak he was wearing to wrap his body in. As we lifted the body out of the place, it was lying to prepare it for burial in the usual way we discovered it was a woman, and we glorified God. We said the prayers for the dead over her and buried her.

Chapter CLXXI

The life of two remarkable men, THEODORE the philosopher, and ZOILUS the lector

There were two remarkable men of great virtue in Alexandria, Theodore the philosopher, and Zoilus the lector. We were very friendly with both of them, the former because of his discipline and learning, the latter because we came from the same country and shared a similar education. Abba Theodore possessed nothing except a travelling cloak and a few books. He slept either in the lecture hall [scabellum, prop. part of the stage machinery of a theatre] or in whatever church he went into. In the end he renounced the world in the coenobium of Salcime where he lived out his life to a glorious end. Zoilus the lector showed just as much a preference for poverty. He also possessed nothing but a travelling cloak and a few books. He spent his time in copying books. When he died, he was buried in the monastery of abbot Palladius. One of the fathers went to Cosmas the scholar to question him about these two men, Theodore the philosopher and Zoilus the lector.

"Which of these two was the greater in the way he laboured in his spiritual exercises?" he asked.

"There was nothing to choose between them in the matters of food, shelter and clothing, rejection of anything superfluous, nakedness, humility and frugality. Theodore the philosopher went barefoot and was foolish enough to damage his eyesight in learning both the old and new Testaments by heart. But he had the consolation of having brothers, a following of friends who were associated

with him in working and teaching. On the other hand not only is Zoilus to be praised for his hospitality, but also worthy of commendation is his solitude, his immense capacity for work, and his custody of the tongue. But he had no following of friends and associates and no business dealings. Completely unconcerned with any worldly affairs, he allowed himself no respite or amusements, and was beholden to nobody in his personal requirements - he cooked for himself, washed his own clothes - never took pleasure in reading simply for its own sake, was always ready to accommodate himself to others, lived completely free from frivolity, sadness, extravagance of any sort, and was unmoved by any discomfort caused by the unending attentions of insects, in spite of the sparseness of his clothing. He found considerably more refreshment in the very work itself than in being idle, for he had the liberty of carrying on night and day just as he wished. For although the extent of his labours set bounds to this liberty, yet it also kept to a minimum any involvement in worldly matters, apart from the occasional business meeting. "To each one therefore his own reward, commensurate with his own labours and the measure of his resurrected life, that is, his purity of mind and spirit, his service, his fear of God, his charity, his compunction, his labouring in psalmody and prayer, and the virtues hidden to men but laid open to God."

Chapter CLXXII

The life of the aforesaid COSMAS the scholar

On the subject of this Master Cosmas the scholar, many have said one thing, others another, many more many other things. We have looked at them all and diligently assessed them, and chosen to write down only those things which make for useful reading. He was a humble man, compassionate, abstinent, virginal, quiet, equable, sociable, friend of strangers, lover of the poor. This marvellous man was an immense help to us, not only because of his character, but also his teaching and the fact that he had a greater supply of books than anyone else in Alexandria, which he freely and gladly lent to anyone who asked. He had no other possessions. In the whole of his house you could see nothing but books, a reading desk, a small couch and a table. He let everyone come in and read and ask whatever they wanted. I used to visit him every day, and it is absolutely true that I never found him doing anything except reading, or writing commentaries against the Jews. He had a great zeal for converting that nation to the truth, so that he often sent me to Hebrew people in order to

contend with them by means of his writings. He never willingly went outside his own home himself.

I went one day to this Master Cosmas the scholar, and since I had great confidence in him I asked him a question:

"Be kind to me," I said, "and tell me how long you have been pursuing this way of life."

He stayed silent, and would not reply, so I asked him again.

"Tell me, for the Lord's sake."

He still kept silence for a little while, then said:

"Thirty-three years."

And hearing this I glorified God.

I questioned him again when I visited him on another occasion.

"Do me an even greater kindness, " I said, "in the knowledge that I am only asking for the benefit of my own soul. I beg you, tell me, in all this long time you have been living in this way, how have you arrived at such quietness and continence?"

"How ever can a secular man gain any virtue at all, living always in his own home as he does?"

"Tell me, for the Lord's sake, so that I may profit from it."

At last, in the face of so much urging from me, he said:

"Forgive me, but I have been led by three things: Not to swear, not to lie, and not to mock."

Chapter CLXXIII

The wonderful deed of THEODORE the anchorite, who by his prayers turned sea water into fresh.

There was an anchorite in the Jordan district called Theodore, an eunuch, who, needing to travel to Constantinople, boarded a ship. The ship was delayed so long in the sea that the water failed, and sailors and passengers alike were in great distress and anxiety. The anchorite stood up and lifted up his hands to the God of heaven who saves our souls from death, offered a prayer and made the sign of the cross over the sea:

."Blessed be God," he said to the sailors, "Drink as much of the water as you need."

They filled all their vessels with fresh water from the sea, and all of them glorified God.

Chapter CLXXIV

The wonderful deed of a SEA CAPTAIN, a religious man, who prayed to the Lord for rain.

This is what abba Gregorius the anchorite told us.

When I boarded ship to leave Byzantium there was also a scribe and his wife on board going on pilgrimage to the holy city. The captain was a very religious man, who fasted strictly. In the course of the voyage, the servants of the scribe wasted so much water that we were very short of it, with the journey only half way through. We suffered great privation. It was a pitiable sight to see women, children and infants burning with thirst, lying around half dead. We had been suffering this for three days when the scribe decided he could put up with it no longer, and drawing his sword he made as if to kill the captain and crew.

"This suffering of ours is all their fault," he cried, "because they did not load enough water."

"No, don't do it," I begged the scribe. "Let us rather pray to Jesus Christ, our true God, who does great and marvellous things without number. Look at the captain. You can see that he has been spending his time fasting and praying these three days."

The scribe was pacified, and on the fourth day at about the sixth hour the captain stood up and cried with such a loud voice: "Glory to you, Christ our God!" that his voice filled us with wonder.

"Spread out canvas sheets," he ordered the sailors, and no sooner had they obeyed than a cloud overshadowed us and poured out such quantities of rain that there was sufficient collected to fill all our containers. It was a great and awesome miracle, for the ship sailed on with the cloud following us, and the rain falling nowhere else save on the ship.

Chapter CLXXV

The story of the Emperor ZENO, a man much given to almsgiving.

One of the fathers told us about a woman whose daughter the Emperor Zeno had grievously wronged. This woman spent a lot of time in the church of our holy Lady the birthgiver of God crying and weeping.

"Grant me a judgment against the Emperor Zeno," she would pray.

After carrying on like this for quite some time, the holy birthgiver of God appeared to her.

"Believe me, woman, I have often been minded to give you vengeance, but his generosity overrides me." For he was indeed a very compassionate man and gave many alms.

Chapter CLXXVI

The beautiful story of abba ANDREAS about ten men on a journey, among whom was a young Hebrew.

While we were in Alexandria, Andreas Octavusdecimus told us this story: As a young man I was a very undisciplined trouble-maker. Once there were nine others beside myself who were in danger of being arrested because of our rioting, so we fled to Palestine. There was one of our number who was a student (? industrius), and another who was a Jew. While passing through the desert, the Jew became mortally ill. As God's my witness we were in great distress about him and did not know what we could do for him. However as is usual among a band of confederates we did not desert him; each one of us carried him to the limit of each one's ability, hoping to get him to some city or market town rather than let him die in the desert. But lack of food and the severity of his fever, together with the devastating effect of thirst and the heat of the sun, brought his failing strength to the brink of death. We could carry him no longer, and with many tears we decided to leave him in the desert, fearing for our own death. In great distress we put him down on the sand, and when he saw that we were about to leave him he began to plead with us.

"In the name of God who made heaven and earth, the God who spreads out the heavens, who came down for the salvation of human kind, who is judge of the living and the dead, please don't let me die a Jew, but have some Christian pity for me and baptise me, so that I may pass from this life as a Christian and go to God."

"To tell you the truth," we said, "we can't do that, for we are only laymen, and that is the work for bishops and presbyters. In any case we haven't any water." But he went on appealing to us as before and tearfully pleaded anew.

"You are Christians. Don't deprive me of a share in that divinely gracious gift."

As we were wavering in great perplexity, the student was inspired by God.

""Lift him up and take his clothes off, " he said, and when with great difficulty

we had done so, he filled both his hands with sand and poured it over his head three times, saying "Theodore is Baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". And at the name of the one, holy, consubstantial and adorable Trinity we all said: "Amen". And as God is my witness, brothers, Christ our God immediately strengthened and healed him, so that not a trace of his former illness or any kind of suffering remained. Healthy and strong, he completed the rest of the journey through the desert with rosy cheeks and great energy, running on in front of us. In amazement at such a sudden change we all praised and glorified the ineffable majesty and benevolence of Christ our God.

When we got to Ascalon, we took him to the blessed and holy Dionysius, the bishop of that city and told him what had happened to our brother on the way. The holy and admirable Dionysius was astonished at being told of such a new and unheard of miracle, and called all the clergy together to tell them the whole matter and decide whether pouring of sand over this brother should be considered a true Baptism or not. Some said it ought to be because of the unheard of greatness of the miracle; others disagreed.

"No," they said, "because Gregory the Theologian has already listed the various forms which Baptism might take, saying: 'Firstly Moses baptised in water, in the cloud and in the sea. Secondly, John baptised, not as a Jewish Baptism, but with water and repentance. Thirdly Jesus baptised, but with the Holy Spirit, and that was the perfect Baptism. I also recognise a fourth - that is, in the blood of martyrdom, and a fifth, the Baptism of tears.' So much for Gregory; with which of these, therefore," they asked, "was this person baptised, that we may confirm there to have been a genuine Baptism?

Especially in view of what the Lord said to Nicodemus: 'Except you are baptised with water and the Spirit, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'" (John 3.5)

"What then?" others said. "It is not written that the apostles were baptised. Did they not enter the kingdom of God?"

"They were baptised," argued others on the contrary. "For Clement Stromateus notes in Hypotyposeon 5 that Christ is said to have baptised Peter only, but Peter baptised Andrew, and James and John, and they baptised the rest of them."

These arguments and many others having been aired, it seemed good to the blessed Dionysius to send the brother to the Jordan to be baptised there, and the student he ordained to the diaconate.

Chapter CLXXVII

The unhappy death of A MONK of Egypt who wanted to live in the cell of Evagrius the heretic

While we were staying in [the monastery of] Nonnum in Alexandria, abbot Johannes Cilix told us the following:

A monk visiting us from Egypt told us that a brother from a distant country once came to the Cells asking to live there, and prostrated himself before the presbyter, begging that he might be allowed to live in the cell of Evagrius.

"You can't live there," said the presbyter, taking a step backwards. "My son, there is a most fierce demon there who seduced Evagrius, robbed him of the true faith and filled him up with wicked teachings. He does not allow anyone to stay alive there."

"Nevertheless if I am to stay in this place," he persisted, "it is in that cell that I shall die."

The presbyter at last was persuaded.

"On your own head be it," he said. "Go, and take that cell."

The brother stayed in the cell for a week, and when Sunday came he appeared in church, much to the relief of the presbyter who was very worried about him.

On the next Sunday he did not appear in the church. When the presbyter missed him he sent two brothers to find out why he had not come. When they got to the cell they went inside and found that the brother had strangled himself with a fine rope.

Chapter CLXXVIII

The life of an OLD MAN of the coenobium of Scholars, a man of simplicity.

Abbot Gregorius, presbyter of the coenobium of Scholars, told us that there was a great old man there, extremely disciplined, who was nevertheless somewhat simple when it came to matters of faith. Whatever was being discussed, he was apt to make dreadful blunders. One day an angel of God appeared to him.

"Tell me, old man," the angel said, "When you die how do you want to be buried, like the monks of Egypt or the monks of Jerusalem?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Think about it," said the angel. "Weigh up the arguments. And in three weeks time I will come back and hear what you have to say."

The old man went to another monk and told him what the Angel had said to him. He was struck dumb at what he was told, but eventually looked hard at him and, inspired by God, asked him:

"Where do you receive the holy mysteries?"

"Wherever I can," he said.

"You must never receive Communion anywhere but in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church," he said, "where the four holy synods are accepted. That is, Nicaea, where there were three hundred and eighteen fathers, Constantinople, a hundred and fifty, first council of Ephesus, two hundred, and Chalcedon, six hundred and thirty. When the Angel comes back, tell him that you wish to be buried according to the rites of Jerusalem."

After three weeks the Angel came back

"Well, old man, have you thought?"

"Jerusalem," he said.

"Good, good," said the Angel. And immediately the old man gave up his spirit.

All this happened lest he lose the fruit of all his labours and be condemned with the heretics.

Chapter CLXXIX

The life of a HOLY WOMAN from the holy city.

We visited abba John Rutilus, the anchorite, who told us a story he had heard from John the Moabite:

There was a certain holy woman in the holy city, very religious, who walked in the will of God. The devil was envious of this virgin, and instilled in the heart of a certain young man an impure and diabolical passion for her. This wonderful virgin discerned the devil's wickedness and was troubled lest the young man lose his soul, so she took a blanket, and a few loaves [hard loaves to be prepared by steeping in water] and went to the desert, hoping not only that her departure would free the young man from his temptation and be the salvation of him, but also that she would find security in solitude and grow in merit.

A long time afterwards, lest her excellent way of life remain unknown, by the dispensation of God an anchorite saw her one day in the desert near Jordan.

"What are you doing in this desert, mother?" he asked.

"Forgive me, father," she said, wishing that he would go away, "but I seem to have lost my way. For the love of God, be so kind as to direct me."

"Believe me, mother, you haven't lost your way," he said, inspired by God to discern what she was. "You have no need of a known path. Now you know that to tell lies is of the devil, so tell me the truth about why you have come here."

"Forgive me, abba," she said, "but there was a youth who was in danger of perdition because of me, so I fled to the desert, thinking it better to die here rather than be a stumbling block to anyone, as the Apostle says (2 Cor.6.3, 1 Cor.8.9)"

"How long have you been here, then?"

"Seventeen years, by the grace of Christ."

"And how have you survived"

"See this blanket and these few loaves. They came into the desert with me, and God has shown such kindness towards me in my lowliness that they have been sufficient for me ever since, and have not grown any less. And you should know this, too, father, that God's benevolence has so protected me for these seventeen years that no man has ever seen me except you today, though I have been able to see them all."

The anchorite listened and glorified God.

Chapter CLXXX

The life of JOHANNES the anchorite, who lived in a cave near the town of Sochus

We heard about abba Johannes the anchorite from the most holy Dionysius, presbyter of the holy church of Ascalon and guardian of the sacred vessels. To illustrate how great he was in his generation, and to tell of his superlative merits in the eyes of God, he told us the following story:

The old man lived in a cave near the town of Sochus, about twenty miles from Jerusalem. He was a man greatly given to venerating the martyrs, and would travel sometimes to Ephesus for St John, sometimes to Euchaita for St Theodore, sometimes to St Thecla in Seleucia Isauria, sometimes to St Sergius in Saraphas, now to this saint, now to that.

Now he had in his cave an image of our immaculate Lady, the birthgiver of God, Mary ever virgin, carrying in her arms Jesus Christ our Lord and

Saviour, and whenever he decided to go away - whether to the empty desert, or Jerusalem to adore the holy cross and other holy places, or to pray at Mt Sinai, or to martyrs at great distances from Jerusalem - he would as an invariable rule take a candle, light it, and stand in prayer beseeching God to watch over his journey. Then fixing his gaze on the image, he would say: "Holy Lady, birthgiver of God, I am about to go on a long journey which will take many days. Do you take care of this your candle, tend it so that it may not be extinguished during this venture of mine, for I take this journey trusting in your help."

His prayer concluded, he would go off on his journey, and when it was over, sometimes after a month, sometimes after two or three months, or even five or six months, he would come back to find the candle still burning without diminution, just as he had asked at the beginning of his journey. Never did he find this candle had gone out of its own accord, whether rising from sleep, or returning from pilgrimage, or coming back to the cave from the desert.

Chapter CLXXXI

More of the same

The venerable presbyter Dionysius also told us the following story about abba Johannes:

One day the old man was walking near the village of Sochus where he had his cave, when he saw a large lion coming towards him out of the countryside. He was on a footpath between thorn hedges, so narrow that it would barely allow a single person unencumbered by any burden to pass through it. The old man and lion could see each other approaching, but the old man did not turn back to let the lion through, nor could the lion turn round because of the narrowness of the path, nor would it have been in the least bit possible for them to pass each other. The lion saw that the servant of God was intending to keep on going, he could not go back himself, so he stood up on his hind legs and by the weight and strength of his body pushed back the hedge on the old man's left to make a space sufficient for this righteous man to pass by without difficulty, brushing against him as he did so. When the old man had gone by, the lion extricated himself from the hedge and continued his own journey. Another brother said that when he visited abba Johannes, he found that his cave was completely bare.

"How can you live here without any of the necessities of life?" he asked.

"My son," he replied, "this cave is a market place of the spirit. It gives and it takes."

Chapter CLXXXII

The life of abba ALEXANDER of Cilicia, who when near to death was attacked by a demon.

About two miles away from the holy town of Bethlehem, there is the monastery of St Sergius, called Xeropotamus. Abbot Eugenius was in charge, a very devout man, who later was made bishop of Hermopolis in the lands of the Thebaid in Egypt. When we visited him he told us the following story about abba Alexander of Cilicia:

Towards the end of Alexander's life in the caves near the holy Jordan, he accepted Eugenius into his monastery. For almost the last three months of his life he was bedridden. Ten days before he passed to the Lord, he was attacked by a demon

"Wretch!" he said to the demon, "you have come to me in the evening of my life. Not very bold, is it, for here I am, confined to bed and unable to move. It just shows up your own weakness, you most miserable of creatures. If you were really powerful and capable, you should have approached me fifty or sixty years ago, when strengthened by Christ I would have shown up your own weakness, defied your boasting, and broken that rigid and inflexible neck of yours. Now, however, it is not weakness I am constrained by, but simple infirmity. But I thank my God to whom I am hastening that after so many years of labour and weariness I shall be able to show him the injuries I have suffered from you, now that you have attacked me so grievously at the hour of my death."

Much more in the same strain he said hour by hour, until at last on the tenth day he quietly gave up his spirit in peace to the Lord Christ.

Chapter CLXXXIII

The wonderful deed of an old Egyptian man named DAVID.

Abba Theodore of Cilicia told us the following story:

When I was living in Scete there was an old Egyptian man there called David who went out one day to take part in the harvesting. This was the custom in Scete, to go to the farms to help in the harvesting. So the old man went to a

farm where he worked for a wage in the employ of a farmer. As he was reaping at about the seventh hour it became so hot that he went and sat down in a little hut, where the farmer came by and saw him.

"Why aren't you reaping, old man?" he said angrily. "Don't you realise I am paying your wages?"

"Yes, of course I do. But this excessive heat is causing the grains of wheat to fall out of the ears, and I don't expect any improvement until this heat passes. I would not want you to suffer any loss."

"Get up and work, even if they all catch fire."

"You don't care if they all catch fire?"

"Not at all", he said in a fury.

So the old man got up, and suddenly the whole field was in flames. The farmer ran to some of the other old men who were working in another part of the field.

"Come with me," he cried, "and beg that old man to pray, that the fire may be extinguished!"

So they came and prostrated themselves before him.

"But he was the one who said 'Let it catch fire'" said David. Nevertheless he went and stood between the part that was on fire and the part that wasn't on fire. He prayed. And immediately the fire was extinguished. So the remaining part of the field was saved.

Chapter CLXXXIV

The life of abbot JOHN THE EUNUCH, and also a young MONK who decided not to drink any water, and also an OLD MAN deeply dedicated to prayer.

While we were in Nonnum in Alexandria, we decided that we would benefit from a visit to the monastery of abba John the Eunuch. We met this old man who had been wearing the monastic habit for eighty years. We have never met anyone to match the depth of his kind-heartedness, not only to human beings but also to brute animals. So what did he do? Nothing other than to call together all the dogs in the monastery every morning and give them their food. He would also put out flour for the smaller ants and grains of wheat for the big ones. He moistened bread and spread it out on the roofs for the birds to eat. Not only was this his invariable rule, but nothing else was beneath his notice for as long as he lived in the monastery, neither door nor window, nor spetlum

(? stone glazed windows), nor candle, nor writing tablet - to cut a long story short, there was nothing in the monastery which he was not aware of. Besides, he could not keep anything in his own possession for one hour, neither book, nor money, nor extra clothing, but would give it all away to the poor; he was concerned only with the future life.

They also told us another story about him to illustrate his kind-heartedness and compassion. A farmer came to him one day wanting to borrow a numma. Seeing he did not have one (indeed he never had any money), he went straight away and borrowed the money from the monastery and gave it to the farmer who promised to pay it back after a month.

When two years had gone by and the farmer had still not paid it back, he summoned him and asked him to pay the money back.

"God knows I haven't got it," he said

"Well let me tell you that I know a method whereby you can pay me back."

"Tell me what it is and I will do it," he said, thinking that the old man would commandeer something.

"As the opportunity arises, when you have nothing else to do, come here to me and make thirty genuflections before me and I will give you one silver coin."

He willingly agreed, and whenever he had some free time from his work, he would go to the abbot and do his agreed number of prayers, after which the abbot would give him a silver coin and also something to eat and drink as well as giving him some food to take away for his family. When he had done this twenty four times, i.e. the value of one golden nummum, he gave it back to the abbot, who sent him away with his blessings.

Abbot John the Eunuch also told us the following story:

When we visited the coenobium of abbot Apollo in the Thebaid, we met there a young brother who had with him his natural father who was also one of the monks. The young man had decided that for the rest of his life he would not drink water, wine or any other sort of liquid. He ate kitchen-garden greens to quench his thirst. He also had the job of cooking bread.

After persevering in this style of abstinence for three years he fell grievously ill and was near to death. Burning with fever and suffering from an immense thirst, he was urged by everyone to take a little liquid, but he would not by any means agree. So the abbot called for a doctor and urged him to try all reasonable means of getting the sick man to submit. When the doctor saw the brother in such dire straits, he began to urge him to take some liquid but he

still would not agree.

"Bring me a large tub," the doctor said to the abbot.

He brought it, and the doctor filled it with four large amphorae of warm water, and immersed the man in it up to his waist for an hour.

The abbot was present while this was happening, and he told us that after the man was lifted out of the water, the doctor took a measurement and found that the greater part of the water had been absorbed.

See what force continent monks will bring to bear on themselves, depriving themselves of the necessities of life in order to obtain an eternal reward.

He also told us that in the same coenobium, he saw a brother who used a large plank as a prayer mat. The places where he put his hands and knees were hollowed out to a depth of about four inches because of the frequency of his genuflexions.

Chapter CLXXXV

The life of a faithful WOMAN, who by an admirable display of wisdom converted her pagan husband to the faith

When we were in the island of Samus, we met the respected Maria, who worked among the poor. She was the mother of Sir Paul, who was being prepared for baptism [domnus Paulus candidatus]. She told us the following story:

When I was in the city of Nisibis, there was a Christian woman who had a pagan husband. They were quite poor, though they did have fifty numismata. "Let's hand this money over to a usurer," the husband said one day to his wife, "to get some interest on them. We have been keeping them as some sort of status symbol, but they are decreasing in value."

"If you want to give them to a usurer," said this good wife, "let's give them to the usurer who is the God of the Christians."

"And where can we find this God of the Christians to give them to him?"

"I'll show you. And if you agree, it's not just that you won't lose anything, but he will give you interest and double your capital."

"Let's go then. Show him to me and we will give to him."

So she led her husband to the holy church, which had five large doorways. As she took him into the portico she showed him the poor:

"The God of the Christians will accept anything you give to them," she said, "for they all belong to him."

So he quite happily began to give his money to them, after which they went home.

Three months later he found himself embarrassed by not having anything to meet necessary expenditure.

"Wife," he said, "as far as I can see, the God of the Christians is not going to give us anything as he ought to do, and now we are embarrassed for lack of money."

"He will give. Go back to the place where you gave the money and you will soon be shown how."

He hurried back to the holy church, to the place where he had given his money to the poor, walked all around it, but saw no one who could repay what he was owed except a fresh lot of poor people sitting there. As he was wondering to whom he could say anything, or from whom he could expect payment, he looked down at the floor near his feet and saw one of the numismata which he himself had given to the poor. He bent down and picked it up and went home.

"Well I've been to the church," he said to his wife, "and believe me, wife, I did not see the God of the Christians as you said I should, and no one gave me anything, except that I noticed this numismata where I had earlier been giving them to the poor."

"He who rules the world by the unseen power of his hand has shown this to you," this wonderful woman said. "Now, husband, go and buy something for us to eat today; tomorrow he will provide for us again."

So he went and bought some bread and wine and fish and brought them back home to his wife. As she began to clean the fish and gut it, she found in its stomach to her amazement a very beautiful stone, although she did not know what it was. She plucked it out and showed it to her husband.

"Look at this stone which I have found in the fish."

He too was astonished at its beauty, though not knowing what it was.

After they had eaten, he said to his wife:

"Give me the stone and I will go and sell it. Perchance I may be able to get something for it."

As I have said, he did not know what it was, he was so simple and ignorant. So he took the stone and went to a moneychanger who bought and sold such things, and found him on the point of shutting up shop and going home (for it was evening on the same day).

"Would you be willing to buy this stone?" he asked.

"How much do you want for it?"

"Give me what you think."

"Will you take five numismata for it?"

The seller thought that he was being made fun of.

"All that great amount of money for it?" he said

The buyer thought he was being sarcastic.

"Well, take ten for it."

The seller said nothing, still thinking he was being made fun of.

"Take twenty," said the buyer.

Again the seller said nothing.

The buyer went to thirty, then forty, then fifty, by which time the seller began to realise that the stone was worth a great deal more than he had thought. The buyer eventually got up to three hundred, which he held out to the seller. He accepted it, handed over the stone and went happily back to his wife.

"However much did you get for it?" she asked when she saw his joyful face. She thought he must have sold it for five or ten mites at most. He showed her the three hundred numismata and gave them to her.

"All that is what I sold it for," he said.

"See what the God of the Christians is like," she said, in admiration of the boundless mercy and goodness of God. "How good! How bountiful! How inexhaustible his riches! Look! he hasn't just given you back the fifty numismata you lent him, but in hardly any time at all has restored it sixtyfold. You must now know that there is no other god in heaven or earth save him alone."

This miracle had such an effect on him, and so convinced him of the truth through his own experience, that he quickly became a Christian, and glorified God and our Saviour Christ with the Father and the holy Spirit, giving abundant thanks for the wisdom of his wife, through whom a true knowledge of God had in truth been granted to him.

Chapter CLXXXVI

The life of MOSCHUS, a merchant of Tyre

We visited abbot Eustachius, superior of the cenobium of abba Saba, who repeated to us the story which Moschus, a merchant, had told him when he was at Tyre:

When I was in business, I once went off to the baths at the end of the day and on the way encountered a woman standing in the gloom. I spoke to her and

she consented to come with me. Much to the joy of the devil, I did not go and bathe but went straight home to a meal, which I entreated her to share with me. However, she would not taste a thing. When at last we got up and went to the bedroom, and I made as if to embrace her, she tearfully cried out with a loud voice.

"Alas, what a wretch I am!" she cried.

I asked her in some agitation why she was crying.

"My husband is a speculator", she said, crying even more bitterly, "and all his property and the property of others was lost in a shipwreck. For that, he has been imprisoned and I have got nothing, not even enough to take him a bit of bread. So because of my extreme poverty I decided to sell my body, just so I could find a bit of bread to take to him. For all we had has been lost."

"How much does he owe?" I asked her.

"Five pounds of gold," she said.

So I gave her the gold and said:

"See, by the grace of God I have not touched you. Settle the debt with this gold, redeem your husband, and pray for me."

Some time later a false accusation was laid against me to the Emperor that I had mismanaged his business affairs. So he gave an order that all my assets were to be confiscated, and that I was to be stripped and dragged through Constantinople to the prison. I had been there quite some time, with only one tunic to wear apart from my underwear (? camisia), when I was told that the Emperor had decided to put me to death. I wept in despair for my life. Crying and sobbing, sleep at length overcame me, and I saw that woman whose husband had been in prison.

""What is wrong, Sir Moschus?" she said. "Why are you imprisoned?"

"I am the victim of a false accusation, and I think the Emperor has decided to put me to death."

"Would you like me to speak to the Emperor for you, to ask for your freedom?"

"Surely he doesn't know you?"

"Ah, but he does."

When I awoke I was not quite sure what it meant. But she appeared to me a second and a third time, saying:

"Don't be afraid. Tomorrow I will see you are set free."

At daybreak, on the order of the Emperor I was taken into the palace. As I went in, he looked at me in my dirty and ragged tunic and said:

"I have decided to have mercy on you. Go, and amend your ways."

And I saw that same woman standing at the Emperor's right hand.

"Be strong and fear not," she said.

And the Emperor ordered everything to be given back to me, adding some more goods besides, and restored me to my previous state, in the same position as I had before.

That same night the woman appeared to me again.

"You know who I am?" she said. "I am that same woman on whom you had pity, and for the love of God did not touch my body. See, I have freed you from danger. See the mercy of God, that through me on whom you had mercy, mercy has been shown to you, as if to say, 'In that you have done this to me I have magnified my mercy upon you.'"

Chapter CLXXXVII

The teaching of abbot JOHANNES of Cyzicus on how to acquire virtue.

When going up one day to the holy mount of Olives from the holy Gethsemane, we came across the monastery of abbot Abraham, the superior of which was abbot Johannes of Cyzicus. We questioned him about how one could acquire virtue.

"Anyone who desires to acquire virtue," he said, "must first of all hate the contrary vice. Otherwise he can acquire nothing. So if you would cultivate mourning (luctus) you must hate facetiousness (risus). If you wish to be humble you must always abhor pride. If you wish to be abstemious you must hate gluttony. If you wish to be chaste detest lust. Naked, fly from worldly goods. Anyone who would be compassionate must beware of avarice. Anyone who longs for the desert, should avoid cities. If you would find peace hate presumptuousness. Anyone who would be a pilgrim should hate drawing attention to himself. Anyone who desires to keep anger in check should fly from much socialising. If you wish to endure insults, detest cursing. Anyone wishing to be undistracted should remain in solitude. Anyone wishing to bridle his tongue should prevent his ears from hearing many things. Anyone with a constant desire to fear God should love affliction and poverty.

Chapter CLXXXVIII

The life of two BROTHERS who were moneychangers in Syria.

Abbot Theodore, the superior of an ancient monastery told us the following story:

There were two brothers in Constantinople who were moneychangers. The elder of them said to the younger:

"Let's go back to Syria and take possession of our paternal home."

"Why should we both undertake this task?" said the younger. "You go, and I will stay here, or else I will go and you stay here."

They came to an agreement that the younger should go. A short time after he had gone, the one who stayed in Constantinople saw in a dream a most handsome old man of very commanding presence who said:

"Did you know that your brother is fornicating with a vagabond's wife?"

He woke up very distressed, and troubled in mind.

"Is his lapse my fault" he wondered, "for letting him go off by himself?"

He saw the same person a second time, saying:

"Don't you know that your brother is ruining himself with this vagabond's wife?"

And again he was very distressed. And a third time he saw the same person, saying this time:

"Don't you know that your brother has abandoned his lawful wife and united himself to this vagabond's wife?"

So from Constantinople he wrote to his brother telling him to drop everything and come back. When he got the letter, the younger brother did drop everything and went back to his brother. Hardly had he greeted him when he took him into the church and in sorrow began to accuse him.

"Do you call this acceptable behaviour, brother, to commit adultery with a vagabond's wife?"

The younger brother swore by almighty God that he had not committed adultery or been with any woman apart from his lawful wife.

"Well is there some other even more serious sin that you have done," he asked.

"Truly I am not conscious of having done anything wrong - unless it is that I went to Communion with some monks of the Severian teaching that I found in our village. I didn't know there was anything wrong in that. I am not aware of anything else I have done."

Then the elder brother realised what it meant when he was told that his brother had committed fornication. For he had abandoned the holy Catholic and apostolic Church, and by ruining himself in the unauthorised heresies of

Severian, a vagabond indeed, he had contaminated the nobility of the true faith.

Chapter CLXXXIX

The life of a WOMAN, who kept the faith for her businessman husband, and God came to the aid of both.

When we were in the guesthouse at Ascalon, abba Eusebius, a presbyter, told us of a ship-owning business man who lost all his property and that of others, though he himself escaped from the shipwreck. When he came back to Ascalon, his creditors seized him, threw him into prison and took possession of everything in his house, even his wife's clothing. She was greatly distressed, and worried that in her poverty she was unable to provide any food for her husband. She was sitting in tears in the prison one day when a rather important looking man came in giving alms to the prisoners. When he saw this free woman sitting with her husband, he fell in love with her, for she was very beautiful, and told her to leave the prison and come with him. She thought that he was going to give her something, so she freely did as she was told.

"What is the problem?" he asked, when he had taken her home. "Why were you in the prison?"

She told him all.

"If I pay his debts, will you sleep with me tonight?"

"Sir, I have heard what the Apostle said," she said, with a mixture of charm and modesty, "that a woman has not power over her own body, but the husband (1Cor.7.4). Let me therefore go and ask my husband, and I will do whatever he says."

So she went and told him everything. Now he was a most conscientious man, with a very deep affection for his wife, and he was not immediately carried away by the hope and desire of getting out of prison, but rather groaned and wept.

"Go back, wife, and tell the man you refuse," he said, "for I put my trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, who will not finally abandon us."

So she went back to the man and said:

"I have asked my husband and he is not willing,"

Now at this time there was also a robber in the prison who had been there since before the businessman had been arrested. He had observed everything and heard what the man and his wife had been saying to each other.

"See what a sad case they are in," he said, stifling a groan. "Liberty could have been important to them. They could have accepted the money and been freed. But they valued chastity more than money. They refused the prospect of a normal life, rather than let her chastity be violated. And what shall I do, miserable wretch that I am, who have never thought about God and am a murderer to boot."

He called them over to the window of the cell in which he was confined.

"I am a robber and murderer," he said to them "and soon the judge will be visiting here and he will order my execution for murder. I have been listening to your praiseworthy decision and been struck with compunction. So, go and dig in a certain place in this city and take the money you find there. When you have settled the debt you will find there is something left over for yourselves. And pray for me that I may find mercy."

A few days later the judge did indeed arrive in the city and ordered the robber to be led out and decapitated.

"If you like, husband," the wife said the next day, "I will go to the place the robber said. Perhaps he was speaking the truth."

"Do what you think best," he said.

That evening she took a small spade, went to the place, and dug. There she found a jar. She picked it up and hurried away. Before long she had discreetly paid off all the debts to the creditors and to others from money that had been borrowed.

All debts having been met, she was able to free her husband from prison. And the man who told us this story added: "See how God multiplies his mercy upon those who keep the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Chapter CXC

The miracle of the wood given to abba BROCHA the Egyptian

Athanasius of Antioch told us this story of abba Brocha the Egyptian:

When Brocha came from Egypt to Seleucia near Antioch, he went out of the city into a desert place to build there a small cell for himself. Having completed it all but the roof he went into the city and called on one of the leading citizens of Seleucia and Antioch, one Anatolius Curvus, whom he found sitting outside the front door of his house.

"Do me a kindness," he said, "and let me have a little wood to roof my cell with."

Anatolius was very annoyed, and pointed out to Brocha a large piece of timber lying in front of the house big enough to have been made into a mast for a very large merchant ship (arbor navis onerariae quinquaginta millium)

"See that piece of wood?" he said. "You can take that away with you."

"Bless you," said abba Brocha. "I will carry it home."

"God bless you, too," said Anatolius, still furious.

Brocha took hold of the timber, lifted it up from the ground all by himself, put it on his shoulders and went off with it to his cell. Struck dumb with amazement by this magnificent and stupendous miracle which had just been done, he generously gave Brocha even more timber, sufficient not only to construct a roof, as he had asked, but to cater for many other useful needs.

Chapter CXCI

The balanced life of the holy JOHN Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople

The holy John, archbishop of Constantinople, was given the name Chrysostom (golden-mouthed) because of the wonderfully accurate purity of his teaching and the splendid beauty of his eloquence. It was said of him that from the time of his saving Baptism onwards, he never swore an oath, nor compelled anyone else to swear an oath, never lied, never cursed anybody, never slandered or made fun of anybody.

Chapter CXCII

The story of a certain MONK of the monastery of the divine Pope Gregory, how he was restored from excommunication after his death.

A holy presbyter from Rome called Peter told us a story about the most blessed Gregory, Bishop of that city. During his time of being Pontifex Maximus, he greatly edified a monastery of men by giving them a rule that they should not possess any money, not even a single obolus. Now, one of the brothers of the monastery made a request to his brother living in the world.

"I have not got a tunic. Do me a favour and buy me one."

"Here are three numismata," the brother replied. "Take them and buy what you like with them".

Another monk saw that this brother had three numismata in his possession, and went and told the abbot, who in his turn reported it to the most holy Pope Gregory. Gregory's reaction was to order that the transgressor of the

monastery's rules should be excommunicated.

Not long afterwards this excommunicated brother died without Pope Gregory being aware of it. Two or three days later, when the abbot went and told him, he was very distressed that the brother had departed this world before being absolved from the penalty of excommunication. He wrote a prayer in the form of a letter and gave it to one of the archdeacons with instructions to read it out loud over the brother's grave. By this letter he absolved the dead from the bonds of excommunication. The archdeacon went as he was told and read this short pronouncement over the brother's grave.

That night the abbot saw the dead brother.

"Are you not dead then brother?" he asked.

"Indeed, I am."

"And where have you been up till today?"

"Truly, sir, yesterday I was in prison, but as of yesterday I have been freed."

And everyone was made aware that at the very time when the archdeacon had read the words of absolution over the brother he was released from excommunication and his soul was freed from judgment and damnation.

Chapter CXCI

The wonderfully charitable deed of the holy abbot APOLLINARIUS, Patriarch of Alexandria, towards a rich young man reduced to poverty.

We were told that the holy abbot Apollinaris, patriarch of Alexandria, was an exceptionally merciful man, overflowing with compassion, and this story about him confirms it.

There was a young man in Alexandria who was the son of one of the leading citizens famous for his dignity and wealth. On the death of his parents, he was left with extensive assets both in gold and in shipping concerns. Unfortunately he did not manage his affairs to the best advantage, and losing everything was reduced to extreme poverty. It was not as if he had wasted his patrimony in riotous living, as many rich people have the habit of doing, but that shipwrecks and various other failures had caused his downfall. So from the heights of opulence he became one of the poorest, as the Psalmist says, 'They ascend to the heavens, and descend into the abyss' (Psalms 107.26). This young man once far above being worried by money, was now brought low and in need.

The blessed Apollinaris heard about this and saw how much misery and

poverty the young man had fallen into. He took pity on his situation, his parents having been so well endowed, and would gladly have helped him by supplying him with food, but felt that that would be somewhat embarrassing. But his heartstrings were touched every time he saw him, with his mean clothing and sallow face showing how poverty-stricken he was. While the pontifex was worrying about all this one day, by divine inspiration he hit upon a marvellous plan, typical of the great and holy man he was.

He summoned the Nomicus, or treasurer of the holy church.

"Can you do something for me very secretly, Master Treasurer," he asked.

"I trust in the Son of God, sir, that I shall tell nobody of whatever instructions you may give me, nor shall anyone learn from me whatever you may share with me, your servant."

"Go then, and write out a bond for fifty pounds of gold which the holy church owes to Macarius the father of this wretched youth. Fix a signature to it, and conditions, and rates of interest and bring it back to me."

With all speed the treasurer immediately did as the pontifex had asked, and brought the bond back to him. But since the young man's father had been dead ten years, the paper on which the bond was written looked rather too new.

"Come, Sir Treasurer," said the pontifex, "bury this bond in the wheat or barley bin for a few days, and then bring it back to me."

On the day appointed he brought back the bond, which looked rather ancient after what he had done to it, and gave it to the pontifex.

"Now, Sir Treasurer, go to the young man and say to him. 'What will you give me if I hand over to you a bond for a considerable sum of money which is owed to you?' But see that you do not accept more than three numismata for giving him the bond."

"Truly, my lord, if you were to say, I would not accept anything."

"No, I want you to take three numismata."

So he went to the young man as he had been told.

"Would you give me three numismata if I were to show you something of great value to yourself?" he asked.

He promised he would.

"Five or six days ago," the treasurer pretended, "while turning out some ecclesiastical files, I found this bond, and I remembered that your father Macarius, who trusted me, had handed it over to me on some occasion. It has been with me since he died. I had completely forgotten about it, and had never thought of handing it back to him."

"This person who owes the money," said the young man, "is he wealthy?"

"Yes, indeed he is, and well-intentioned. You will be able to recover the debt from him without any trouble."

"God knows I haven't any money at present, but if I get back what is mine I will give you what you asked and even more than three numismata."

And then the treasurer gave him the bond for fifty golden pounds.

He took it and hurried to the pontifex, and prostrating himself before him gave him the bond. He looked at it, read it, and then pretended to be very upset.

"Where have you been all this time?" he said. "Your father has been dead for ten years. Get away, I'm not going to meet this now."

"Truly, my lord, it has not been in my possession. Your treasurer has had it and I knew nothing about it. But may God have mercy upon him for giving it back to me now, saying that he had found it among his papers at home."

"Well, I'll think about it. Leave the bond with me and give me some time."

After a week he returned to the bishop to plead with him.

"Why have you waited so long before presenting this bond?" he asked, making as if to be unwilling to give him any money.

"God knows, my lord, that I haven't got enough to feed my family. If you have any inspiration from God, have mercy on me."

Then the holy Apollinaris pretended that this prayer had persuaded him.

"All right, I will give you the whole sum. All I ask, brother, is that you don't ask the holy church for any interest on it."

"I will do whatever you want or command. If you wish to take something out of the principal, do so."

"No, no. It is enough that you forego the interest."

And so he handed over the fifty pounds of gold, and let him go, reminding him again not to ask for interest.

Such was the work of that great Apollinaris, such was his holy trickery and compassion. And by means of his holy blessing, God looked with such favour on the young man that he emerged from poverty and was restored to his former state and position, and excelled in good works and wealth even more than his parents, and especially grew in great strength of soul.

Chapter CXCIV

The rebuke given by an OLD MAN of Scete to a monk who went into a tavern.

An old man from Scete once went into Alexandria to sell his wares and saw a young monk going into a brothel. The old man was greatly distressed and waited outside for the young man to come out. As soon as he did, the old man took the younger by the hand and took him apart.

"Don't you realise, brother, that you are wearing the angelic habit? Is this just youthful ignorance on your part? Don't you know how many are the snares of the enemy? Are you not aware of the many dangers lying in wait for monks in cities, through the eyes, the ears, and in various other shapes and disguises. And yet you have gone boldly into a brothel, hearing things you should not want to hear, and seeing harmful things in the company of shameless men and women. Please don't, my son, don't act like this, but fly to the desert where with God's help you may be saved."

"Go on, old man," the younger man replied. "All God asks for is purity of heart."

"Glory to God," the old man said, lifting up his hands to the heavens. "Here have I spent fifty-five years in Scete and I have not yet got purity of heart. And yet this man possesses purity of heart even in the midst of a tavern. God keep you, my brother, and let me not be confounded of my hope."

Chapter CXCV

The life of EVAGRIUS the philosopher, converted to the faith of Christ by Synesius, bishop of Cyrene.

When we were at Alexandria, Leontius of Apamia, a most faithful and religious man, arrived from Pentapolis, for he had been living for many years in Cyrene. This was in the days of Eulogius, the holy patriarch of Alexandria, who later became bishop of that same city of Cyrene. In the course of some friendly conversation with us, Leontius told us the following story.

In the time of the most blessed Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, the bishop of Cyrene was a philosopher called Synesius. When he came to Cyrene, he met up with a philosopher called Evagrius, who had been a companion of his when studying the liberal arts. He was a dearly beloved friend, although a pagan, much given to the worship of idols. Bishop Synesius did everything he could to convert him from idols to the worship of Christ. He took an immense amount of trouble upon himself in this matter, for the great love that he had for him of old. Evagrius put up with this treatment rather grudgingly, for he had no desire to accept Synesius' teaching. But the bishop, for the great

affection which he had for him refused to become tired of trying, continued daily to urge him and teach him and persuade him to believe in Christ and receive his Sacraments. Evagrius replied to his persistent teaching.

"Truly, my lord bishop, among other things which I can't stand about Christians is the fact that they say that this world will come to an end, and all the people from the very beginning will rise with their bodies, to be clothed in immortal and incorruptible flesh and live for ever, and will be rewarded according to their works. Compassion on the poor will be rewarded by God, for those who share their money with the poor and needy will find treasure in heaven, and will be returned a hundredfold in the regeneration to eternal life bestowed on them by Christ. Everything they say seems to me to be a ridiculous deception, a fable."

But Synesius asserted that everything in Christianity was true, there was nothing false or contrary to truth, and he cited many documents to try and persuade him.

And at last he did succeed in converting Evagrius, and he baptised him and his sons and his whole household. Furthermore, not long after the baptism he gave three hundred pounds of gold to the bishop for distribution to the poor.

"Take this gold and give it to the poor," he said, "and write me a bond, so that Christ may honour it in the next life."

He took the gold and gladly gave him the bond he had asked for.

Some years later this philosopher became mortally ill. On the point of death he gave instructions to his sons.

"When you are arranging my funeral, put this document in my hands and bury it with me."

On his death the sons did exactly as they had been requested and buried the bond with him. The third day after the burial, he appeared to bishop Synesius as he was sleeping at night.

"Come to the tomb where I am buried", he said, " and take back your bond. Satisfaction has been made. I have had the debt repaid, and lest you should have any doubt about this, I have receipted it with my own hand."

Now the bishop did not know that the bond had been buried with him, but next morning he summoned the man's sons.

"Did you, by any chance, inter anything in the tomb with your father?"

"Nothing, apart from the usual grave clothes," they replied, thinking that the bishop must have been talking about coins.

"No document at all buried with him?"

They still did not know that he was talking about a bond as such.

"Oh yes, my lord," they said, "he did give us some document or other when he was dying and told us to bury him with the document in his hands, but not to let anyone know."

Then the bishop told them of the dream he had had that night, and he took them to the tomb, along with some clerics and leading citizens. They opened the tomb and found the philosopher lying there, still with the bond in the bishop's handwriting clutched in his hand. But something had been added to it in the philosopher's handwriting:

"I, Evagrius, philosopher, bid you, my most holy lord bishop Synesius, greeting. I have received payment for the debt herein written by your hand, and have no further claim against you for the money which I gave you, and through you to Christ our God and Saviour."

All those present were absolutely amazed at what they were reading and for the next few hours did not stop crying Kyrie Eleison, glorifying the God who does wonderful things, and gives his servants such great proofs of how he keeps his promises.

This same lord Leontius declared that the bond receipted by the philosopher had been preserved right up to the present day, and was kept in the sacristy of the church of that holy Cyrenian, and whenever a new sacristan was installed, he was charged to take care of it with all diligence along with all the other holy vessels, and finally to hand it over whole and undamaged to his successor.

Chapter CXCVI

The miracle which happened to the CHILDREN of Apamia, when in play they repeated the words of the prayer of consecration.

Gregorius, the bishop of an African province, was a most faithful man, a lover of monks and the poor, always rejoicing in everything that was good. He told us the following story from his home town of Thorax in the province of Apamia, the second province of Syria:

There is a farm about forty miles from the city called Gonagus, where the children used to feed the cattle out in the fields. As children will, they enjoyed playing games, and as they were playing one of them said to the others:

"Let's celebrate Mass, and offer the sacrifice and receive communion, just as the presbyter does in the holy church."

They all thought it was a great idea, and decided on one of them being the ordained presbyter, and two other boys the ministers. They were out in a level area where they were able to choose a large rock to serve as an altar, on which they placed some bread and an earthenware vessel containing wine. The one acting as a presbyter stood in the middle, with the two ministers one on each side of him. The 'presbyter' said the words of the holy oblation, and the other two stirred the air by using the scarves [fasciolae, 'small bandages'] they wore as fans. The 'presbyter' was familiar with the words of consecration because it was the custom in church for boys to serve at the altar and they were the first after the presbyters to receive the communion of the holy and worshipful mysteries of Christ our God. Since it was the custom in some places for the presbyter to say the prayers of the holy sacrifice out loud, the boys had learnt them from hearing them so often as they stood nearby.

When all had been done according to the custom of the church up to the breaking of the bread and communion, fire fell from heaven on to the altar and burnt everything up, so that nothing remained, neither stone nor anything that had been placed on it. This happened so suddenly that the boys all fell to the ground in fright, and remained there for a long time, half dead, speechless, not able to get up. When they did not return home at the usual time (for they just lay terror-struck on the ground), their parents came out from the village to find out why. When they found all the boys lying insensible on the ground, unaware of anything around them, they cried out to them but received no answer. They picked them up and carried them home, each his own son, while they could do nothing but gaze on the boys as they continued in this kind of trance. They were completely dumbfounded, not having the faintest idea of the reason for their unconscious state, and having no way of being able to find out. For however often they flung their questions at them all day long they could not get an answer, and so could not understand what had happened.

A whole day and night passed by before the boys little by little began to come to themselves. They related everything that had been done and what had happened to them, and they took their parents and all the local inhabitants out to show them the place in which the miracle had occurred, and pointed out to them the traces left of the fire that had fallen from heaven.

As they gradually took in what had happened and became convinced by the signs left behind, they ran back to the city and told the bishop everything. He was overwhelmed by how great this unusual miracle was, and hastened out with all his clerical staff to interview the boys. Having heard what they had to

say and inspected the traces of celestial fire, he put all the boys into a monastery. Over the place itself he built a very extensive monastery, putting the holy altar of the church on the very spot where the fire had fallen. That most faithful man, lord Gregory, told us that he had seen one of the boys himself and knew that he was a monk in the monastery where the miracle had occurred. And Gregory, that venerable man, bore witness to this great and truly divine, stupendous miracle that had happened in our own time.

Chapter CXCVII

The story told by RUFFINUS about the holy Athanasius and his childhood companions.

Ruffinus, the ecclesiastical historian, tells a similar story from an earlier age about children at play. The most holy Athanasius, bishop of the great city of Alexandria, was a famous champion of the truth and an unparalleled teacher for the whole world, and in his account of the childhood of Athanasius, Ruffinus describes how his future elevation to the episcopate was divinely prefigured:

In writing down a few things about the men of old, it seemed right to me to gather together the memories of their contemporaries about how they lived from their youth up, and how they developed. So we go back to the time when the most holy Alexander (he who condemned the ungodly Arius) presided over the church after Achilles, as the holy Peter, archbishop and martyr, had predicted. One day when Alexander was standing on a small rise looking out to sea, he saw some boys playing on the shore as boys will. They were acting out ecclesiastical rituals, one of them pretending to be a bishop. He watched them for some time, and could see that they were trying out some of the greatest and most sacred mysteries. Disturbed by this, he called his clergy and having showed them what he had seen, he told them to go and get all the boys and bring them to him. As they stood before him he questioned them about what their game was, what they had been doing and exactly how they had done it. At first they were frightened, and, just like boys, denied everything. But gradually they laid it all bare from beginning to end, and admitted that they had been baptising catechumens at the hands of Athanasius whom they had chosen to be bishop. He then thoroughly interrogated them about which ones had been baptised, how they had done it, what had been the questions and what the responses. He realised that everything had been done in

accordance with the rituals of our religion, and having discussed the matter with his clerics, he declared that since all had been solemnly done by question and answer, there would be no need to baptise them again, as they had carried out everything that the priests usually did. Next, he called their parents together, and calling on God as his witness he enrolled Athanasius in the church, to be instructed there along with all those who [in play] had been his priests and deacons.

After a short while, Athanasius was able to read and write perfectly [a Notario perfecte instructus esset], and was fairly proficient in Grammar. He was like a bond deposited in good faith by God, and his parents therefore handed him over as destined for the priesthood. From then on he was nurtured like Samuel in the temple, and whenever Alexander in his old age visited his bishops, Athanasius followed him wearing the vestment (amictus) of priesthood, which in Hebrew is the Ephod.

The battles of Athanasius against the heretics in the church were so many and so famous that you would have thought that these words of scripture had been written especially for him: 'I will show him how much he must suffer for my sake' (Acts 9.16). For the whole world conspired to persecute him, kings of the earth and the nations were moved, and kingdoms and armies gathered against him. But he relied on the power of divine wisdom, where it says: 'Though a host should stand against me, yet shall my heart not be afraid. If war rise up against me, even in this I will not lose hope.' (Psalms. 27.3). He achieved so many great things that I cannot be persuaded there have ever been any greater. One can only be struck dumb by the multitude of his deeds. The mind falls into confusion in trying to decide what to write down about him, what to leave out. So we just call to mind a few things. His reputation will tell of everything else, it will tell how even in small things truth was paramount for him, and nothing can be added to truth.

Chapter CXCVIII

The reply of the holy ATHANASIUS, bishop of Alexandria, as to whether anyone can be baptised without faith.

After the aforesaid holy Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria, he was once asked whether it was possible for anyone without faith to be baptised according to the rituals and teachings of the Christians, and what should we think of anyone who was baptised pretending to have faith or on some other

pretext, and how would God receive such a person. Athanasius replied:
"I heard once from our elders that an angel in human form appeared to blessed Peter, bishop and martyr, when there were some mortally ill people taking refuge in Baptism because they were afraid of death. The angel said: 'Why are you turning out so many empty vessels (marsupia, pouches) even though they have been signed [with the cross]. They are utterly worthless and empty, with no inner life.' So as far as one can judge, from what the angel said, there are those who bear the sign of Baptism simply because they thought that if they were to be baptised they might get something out of it [forgiveness of sins], and that is the only reason that they were baptised."

Chapter CXCIX

The story of a rather simple OLD MAN, who saw Angels when offering the Sacrament.

One of the fathers told us about an old man living a pure and holy life who used to see Angels standing on the right and on the left when offering the Sacrament. However, he had learnt his rite of consecration from heretics, so because he was rather simple and unversed in divine doctrine, he was saying things which were not in accordance with the true faith when making the offering, unaware that he was in error.

But one day by divine providence a deacon was with him who was skilled in divine doctrine, and he was there when the holy old man was offering the sacrifice.

"The words you use in making the offering," he said to the old man, "are those of heretics, men of erroneous opinions."

But because the old man saw Angels when making the offering he was not troubled, and took no notice of what the deacon said but treated him with derision. The deacon, however, persisted.

"You are wrong, abba," he said "for the Catholic faith of mother Church does not admit of the words you use."

The old man began to realise that the deacon was really serious in his arguments, and the next time he saw the Angels at the saving oblation as usual he spoke to them.

"This deacon here tells me this and that. Why should he be telling the truth?"

"Listen to him," said the Angels, "for he does speak the truth and is on the right path."

"Why haven't you told me this, then?"

"God has so decreed that humans should be corrected by humans."

And from that time on he was corrected, giving thanks to God and his brother.

Chapter CC

How a YOUTH who was a goldsmith was adopted by a nobleman as his heir.

One of the holy fathers told us about a gifted youth who was apprenticed to a goldsmith in order to learn the trade. After he had been learning for some time, a certain nobleman asked that a golden cross should be made, ornamented with precious stones, so that he might offer it to the church. And since the young apprentice was proving himself to be very creative, his master gave the task to him. This gave the young man cause for thought.

"If this man can offer so much money to Christ," he said to himself, "why shouldn't I put my wages into it, so that Christ will take note that it is mine, just as he did the widow's two mites." So he calculated the amount that he would receive in wages, borrowed that amount, and put it into the cross.

The nobleman came and weighed the cross before the stones were set in it, and found that it was heavier than he had asked for. He turned on the young man and accused him of fraudulently adulterating the gold.

"He who alone can search the secrets of the heart knows that I have done no such thing," he said. "But when I saw how much money you were offering to Christ the Lord, I thought that if I could put my wages into it I could share with you, so that Christ would accept me just as he accepted the widow's two mites."

"Is that what you really thought, my son?" he asked in astonishment.

"It is indeed."

"In thinking like this you have given your whole self to Christ, and since you want to share with me, look, I take you as from today as my son, and make you my heir."

And he did take him to himself, and he did make him his heir.

Chapter CCI

The life of a NOBLEMAN of Constantinople whose father at death left him to the guardianship of Christ.

One of the fathers told us the following story:

I had occasion once to go to Constantinople and I was sitting in the church when a nobleman came in. He was of a well known family, and also of great faith. When he saw me, he came up and greeted me warmly, then sat down and began to question me on matters to do with the salvation of the soul. I said to him that the things of heaven are given to them who put aside the things of the earth .

"Well said, father," he said. "He is blessed who puts all his hope in God and commits himself wholly to God. I am the son of someone who was very famous in the world. This father of mine was greatly devoted to almsgiving, and gave a great deal to the poor. One day he called me and showed me how much money he had. "'Son, would you rather,' he said, 'that I leave you all this money or simply leave you to the guardianship of Christ?'

"'I prefer Christ,' I said, delighted that he should have asked me this question, 'For all these things were once, today are, and tomorrow will perish, but Christ remains for ever.'

"Hearing this, he gave to the poor with an even greater generosity, so that when he died he had hardly anything at all to leave me. But poor though I was, I went humbly on, putting all my hope in Christ to whom he had left me.

"Now there was another very rich man, a leading citizen, whose wife feared God with a deep faith. They had an only daughter.

"'What does this only daughter of ours stand in need of,' the wife asked her husband, 'since God has blessed us with so much worldly goods? We could look into the possibility of marrying her to someone else who is important and rich, but if he were a bad-living man, he might be forever beating her. So let us look out for a humble man who fears God, who will love her and cherish her for God's sake.'

"'I think you are right,' he replied. 'So go into the church, offer some fervent prayer, then sit down, and let the first person that comes in after that be the one whom the Lord sends us as bridegroom.'

"So she did as her husband had bidden her, and after she had prayed and sat down it was I who was the first person to come in. She sent her servant away, and approached me and began to question me.

"'Who are you, exactly?' she asked.

"'I am the son of so-and-so of this city,' I said.

"'The famous almsgiver?'

"'Yes, I am his son.'

"'Are you married?'

"No' - and I told her what my father had said to me and what I had replied.
"Glory to God," she said. "Your good guardian has now provided you with a wife and wealth, and you must use both in the fear of God.'
"And she entrusted her daughter and her wealth to me, and I pray that I may follow in my father's footsteps to the very end."

Chapter CCII

The life of ABIBAS, a lay person's son, a servant of God

One of the fathers told us about a layman who had a very devout son, very committed, accustomed to being very abstemious from early childhood, so much that he did not even drink wine. His greatest desire was to live in solitude. His father wanted to get him involved in business but had no success, as the son simply could not endure it. He had other brothers but he was the eldest. Since he distanced himself so firmly from what his father wanted, his father cursed him roundly and particularly ridiculed his continence.

"Why can't you be like your brothers? Why won't you take part in our business?"

But he stayed silent, and everyone loved him for his piety and modesty.

Now when the father was about to die, some of his family and other friends of Abibas (for that was the young man's name) who thought that he must really hate Abibas, judging by the way in which he had cursed him, got together and decided to beg the father not to deprive the son of his inheritance. For he was very rich.

"We have come to you with a request," they said as they stood round him.

"What do you want from me?" he asked.

"We are pleading with you that you don't neglect Abibas."

"You are pleading with me about him?"

"Yes, we are."

"Call him here."

They all thought that as usual he was intending to heap curses upon him, but when Abibas entered his father said:

"Come closer."

And when he had done so the father clasped the son's feet, weeping.

"Forgive me, my son," he said, "and pray to God that he will forgive me for the way in which I have mistreated you. You have been seeking Christ; my motives have been all of this world."

He then called his other sons.

"Abibas now will be your lord and father," he said. "Do whatever he tells you. It will be in his power to decide what each of you should have."

And this met with their approval.

As soon as the father was dead, Abibas shared out everything among the brothers. His own share he gave to the poor, keeping nothing for himself. He built himself a little cell in which he could live as a solitary, but no sooner had he finished building than he fell ill, and was in danger of death.

One of his brothers was with him, and it was on the feast of the holy Apostles.

"Go and celebrate with your family," he said.

"How could I possibly go away and leave you?"

"Just go, and if my hour is come, I will call you."

And when he did feel the time had come he went to the window [of his cell] and knocked on it. The brother had been keeping an eye on it, and Abibas waved to him, saying, "Come". No sooner had he come than Abibas gave up his spirit to God.

And they all wondered, giving glory to God, and saying, "It was the abundance of charity with which he loved Christ that brought him to such a worthy end."

Chapter CCIII

The story of a certain JEWELLER who saved his life at sea by means of a wise plan

One of the fathers told us about a certain jeweller, who gathered together some precious stones, gems and pearls and took ship with his sons on a business trip. In the providence of God he took a great liking to a boy on board who waited on him. He was very kind to this boy, sharing his own food with him. One day the boy heard the sailors talking among themselves, making plans to throw the jeweller into the sea for the sake of the jewels. The next time he came to offer his usual services to the jeweller it was with a very long face.

"Why are you looking so glum today, my son?" he asked. But he said nothing and tried to hide his grief.

"Come, tell me truly, what is the matter with you?"

"Thus and thus, have they made a plot against you," he said, bursting into tears."

"Are you sure about this?"

"Yes, this is what they have decided to do to you."

The jeweller called his sons to him.

"What I shall tell you to do, see that you carry it out implicitly and without fail."

He laid out a cloth and told them to fetch his jewel cases, which he opened up and spread the jewels out on the cloth so that they could all see them.

"Is this what life is all about?" he said. "Am I in danger because of these? Must I do battle with the sea? And shortly die? Can I take anything with me out of this world? Throw all these things into sea."

In obedience to his words they picked them all up and threw them overboard. And the sailors were stupefied, knowing that their plans had been thwarted.

Chapter CCIV

How a religious WOMAN who feared God put to flight a monk's evil desires.

One of the fathers said:

There was a brother who got bitten by a serpent and went into the town to find a cure. A certain religious woman who feared God agreed to take him in and cure him. When he had nearly recovered from the poison the devil began to stir up lustful thoughts in him, and he tried to take her by the hand.

"Not so, father," she said. "Fear God. Bring to mind the grievous penances and remorse that you have endured in your cell. Think of the groans and tears which you have poured out."

After listening to this and other similar warnings the devil's attack departed from him. He was deeply embarrassed, and thought to depart immediately, unable for very shame to look her in the face.

"No, don't go, father," she said, pitying him 'in the bowels of Christ' (Colossians 3.12), "You still need some more poultices. Those thoughts of yours were not entirely your own fault, but came from the deceiving suggestions of the devil in hell."

And thus she was able to cure him and send him on his way with a blessing and no scandal.

Chapter CCV

The story of another prudent WOMAN who repulsed a monk's advances with her wise words.

One of them told us about someone else in a coenobium, who used to be sent out on monastery business. Whenever he went into the village, he used to stay with a certain devout layman who lived there. This man had a recently widowed daughter living with him who had lived with her husband for one or two years. As the brother went in and out among them he began to be infatuated with her, which being a prudent woman she soon recognised, and so took care to keep out of his sight as far as possible. But one day her father had to go into the city on some necessary business leaving her alone in the house.

The brother came to visit according to his usual custom and found her alone.

"Where is your father?" he asked.

"He is away in the city."

He immediately began to struggle in a great interior battle, filled with a desire to force himself on her.

"Don't struggle," she said, very prudently. "My father will not be back until evening. Here we are, both of us, but I know that you monks never do anything without praying about it, so go and pray to God, and whatever he puts into your heart, let's do that."

But he would not agree to that and got even more agitated.

"Haven't you ever been with a woman?" she asked, observing his agitation.

"No, but I would love to know what it is like."

"You are getting all aroused, but you don't know how smelly we unfortunate women are. I am having my period at present," wanting to dampen his passion down, "and no one could come near me without ceasing to breathe because of the smell."

Listening to her saying these things and much more, he was stricken with compunction, and came to himself and wept.

"See now," she said when she realised he had calmed down, "if I had listened to you and given in, we would have committed a great sin, and after that how could you have looked my father in the face (lit. 'with what face, with what eyes would you have been able to look at my father')? And when you got back to the monastery, how would you have been able to listen to those holy men singing psalms? I implore you to be sober and vigilant, so as not lose the fruits of all your labour, and to be deprived of eternal reward because of one brief failure of will."

This brother took what she was saying to heart. He had suffered temptation and drawn back from it and he gave thanks to God who through the prudence

and modesty of a woman had snatched him back lest he be overthrown and perish. He went back to the monastery and did penance for his sin.

Chapter CCVI

The means by which a certain aristocratic LADY was taught docility (mansuetudo).

One of the fathers told us of an aristocratic lady of senatorial rank who was on a pilgrimage to worship at the holy places. When she got to Caesarea, she decided to rest for a while and visited the bishop.

"Could you send me one of your nuns (virgines)," she asked him, "to instruct me and teach me how to fear God?"

So the bishop chose a nun noted for her humility and sent her to the lady.

After a while, the bishop went back to visit her.

"How is that nun I sent you getting on?" he asked.

"She is a very good person, but not much use to my soul, for she lets me please myself in everything, because she is so humble."

So the bishop sent a rather more severe nun to her who criticised her, calling her a 'stupid little rich woman' and other uncomplimentary things.

After a while the bishop once more enquired.

"How is that other nun behaving herself?"

"She really is doing my soul a great deal of good."

And this is how the lady acquired docility.

Chapter CCVII

The life of a GIRL of Alexandria, who was lifted out of the sacred font by holy Angels.

Abbots Theonas and Theodore told us that in the time of the patriarch Paul, there was a girl of very rich parents who was left an orphan. She had not as yet been baptised. One day she was walking in the orchard which her parents had left her (for there are orchards even in the midst of the city), when she saw a man preparing a noose to strangle himself with. She ran over to him.

"What are you doing, man!" she said.

"Leave me alone, woman, for I am in deep trouble."

"Tell me why, and perhaps I may be able to help you."

"I am heavily burdened by debt, and my creditors are almost suffocating me,

so I choose rather to put an end to my life than go on living like this."

"I beg you, take what I have, and settle your debts. Only do not destroy yourself." And truly she gave him her all.

But then she found herself in difficulties, not having enough left to live on.

Deprived of parental care she took to prostitution to earn a living.

People who knew her and what her parents had been like wondered among themselves.

"Who can understand all this except God alone? Perhaps God has allowed her soul to fall into sin for some reason known to him alone and for the time being he has abandoned her."

Not long after this the girl became ill, and coming to herself she was conscience-stricken and approached her neighbours.

"For the Lord's sake have pity on my soul and beg the Pope to make me a Christian."

But they all turned her away.

"Who is going to take her on, harlot that she is!" And they persecuted her mercilessly. In these narrow straits she found herself in the presence of an Angel in the shape of a man, who took compassion on her.

"I want to become a Christian," she said, "but there is no one willing to speak for me."

"Is that what you really want?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed, sir, and please, will you ask for this to be given me?"

"Don't be sad any longer", he said. "I will bring you some people who will speak for you." And he brought two other holy Angels to her who led her into the church, transformed into very aristocratic personages, well known members of the Augustal class. They called the clerics, a presbyter and a deacon, who were in charge.

"Will your charity make the promises for her?" the clerics asked.

"Yes indeed, we will promise for her."

So they took her to Baptism, and lifted her up, clothed in the white garments of the newly baptised. They put her down, and vanished.

When she went home, the neighbours saw that she was clothed in white.

"Who has baptised you then?" they asked.

She told them the whole story.

"There were some people who came and took me into the church, spoke for me to the clerics and had me baptised."

"Who were they?"

"I can't really tell you who they were!"

The neighbours went to report it to the bishop, and the bishop spoke to the clerics in charge of baptisms.

"It was you who baptised this woman?"

"Yes, we baptised her at the request of two Augustal people."

The bishop summoned the two people whom the clerics had named.

"Was it you who vouched for this woman's faith?"

"We don't know anything about it; we didn't even know that it had been done."

Then the bishop realised the truth.

"This is the work of God," he said.

He got the girl to come and see him.

"Tell me, my daughter," he said, "about any good deeds you have done."

"I am only a very poor little prostitute. What good could I have possibly done?"

"You have never ever done anything good at all?"

"No - except that I once saw a man trying to strangle himself because of being pressurised by creditors, and I liberated him by giving him all my money."

And as she said this, she fell asleep in the Lord, freed from all her sins, both voluntary and involuntary. And the bishop glorified the Lord.

"Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgments are right." (Pslams, 119.137)

Chapter CCVIII

The beautiful advice of an OLD MAN to a brother fighting against depression.

A brother fighting against depression sought advice from one of the old men.

"What shall I do? For I am attacked by thoughts telling me that it was a complete waste of time to have renounced the world, and salvation is beyond my reach."

"Don't you know, brother," the old man said, "that even if you cannot enter the promised land it is better to perish in the desert than to go back to Egypt."

Chapter CCIX

The beautiful explanation that A MAN gave of the meaning of the words And lead us not into the time of testing in the Lord's prayer.

One of the holy men said that when we pray to the Lord, 'Lead us not into the time of testing', we are not praying not to be tested (for that is impossible), but

that we may not be swallowed up by the testing, if we do anything displeasing to Christ. This is what it means not to enter into the testing. For the holy martyrs were tested by tortures, but were not overcome. They were not swallowed up by the testing, just as anyone fighting with beasts is not swallowed up as long as he has not been eaten. When he has been eaten, then he has been swallowed up by the testing. It is like this in every attack of the passions. As long as we are not overcome by the passion we have not been swallowed up by the test.

Chapter CCX

How a holy BISHOP in disagreement with another bishop conquered by means of humility

One of the fathers told us about two neighbouring bishops between whom a quarrel had arisen. One of them was rich and clever, the other very humble. The clever one was doing everything in his power to discredit the other. When the latter realised what was happening he spoke to his clerics about it.

"By the grace of Christ, it is possible we can win," he said.

"Who could possibly prevail against him, my lord?"

"Just be patient for a while, and you will witness the mercy of God."

He waited for a day when the clever bishop was celebrating a feast of the martyrs, and he called his clerics to him and said:

"Follow me, and whatever you see me doing, you do the same, and we shall come out victorious."

"Whatever are you thinking of doing?" they wondered.

However, they approached the bishop as he was processing with the whole population of the town singing a Litany. He fell at his feet along with all his clerics, saying:

"Forgive us, my lord. We are your servants."

He was astonished and conscience stricken by such a display of humility from a bishop, and the Lord touched his heart. He grasped the other's feet and said:

"You are my lord and father."

From that day on the greatest charity and concord was established between them. The humble bishop explained it to his cleric thus:

"Have we not conquered by the grace of Christ? So then, if you have an enemy do likewise and you will be victorious."

And the old man added: "The humble man has more glory than a king, does

he not? For the king is praised for his appearance, the humble man is praised always and everywhere, and is called blessed."

Chapter CCXI

How an OLD MAN freed from prison the brother who had stolen his goods.

A certain abbot told us that near our coenobium there was a most gentle old man of great virtue. In a neighbouring cell there was a brother who, one day when the old man was absent, by the instigation of the devil went in to the old man's cell and stole his books and vessels. The old man came back and saw his door was open, went in and found that his vessels and all his books had gone. He went to the brother to tell him what had happened and found the vessels still out in the open, for the brother had not had time to put them away. The old man did not want to embarrass the brother or start an argument with him, so he pretended that he had a sudden call of nature and went out. He stayed out quite some time, giving the brother time to remove the vessels and hide them. When the old man did eventually go back he began to talk to the brother about something quite different and did not remonstrate with him at all.

After a few days the theft was discovered by some of the brothers, and they put him in prison without the old man knowing anything about it. When he did discover, however, that the brother was in prison, but not knowing why, he came to our monastery, which is something which he quite often did, and made me a request.

"Do me a kindness, and let me have some food supplies."

"You've got a guest with you, perhaps?"

"Indeed, yes."

The old man gathered these foodstuffs up in order to go to the brother in prison with some comfort and cheer. And as soon as he entered, the brother threw himself at the old man's feet.

"It is because of a crime against you, abba, that I am here. I am the one who stole all your things. But look, one of your books and your cloak are in such a place, and the other things are in this place and also that place."

"Well, my son, I didn't actually come here on that account - and you can be absolutely sure about that. I had no idea that it was on my account that you are here. But when I heard that you had been arrested, I was very sorry, and I came here to cheer you up. See, I have brought you some food. And I will do

everything I can to see that you are released."

He went to see some of the people in authority, who took note that he was a man of virtue, and they gave orders that the brother should be released from custody.

Chapter CCXII

How two OLD MEN displayed marvellous patience towards robbers.

An old man of great virtue was visiting us once when we were reading the lives and sayings of the fathers, which this old man delighted in reading above all things. They were always in his heart and in his speech, and he profited immensely from them. We had got to the point in the reading where robbers entered an old man's cell, and said:

"We are intending to take everything you have in your cell."

"Help yourselves, my sons, to everything you can see."

And they gathered up everything and went. The old man realised that they had overlooked a little bag hanging up [on a hook], so he took it down and ran after them shouting loudly.

"Take this also, my sons. You overlooked it in my cell."

They were astounded at the old man's tolerance, and put everything back in its place in the cell.

"Truly here is a man of God," they said.

After we had read this, the old man said to me:

"I have found this a very profitable example, abba."

"How is that, father?"

"I read this when I was once living near the river Jordan, and were struck with admiration for this old man. 'Lord God,' I said, 'who have deigned to call me to wear this habit, make me worthy to follow in his footsteps.' I was burning with the greatest desire to imitate him, and after two days some robbers did come and knock on my door. 'Thanks be to God,' I said to myself. 'It is time for my desire to bear fruit.' I opened the door, greeted them kindly, lit a lamp, and began to show them everything. 'Don't worry,' I said to them, 'I put my trust in the Lord. I won't keep anything back from you.' They asked me if I had any gold, and I said that I had three numismata, which I put before them. They took them, and departed in peace."

"And did they come back to you, as those others did to that old man?" I asked.

"No, God did not allow that to happen. In any case, I would not have wanted

them to come back."

Chapter CCXIII

Why there are signs and divine wonders in the holy Church

An old man said:

Signs and divine wonders are done in the Church right up to the present day because of those who have spewed forth ungodly heresies and who still do so today, especially because of the pernicious schisms of that brainless Severianus and all the rest of them. The signs are for the purpose of building up and consolidating weak souls, and for converting those heretics if only they will. Marvels have been done in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church from the beginning of the faith right up till now by the holy fathers and most blessed martyrs.

Chapter CCXIV

The miracle of the Baptismal font in the state of COEANENSIS

The village of Soruba is at the foot of the mountains in the state of Coeanensis. There is a baptistery there which at the feast of the Epiphany fills with water, getting gradually deeper over a space of three hours. Once a Baptism has been performed the water level begins to disappear, and after three hours has completely gone.

Chapter CCXV

Another baptismal miracle in the fortress of CEDEBRATIS

In the fortress of Cedebratis at the foot of the mountains in the state of Aenoandron, there is a baptistery made out of one block of stone which fills up all by itself on the holy paschal feast of the Resurrection. The water stays there till Pentecost; after Pentecost it vanishes.

Both these miracles occur in the province of Lycia. If anyone does not believe this, let him make the small journey to Lycia and test the truth for himself.

Chapter CCXVI

Prudent advice on the subject of not swearing rash oaths, and not keeping to what has been rashly sworn.

Once when I was in the holy city, a certain man of the faith approached me. "A certain antagonism has arisen between my brother and me," he said, "and he is not willing to be reconciled with me. Could you go and see him and urge him to relent."

I was quite happy to do so, so went to see him and spoke to him about the things which make for charity and concord. He seemed to be agreeing with me for a while, but then came out with an objection.

"I can't be reconciled," he said, "because I have sworn on the cross to be at odds with him from that time forth."

I smiled!

"That oath of yours has as much force as if you had said 'By your precious cross, O Christ, I swear that I will not obey your commandments but give myself over to your enemy the devil'. We should not only abandon such things which we have spelled out so wickedly, but also afflict ourselves with severe penances for wickedly determining to do things contrary to our salvation. For if Herod had done penance and not carried out the oath which he had foolishly uttered, he would never have committed the dreadful crime of beheading the Forerunner of Christ. And Basil himself confirms this opinion, when he uses the example from the scriptures of how the Lord wanted to wash the feet of the blessed apostle Peter, who at first vigorously resisted and then changed his mind.

Chapter CCXVII

The wise advice of an OLD MAN that a monk should not have dealings with a woman.

An old man said:

My sons, salt is obtained from water, and if it is put back into water it dissolves and disappears. Similarly a monk comes from a woman, but if he gets involved with a woman, he likewise is dissolved and disappears and is no longer a monk.

Chapter CCXVIII

How abbot SERGIUS by his patience put to shame a farmer who raged at him.

Abbot Sergius, the superior of the monastery of abbot Constantine, told us the following story:

Once when we were on a journey with a certain holy old man, we wandered off the way, and without realising it found ourselves unintentionally in a newly planted field, crushing the plants with our feet. When the farmer who was working there saw us, he immediately unleashed a storm of angry abuse at us.

"Call yourself monks who fear God? If you had the fear of God before your eyes you would certainly not have done that."

The holy old man turned to us;

"For the Lord's sake, don't any of you reply." Then turning to the farmer he said:

"You are quite right, my son. If we feared God we would not have done that." But he kept on raging, and hurling invectives at us. The old man spoke to him again.

"You are telling the truth, my son, for if we were true monks we would not have done what we did. But for the Lord's sake, please forgive us for we have sinned."

Overcome at last by such great humility, the farmer came nearer and fell at the feet of the old man.

"No, it is I who have sinned. Forgive me, and for the Lord's sake, let me go with you."

And the blessed Sergius told us that the farmer followed them and took the habit.

Chapter CCXIV

How a certain BROTHER by his humility was reconciled with a deacon who was angry with him.

One of the senior men told us the following story from his own experience: I stayed for a short time in the monastery of abbot Gerasimus where I shared a cell with another brother, whom I dearly loved. As we were sitting together one day talking about matters profitable to the soul, I happened to mention a certain saying of abba Poemen.

"In my own experience," he said, "I have learned the strength and peacefulness of those words of abba Poemen, as also their forceful efficacy. For I once had a deacon in the monastery who was most dear to me, and

whom I loved very much. Somehow or other he came to suspect me of something which had upset him, and he began to be quite miserable, and did not look upon me so kindly as he used to. Seeing that he was so unhappy, I began asking him the reason.

"'Because of what you have done,' he said.

"I could not think of anything I had done, and tried to persuade him that my conscience was completely clear.

"'Sorry, brother,' he said, 'but I am not convinced.'

"So I left him and went to my cell and examined my conscience as to whether there was something I was guilty of, but could find nothing. So one day when he had the holy chalice in his hands to give communion to the brothers, I went up to him and swore on that very chalice that I had done nothing wrong. He would not accept that. So I went back to my cell again, turning over in my mind the words of the holy fathers. I believed in their truth, and little by little began to change my mind.

"'This deacon cares for me very deeply,' I said to myself, 'and it was out of charity that he told me what was in his heart - that I should be sober and vigilant, and not try to do anything more than just keep control of myself. Miserable wretch! you said you had done nothing wrong, and yet you must have committed sins without number which you are not aware of. Where are they, the sins I did yesterday, or three days ago, or ten days ago? Recollect them if you can. Oh yes, there is this you have done, and that, and this other thing you had forgotten about.' I was deeply moved, to realise that there were these things I had done which had escaped my memory, and I gave thanks to God, and also to the deacon, for it was through him that the Lord had seen fit to convince me of my sins and do penance for them.

"I got up and went to the deacon to apologise and also thank him. When I knocked at his door, he opened up immediately and got in first by prostrating himself in front of me.

"'Forgive me brother,' he said. 'It was a demon who suggested to me that I should suspect you falsely. Truly, God has convinced me of your innocence.'

"And he would not let me make any apology to him.

"'It's not necessary,' he said.

"So I was greatly edified, and glorified Father, Son and holy Spirit, the unchanging and indivisible Trinity, to whom be honour, kingdom, power and glory and unto the ages of ages. Amen."

End of Book X

Appendix 3 to Vitae Patrum Sayings of the Egyptian Fathers

By an unknown Greek author

Translated into Latin by Bishop Martin Dumiensis, 6th century

1. Abba John said to his disciples: "The Fathers ate only bread and salt, and thus became strong in the work of God while inhibiting themselves. Let us also therefore restrict ourselves to bread and salt, for it behoves the servants of God to be constricted in this way for the Lord himself said that narrow was the gate and strait the way that leads to life." (Matt. 7.14)

2. A brother asked the same old man: "What is the effect of the fast and vigils that we do?" And he replied: "They bring humility to the soul, as it is written in Scripture; 'Look upon my adversity and misery and forgive me all my sin.' (Psalm 25.17) If your soul strives like this, God will bring you mercy and strength."

3. Abba Poemenius said: "Have no truck with thoughts of sexual sin or slandering of your neighbour; do not allow their venom into your mind. For if you once allow them entry, you will immediately begin to feel how poisonous they are and that is the beginning of losing your way. But rather by prayer and good works bring your enemy to naught. Drive him back and you will have peace."

4. A brother asked an old man: "How should I deal with passionate thoughts, father?" And the old man replied: "Pray to God that your eyes may see your salvation which comes from God who surrounds you and preserves you."

5. A brother going to market asked Abba Poemenius: "How should I go about selling my goods?" And the old man said: "Don't sell anything for more than it is worth, and if you are pressurized, don't be upset by anyone who forcefully tries to beat you down, but sell to him without losing your peace of mind. When I have been going to market I have never wished to gain in my prices at my brother's expense, holding fast to the hope that my brother's gain is a source of fruitfulness."

6. = V.iv.8

7. = V.x.56

8. = V.i.14

9. = V.xvii.20

10. (cf V.xv.11) An old man said: "In living with your neighbour be like a pillar of stone, which does not get angry when insulted, or conceited when

praised."

11. & 12. = V.iv.20

13. Similar to 11 & 12

14. = V.xvii.10

15. = V.x.34

16. Abba Macarius said: "If a monk is harmed or slandered by his brother, he is himself at fault if he does not drive anger from his heart and hasten to make his peace with him. The Shunamite would not have been found worthy to receive Elisha into her house unless she was innocent of any quarrel with anyone. Now the Shunamite personifies the soul and Elijah the Holy Spirit, showing that the soul does not deserve to receive the Holy Spirit unless it is pure. Unforgiving anger blinds the eye of the heart and deprives the soul of prayer.

17. The brothers talked to Abba Poemenius about a brother who fasted in exemplary fashion for six days a week but who had a dreadful temper, and asked whether this could be acceptable. The old man replied: "Anyone who has learned to fast for six days without conquering his bad temper needs to spend more time in a little hard work at it."

18. Abba Poemenius had a brother monk living with him in his cell who had a quarrel with another brother living outside their monastery. Abba Poemenius said to him: "Brother, I wish you wouldn't pursue a quarrel with someone outside our monastery." But the brother wouldn't listen to him. So Abba Poemenius went to another old man and said to him: "My brother monk has a quarrel with someone outside our monastery and we are getting no peace because of it." The old man said to him: "Poemenius, do you mean to tell me that here you are, still alive? Go back to your cell and think on the fact that by this time next year you may be in the grave."

19. While Abba Poemenius sat quietly in the cell, the brothers quarrelled fiercely among themselves, but Poemenius said nothing to them at all. When Abba Paphnutius came in and found them wrangling, he said: "Why do you let them go on without telling them to stop their arguments?" Poemenius said to him: "They are brothers. They will make it up in due course." "How can you say that?" said Paphnutius. "You can watch them quarrelling almost to the point of shedding blood, and you can say they will make it up?" Abba Poemenius said to him: "Brother, you should think in your heart that I am not here at all." This was the quality of the stillness and silence of Abba Poemenius.

20. Some heretics once visited Abba Poemenius and began to criticise the

Archbishop of Alexandria, but Poemenius said nothing. He simply called his disciple and said: "Set the table and give them something to eat, and let them go in peace."

21. A brother asked Abba Poemenius: "How should you go about sitting in your cell?" And he replied: "To sit in your cell is clearly to work with your hands, to meditate on the word of God, to be still and eat bread in solitude. Sitting in hiddenness and stillness he begins to discipline his thoughts. Wherever he goes he observes the canonical hours of prayer, and does not fail to meditate in private. Thus he cultivates a good way of life (*bona conversatio*) and departs from evil."

22. = V.iii.22

23. Abba Macarius said: "If a monk can learn to treat scorn as praise, poverty as riches, and hunger as a feast, he will never die. If you believe in God and seek him in everything you do, you cannot fall into unclean thoughts and the wiles of the devil."

24. An old man said: "Going, coming, or sitting or whatever it is you are doing, keep God always before your eyes and the enemy has no terrors for you. Anyone who keeps this thought in his mind is possessed of the power of God."

25. A brother said to Abba Peter: "In my cell my soul is at peace, but when I go out and hear what the other brothers are talking about I get into a turmoil." The old man replied: "You have the key to the door of your brother's mouth." "How do you mean?" the brother asked. "It's you who ask him things," the old man said, "so he replies, and you hear things you had rather not." The brother asked; "What should we do then when we meet with a brother? How should we converse with him?" "All teaching is summed up in the one word, Mourning (*'luctus'* = mourning, grief, lamentation, compunction).

26. A brother asked Abba Sisois: "At what point should one cut off one's emotions?" (*abscidere passiones*, cut off passions) And the old man replied: "The moment any emotion arises in your heart cut it off at once. The soul is very fragile, but be prepared for battle lest you suffer defeat.

27. A brother asked Abba Agathon about his emotions, which he could not overcome. The old man replied: "There is a large container of them inside you. Give them *arrhas retributionis ipsorum* (?) and they will depart.

28. A brother visited a hermit who welcomed him gladly. When it came time to depart he said: "I'm sorry, father, if I have interrupted your way of life." The

hermit replied: "My way of life, brother, is to receive in peace all who come, and take leave of them in charity."

29.A brother asked an old man why it was that although God through the Holy Scriptures promises the soul good things, nevertheless the soul does not desire to rest in them but inclines after transitory and unclean things. The old man replied: "It is because the soul has not yet tasted the joys of heaven which would make it seek God whole-heartedly that it turns more readily to things unclean."

30.A brother asked an old man why it was that the soul savoured its emotions, and he replied: "The soul delights in its emotions but it is the Spirit of God who keeps it in check. We therefore should weep and take note of what in us is unclean, begging God who can accomplish all things to cut off from us the seeds of evil. Mary kneeling before the sepulchre wept, and straightway was in His presence. So it is with the soul if it loves tears."

31.A brother said to an old man: "Give me, abba, a word whereby I may live," and he replied: "Go, ask God to give you mourning and humility, and keep your own sins always in mind."

32.It was said of Abba Poemonius that before leaving his cell to join the brothers in church, he would sit still for an hour passing judgment on his own thoughts, and only then would he go in.

33.A brother asked an old man what he should do about his sins, and he replied: "Anyone who wants to be freed from sin can only be freed by tears, and anyone who wants to build up virtue can only build with tears. The Scripture itself is tears. Our fathers said this to their disciples: 'Weep. There is no other way to life except this.'"

34. = V.iii.13

35.Abba Moyses said: "If prayer and action do not go together, your labour is in vain. So then, when you pray that your sins may be forgiven, make sure that you do not offend again. When you have lost the desire to sin and walk permanently in the fear of God, then God welcomes you with joy."

36.A brother asked an old man what one should do about all the temptations which come upon one, and all the thoughts which come from the devil, and he replied: "Weep always in the sight of the goodness of God, that he may make haste to come to your aid. For it is written: 'The Lord is my helper and I shall triumph over my enemies.'" (Psalm 118.7)

37.A brother asked an old man: "Suppose someone strikes a servant in punishment for a fault, what should the servant say to his master?" And he

replied: "Even if the servant is not at fault, he should say: 'I have sinned. Have mercy on me.' and nothing else. But if he recognises his sins and confesses what it is that he has done, his master will forgive him."

38.A brother asked an old man where one should fly to if there were to be persecution for the faith, and he replied: "Wherever you hear that people are orthodox and faithful, fly there."

39. = V.ix.8

40.A brother asked an old man what he should do about the thoughts which troubled him and the old man said: "Question them: 'What do I want with you? What need do I have of you?' - and you will find peace. Be willing to be held in low esteem, cast self-will behind you, be careful for nothing, and your thoughts will cease to bother you."

41.A brother asked an old man: "How is that sometimes when singing psalms time flies and I finish them quite quickly?" And he replied: "This is the sign of someone who really loves God. It is only when depressed by the action of demons that we need to drive ourselves vigorously, motivated by the fear of God and God's love."

42.The same old man said: "A fly will not come near a boiling pot, though it will alight on a tepid one. Similarly, the devils fly from the monk who is burning with the divine Spirit, though they will deceive a tepid one."He also said: "If persecuted by the enemy, first of all fly, secondly fly, thirdly be like a great sword against them, get out from under them, kill them."

43. = V.xiii.5

44.Some brothers from Scete once came to Abba John as he sat and worked in silence and after they had greeted him he turned back ('conversus in alteram patrem', sic, misprint for partem?)and began to work again. The brothers said to him: "John, who was it gave you the monk's habit, and why did he not teach you when receiving brothers to ask them to say a prayer or ask them to sit down?"John said to them: "Sinners are never at leisure," to which Abba Theodore replied: "How right you are. God does not require such requests from anyone who is in constant prayer and penitence."

45.A brother asked Abba Poemen what he should do, and he replied: "The Scripture says: 'I acknowledge my faults and my sin is ever before me.'" (Psalm 51.3)

46.A brother asked an old man what he should do and he replied: "Learn to love how to do violence to yourself, unsheathe your sword and go to war."The brother said to him: "My thoughts prevent me." The old man replied:

"Scripture says: 'Call upon me in the time of trouble, so will I hear thee and thou shalt praise me.' (Psalm 50.15) Call upon God then and he will save you.

47. = V.iii.19

48. = V.iii.15

49. = V.xv.17

50. = V.xi.13

51. A brother asked an old man the meaning of : "When I was in prison you came to me." And the old man replied: "The Lord accepts what is done to one's neighbour as being done to himself. At the same time, since 'being in prison' is the same as 'being in one's cell', anyone who in the cell constantly remembers God can quite properly hear God addressing him with the words: 'I was in prison and you came to me.'"

52. A brother asked Abba Besarion: "What shall I do, for my thoughts trouble me?" And he replied: "Just be still. Don't measure yourself up against those of great reputation, but just be quiet in your own heart."

53. A brother asked Abba Antony what it meant that anyone should consider himself as of no account. And he replied: "It means to consider yourself to be like an irrational beast which has no discernment, as it is written in Scripture: 'I am become as it were a beast before thee, nevertheless I am always by thee.' (Psalm 73.21-22)

54. = V.i.2

55. A brother asked an old man: "Is it a good thing to be highly regarded by people?" He replied: "There is no virtue in that. Don't desire to be highly regarded by your brethren. Run away from that."

56. A brother asked an old man the meaning of humility, and he replied: "Perfect humility is shown in blessing those who do you evil." And the brother said: "What if you can't rise to the measure of being able to do that?" And he replied: "Walk away from it, and be still."

57. A brother asked an old man: "What makes a perfect monk?" And he replied: "Humility. You are raised up to the heights in proportion as you are brought down low through humility."

58. A brother asked an old man: "How can you keep on being humble?" And he replied: "By keeping your sins constantly in mind."

59. Abba Poemenius groaned and said: "All the virtues except one are evident in my cell, and it is by this one virtue that a man stands or falls." The brothers asked him what this virtue was and he replied: "Always to accuse oneself."

60. A brother asked an old man: "Please pay me a visit if you think I am

worthy to wash your feet." But he would not. A second and a third time he asked with the same result. At last he went to the old man's cell and did penance before him, beseeching him to visit him in his cell. And the old man agreed. The brother asked him: "How was it that you didn't come all the times I asked you before?" And the old man replied: "When it was with words only that you asked, I wasn't persuaded in my heart that I should come. But when I saw in you the monastic virtue of humility, then I came with joy."

61. An old man said: "How can anyone teach someone else something which he has not learnt himself and also put into practice? Therefore always be humble enough to learn."

62. An old man said: "The virtue of a monk lies in being always suspicious of himself."

63. An old man said: "You can't inspect your thoughts from outside, but only when they rise up from within. If you are a warrior, expel them."

64. An old man said: "The work of a monk is to see thoughts coming from afar."

65. An old man said: "Unforeseen crises prevent us from rising to better things."

66. An old man said: "Don't set your own standards, but measure yourself against those whose life is irreproachable."

67. An old man said: "If you don't cut off every occasion of sin, you will continue to be led astray."

68. An old man said: "Every task which falls to a person can be an occasion of victory."

69. An old man said: "Every carnal delight is an abomination in the sight of the Lord"

70. An old man said: "If the flesh causes certain thoughts to come to you, once, twice, or even three times, pay no attention."

71. = V.xi.5

72. An old man said: "Pilgrimage is keeping silent."

73. An old man said: "People who curb their appetites and are immune from worldly considerations will find peace."

74. An old man said: "A monk must be single-hearted, and he will be on the way to salvation,"

75. An old man said: "Whatever you see or hear, don't gossip about it to your brother; it only breeds battles."

76. An old man said: "Self will and laziness, especially if habitual, drag a

monk down."

77.An old man said: "Charity, silence and private meditation make for purity of heart."

78.An old man said: "Anything out of proportion comes from the demons."

79.An old man said: "What is the point of building up somebody else's house and pulling down your own?"

80.An old man said: "Each person begins with a wall of self will, as of bronze and stone, between the self and God. Therefore if you can overcome your own self will you can truly say: 'With the help of my God I shall leap over the wall.'" (Psalm 18.29)

81. An old man said: "If we depart from the straight and well marked path we wander off into dark and thorny places; that is, if we cease to weep for ourselves and our sins, we begin to neglect our neighbour."

82.An old man said: "Anyone who slanders his neighbour is not a monk, anyone who returns evil for evil is not a monk, nor he who is bad tempered, greedy, proud, avaricious, puffed up or verbose. The true monk is humble and quiet, loving, with the fear of God always in his heart."

83.An old man said: "See that you don't condemn a brother who stands up to you. How do you know whether the Holy Spirit is in you or him?"

84.An old man said: "Humility, chastity and the fear of God are greater than all the other virtues."

85.An old man said: "If anyone wills to cause a monk actual harm, his cause is just if he resists as he would against the devil."

86.An old man said: "Whatever things a person may be upset by, whether great or small, let them all be held in contempt, whether in thought or deed."

87.An old man said: "Humility is no burden, but provides the seasoning in everything burdensome."

88.An old man said: "To be humble and self deprecatory is like a protective wall for a monk."

89.An old man said: "Anyone wishing to build a house needs to amass many materials in order to bring his work to completion; so a monk must take great care in bringing the work of God to completion."

90.An old man said: "Blessed is the one who undertakes to work hand in hand with grace."

91.An old man said: "There is no greater virtue than to despise no one."

92.An old man said: "To do violence to self in all things, this is the way of God, this is the work of the monk."

93. An old man said: "Doing violence to yourself makes you like the Confessors."
94. An old man said: "If you keep your mortality always in mind you will lose your faint-heartedness."
95. An old man said: "Speak as a free person, not as a slave."
96. An old man said: "It is impossible to advance in virtue without custody of the tongue. Custody of the tongue is the primary virtue."
97. = V.iii.4
98. An old man said: "Wherever you live, don't look out for those who are comfortable, but for the needy who lack food and shelter."
99. An old man said: "If you are in the grip of some passion and without having done anything about it pray to God about something else, he will not hear you. First pray about your own battle, and when you have then knocked and entered ask anything you like for other people."
100. An old man said: "There are three important things: the fear of God, diligent prayer, and doing good to your neighbour."
101. An old man said: "Humility and the fear of God which you ought always to have in you are like the breath in our nostrils without which we can't live."
102. An old man said: "What is the use of starting anything if you don't study to finish it? Starting without finishing is worth nothing."
103. An old man said: "If you cannot give your whole hearted agreement to somebody don't regard him as if he were your conscience."
104. An old man said: "Decide never to do harm to anyone, and be open hearted towards all."
105. A brother asked an old man whether he should do anything about it if he saw some neglect in his brothers. And he replied: "Whether they are older than you or of the same age admonish them humbly without being censorious, lest in this you lose your own humility."
106. A brother asked an old man: "The brothers living with me want me to be their teacher. What do you think I should do?" And he replied: "Practice what you teach them. And give them not only moral precepts but also practical means of carrying them out."
107. It was said of Abba Macarius the Greater that like God he protected the whole world. He carried the burden of human sin, he was like an earthly God to his brothers, covering their sins, and as if blind and deaf to the things which he did see and hear."
108. Abba Moyses asked Abba Silvanus: "Is it possible to begin again every

day?" And he replied: "A true workman can begin again every day. He must understand that each one of the many virtues is of equal importance. On rising each day let him make a new beginning in every virtue and in every commandment of God, in much patience and longsuffering, in the fear and love of God, in humility of mind and body, in much forbearance, in tribulation, in staying in the cell, in prayer and intercession, with groaning, purity of heart, custody of the eyes and tongue and speech, in denial of material things and carnal desires, in the warfare of the cross, that is in mortification and poverty of spirit, in spiritual temperance and agonised battle, in penitence and mourning, simple of mind and few of words, in fastings and nightly vigils, and in manual work as St Paul teaches when he says: 'working with my hands, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in labours and tribulations, in need and difficulties and persecutions, in pitfalls and caverns and caves of the earth.' (2 Cor.11) 'Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only' (James 1.22) , let your talents bring forth double, wearing the bridal garment, founded upon the rock, and not on the sand. Be faithful in almsgiving, steadfast in faith, remembering the day of your death is at hand, and care nothing for the things of this world as if you were already in the grave. Be sparing in food, be humble and mourn. Let the fear of God be in you at all times. For it is written: 'In the fear of God, we have accepted and given birth to the spirit of salvation even from the womb.' (Isaiah 26.9) If there be any virtue look to these things. Do not reckon yourselves to be among the great but consider yourself to be lower than all other creatures, worse than any other human sinner. Gain discretion, know yourself, do not judge your neighbour nor delight in other people's sins, but weep for your own sins, and do not interfere in other peoples affairs. Be gentle in spirit and not angry. Think no evil in your heart about anyone, bear no malice, and entertain no hatred towards anyone who bears malice towards you without a cause. Don't be upset by his malice, or turn against him in his need and tribulation, render no evil for evil, but be at peace with all - this is the peace of God. Do not entrust yourself to the evildoer, but do not rejoice in anyone who does evil to his neighbour. Slander no one, for God knows all and sees each one of us. Do not believe the slanderer or rejoice in his evil speech. Do not hate anyone because of his sins, for it is written: 'Judge not that you be not judged' (Matthew 7.1). Do not despise the sinner but pray for him that God will patiently turn him and have mercy on him, for the Lord is of great power. And if you hear about anyone doing evil things say 'Who am I to judge? For I too

am a sinner, dead because of my sins, and mourning my own wicked deeds. He who is dead has no quarrel with anyone. Anyone then who thinks of these things and earnestly pursues them is a worker for universal justice under the grace and power of our Lord.

109. Abba Moyses gave the following seven precepts to Abba Poemenius, which if followed will lead to salvation by anybody whether they be in the cenobium, or in solitude or in the world:

1. In the first place, as it is written, love God with all your heart and with all your mind.
2. Love your neighbour as yourself.
3. Do to death all evil in you.
4. Do not judge your brother in any dispute.
5. Do no evil to another person.
6. Before departing this life cleanse yourself of every fault of mind or body.
7. Always be of a humble and contrite heart. These things can be achieved by anyone who thinks of his own sins and not his neighbour's, and trusts in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns world without end. Amen.

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