Letters (part 2 of 2)

Ambrose of Milan (c. AD 339–397)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLIII.

This Letter is a reply to a question from Horontianus, why man, the highest work of God's creation, was made the Fast. S. Ambrose brings forward various analogies to shew that the last is first, and each with an enthusiastic and poetical description of man's greatness, and of his dominion over the other works of creation. AMBROSE TO HORONTIANUS. 1. You have intimated to me your surprise at finding in my Treatise on the Six days of Creation, that, while you found both the Sacred Narrative and the tenor of my discourse assigning greater gifts to man than to any other creature in the earth, still that the land and the waters brought forth all flying and creeping things and things in the waters before him for whose sake they were all created: and you ask me the reason of this, which Moses was silent about, and I did not venture to touch upon.

2. And perhaps that spokesman of the Divine Oracles purposely kept silence, lest he should seem to render himself the judge and counsellor of the Divine ordinances; for to give utterance to that with which he was inspired by the Spirit of God is one thing, to interpret the will of God is |288 another. I am of opinion however that we, not as speaking in God's Name, but as gathering up scattered principles of reason from human usage, may he able, from the way in which God has disposed other things for man's use, to come to the conclusion that it was fitting for man to be the last work of creation. 3. For he who sets out a banquet, like that rich man in the Gospel, (for we must compare Divine things with each other the better to draw our conclusion,) prepares every thing first, kills his oxen and fatlings, and then bids his friends to supper. The more trivial things therefore are prepared in the first place, and then he who is worthy of honour is invited. Hence the Lord also first provided for the food of man all other animals, and then invited to the feast man himself, as His friend: and truly His friend, seeing that he was partaker of the Divine Charity and heir of His Glory. To man himself it is that He says: Friend, how camest thou in hither? So then all things that precede are to minister to the need of the friend, and it is the friend who is invited last.

4. Take another instance. What is the world but a sort of arena of continual strife? Wherefore also in the Apocalypse the Lord says, To him that overcometh will I give a crown of life; and Paul says, I have fought a good fight; and in another place, No man is crowned except he strive lawfully. He who institutes this combat is Almighty God. Now he who in this

world offers a combat, does he not first provide all things which are necessary thereto, and prepare the chaplets of victory before he summons the athletics to contend for the prize; and all this that the conqueror may not suffer delay, but retire from the contest crowned with his reward? Now the rewards of man are the fruits of the earth and the lights of heaven; the former for the use of this present life, the latter for the hope of life eternal.

5. As a wrestler therefore he enters the lists last of all; he raises his eyes to heaven, he sees that even the heavenly creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. He sees that the whole creation groaneth in pain together, waiting |289 for redemption. He sees that labour awaits us all. He raises his eyes, he sees the circlets of lights, he surveys the orbs of the moon and stars: For the just, who overcome, shall be as the stars in heaven. And he chastises his body, that it may not be his enemy in the combat, he anoints it with the oil of mercy, he exercises it with daily trials of virtue, he smears himself with dust, he runs to the goal of the course but not as uncertainly, he aims his blows, he darts forth his arms, but not into empty space, he strikes the adversary whom he sees not, for he has respect to Him alone to Whom all enemies give way, even those who are invisible, in Whose Name the powers of the air were turned aside. It is he therefore who poises the blow, but it is Christ Who strikes, it is he who lifts up his heel, but Christ Who directs it to the ground. Lastly, although Paul saw not those whom he struck, he was not as one that beateth the air, because by the preaching of Christ he wounded those evil spirits which assaulted him. Rightly therefore did man, for whom a race was prepared, enter the course last, that he might be preceded by heaven which was to be, as it were, his reward.

6. But we wrestle not only against spiritualities of wicked-ness in high places, but also against flesh and blood. We wrestle with satiety, with the very fruits of the earth, with wine, by which even a righteous man was made drunk, and the whole people of the Jews overthrown; we wrestle with wild animals, with the fowls of the air; for our flesh, if pampered by these, cannot be brought to subjection; we wrestle with perils of the way, with perils of waters, as Paul says; we wrestle with rods of the wood, those rods with which the Apostles were beaten. You see how severe are our combats. Thus the earth is man's trial-ground, heaven is his crown; and fitting therefore it was that as a friend, what was to minister to his wants should precede him, as a combatant, his reward. 7. Take another illustration. In all things the beginning and the ending are most excellent. If you look upon a house, it is the foundation and the roof which are more considerable than the other parts, if you look upon a field it is the sowing and the harvest, the planting and the |290 vintage. How sweet are the grafts of trees, how pleasant are the fruits! In the same manner also was the heaven created first, and man last, as a kind of heavenly creature upon earth. For although in body he is compared with the beasts, in mind he is numbered among the inhabitants of heaven; for as we have borne the image of the earthy; we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. How should he not be heavenly, who is made after the image and likeness of God?

8. Rightly therefore in the creation of the world the heaven is both first and last, wherein is that which is beyond heaven, even the God of heaven. And of man is rather to be understood the text, Heaven is my throne, for God does not sit above the element, but in the heart of man. Wherefore the Lord also says, We will come unto Him, and make our abode with Him. Heaven therefore is the first work in the creation of the world, and man the last. 9. Heaven is of the world, man above the world; for the former is a portion of the world, the latter is an inhabitant of Paradise, and the possession of Christ. Heaven is thought to be undecaying, yet it passes away; man is deemed to be incorruptible, yet he puts on incorruption; the fashion of the first perishes, the latter rises again as being immortal; yet the hands of the Lord, according to the authority of Scripture, formed them both. For as we read of the heavens, And the heavens are the work of Thy hands; so also man says, Thy hands have made me and fashioned me; and again, The heavens declare the glory of

God. And as the heaven is resplendent with stars, so are men bright with the light of good works, for their works shine before their Father Which is in heaven. The former is the firmament of heaven which is on high, and the latter firmament is not unlike to it, whereof it is said, Upon this rock will I build My Church; the one is the firmament of the elements, the other of virtues, and the last is more excellent; they sucked honey out of the firm rock, for the Rock is the flesh of Christ, which redeemed the heaven and the whole world. 10. Why should I add further, carrying you, as it were, |291 through the whole course, that God made man partaker of the Divine nature, as we read in the Epistle of Peter? Whence one says not improperly, We also are His offspring, for He made us akin to Himself, and we are of a rational nature, that we might seek for that Godhead Which is not far from each one of us, in Whom we live and move and have our being.

11. Having therefore conferred on man that which is the greatest of graces, He granted to him as to that creature who was dearest and very nearest to Him, all the things which are in this world, that he might want for nothing which is necessary either for life or for a good life, some of which things were to be supplied by the abundance of earthly plenty to minister pleasure, others again by the knowledge of heavenly secrets, to arouse man's mind by the love and desire of that discipline which should enable us to reach the summit of the Divine mysteries. Both these therefore are most excellent gifts, both to have all the riches of the world subject to him, all flying and creeping-things and fishes, and, as being lord of the elements, the use of the sea, and without toil or want, after the model and likeness of his adorable Creator, to abound in all things, living in the greatest plenty, and also to open paths for himself, and make progress, so as to ascend to the royal abode of heaven.

12. You will easily discover that the traveller along this arduous path is the man, who has been so fashioned in purpose of heart and will, as to be, as far as possible, estranged from his body, as not to enter into any fellowship with vice, nor suffer himself to be smoothed down by the words of flatterers: one who does not, when riding on the chariot of prosperity, despise the humble, shun sorrow, discard and disparage the praises of the holy, nor, by desire of glory or of wealth, grasped at too prematurely, exhaust all the ardour of hope; one

whose mind is not bowed down by sadness nor broken by injury, which is not har-rassed by suspicion, nor excited by lust, whom the passions of the body do not overcome, whom no desire of vanities or charms of pleasure disquiet and disturb. Add to all this the virtues of chastity, soberness and temperance; let |292 him be able easily to curb the irregular sallies of light passion, set bounds to his pleasures and desires, clear up ambiguity by an equitable judgment, by tranquillity of mind settle what is doubtful, and with all the strifes of the mind and body reconciled, so to speak, preserve in a just balance the concord of the exterior and interior man unimpaired, stilling them as they lie within his own breast, while, should he be called to it, no evil counsellor is able to turn him away from the crown of suffering, such a man surely will be adopted not only as a friend but a son by the Father, that he may obtain the riches of His glory and inheritance.

13. Rightly therefore did he come last, being, as it were, the end of nature, formed to righteousness, and the arbiter of right among other creatures. And, if we may employ the illustration, as among men Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth, so are we as beasts in the sight of the Lord, for thus says the Prophet, I became as a beast before Thee. Yet what comparison is there between the two, when He has redeemed those who were ready to perish, and we put them to death, He calls slaves to liberty and we inflict bondage on the free? But who is like God? 14. Man however came forth the last of all created things, in form comely, in mind lofty, to be admired by all creatures, having in him, after the image of the eternal God, an invisible intelligence clothed in human form. This is that intelligence or power of the soul which claims to itself, as the ruling principle, authority over the soul and body. This it is that all other living creatures dread although they see it not, just as we fear God Whom we see not, and fear Him only the more because we see Him not.

15. For, if we may presume to speak of ourselves after His image and likeness, as Scripture says, in the same way as He is established in the fulness of His Majesty, and sees all things, heaven, air, earth and sea, embracing the universe and penetrating each part, so that nothing escapes Him, and there is nothing which does not consist in Him and depend on Him, and which is not full of Him, as He Himself says, I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord, so |293 likewise the mind of man sees all things and is not seen, but maintains its own essence invisible. By means of discipline forethought and perception she apprehends hidden things, dives into the secret of the deep, and those lurking-places which are spread throughout all lands, scrutinizing the nature of both elements, after the likeness of the great God Whom she imitates and follows, Whose image in minute portions is represented in each individual. She raises herself likewise into the air, and rising above the cloudy region, soars, in zeal for knowledge and thirst for wisdom, to the height of heaven, and resting there awhile, rapt in wonder at the heavenly constellations and charmed with their brightness, looks down upon the things of earth. Then she approaches also to Hesperus and Arcturus and those other stars which although Planets err not, and sees that they keep their coarse without stumbling, that course along which, in order the better to visit all regions, they seem to circuit and to wander.

And thus with greater ardour she raises herself to the very bosom of the Father, wherein is the Only-Begotten Son of God Who declares the secrets of God, which in the time to come are to be revealed face to face. But even now He discloses them partly and in a figure to those whom He deems worthy, and at the same time sheds forth from the Spirit and from His own countenance floods of resplendent light, so that he who is illuminated thereby may say, But it was as a fire blazing in my bones and I am melted on all sides, and cannot stay. And David says, Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence!

16. By this vigour of mind, therefore, to return to the point from whence I have digressed, whereby she subjects to herself things external, comprehends in her view things distant and separate from each other, and subdues the more powerful animals, she has inspired the rest with such reverence for herself, that they emulously obey her as their king, and pay ready attention to her voice. Nay, although they are irrational they still acknowledge reason, and fix within themselves that discipline which nature has not given them. Furthermore wild beasts, seeing man's gentleness, grow gentle under his rule. Often have they closed their jaws, |294 recalled by the sound of the human voice. We see hares caught without injury by the harmless fangs of dogs, and even lions, if they hear man's voice, letting their prey escape: leopards also and bears urged on and recalled by the sound of his voice: the horses stimulated by the applause of man, and slackening their speed at his silence: nay, often, untouched by the lash they outstrip others that are scourged on, so much more powerfully does the scourge of the tongue incite them.

17. But what shall I say of the creatures' services to man? In order to please him the ram nourishes his fleece, and is plunged in the stream to enhance its beauty; sheep also crop the best herbage to distend with sweeter juice of milk their teeming udders; and, that they may offer to man their gifts, suffer the pangs of travail; bulls groan all day under the plough pressed down in the furrows; camels, besides the service of bearing burthens, suffer themselves to be shorn like rams, so that each animal contributes to man, as to a king, its service, and pays its annual tribute. The horse, exulting in such a rider, prances proudly, and curving his neck when his master mounts, gives his back to afford him a seat. And if you are still at a loss why man was made last, let the same animal teach us that this is to be deemed an honour not a slight. For he bears one who came after him, not despising but fearing him, and bearing him with pain to himself from place to place. In a moment of time man reaches far distant places and traverses long distances, transported sometimes on single horses, sometimes in triumphal chariots .

18. And since I have mentioned triumphal chariots it is needful that I should add thereto the chariot of Elijah which carried him through the air, and those of elephants, whereon man sits as conqueror, and governs although he be last and they precede him. And thus the steersman of a ship sits in the stern, and yet guides the whole ship. Whence I deem it not without a purpose that we are told in the Gospel that the Lord Jesus was asleep in the stern of the ship; and that when awakened He commanded the wind and the sea, and laid the storm, shewing thereby that |295 He came last because He came as the Pilot. Wherefore

the Apostle says, The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit. How-beit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual; and then he adds, The first man is of the earth, earthy, the second man is from heaven, heavenly.

19. Rightly therefore is man the last, being as it were the consummation of the whole work, the cause of the world, for whose sake all things were made; the habitant, as it were, of all the elements, he lives among beasts, swims with fishes, soars above birds, converses with Angels, dwells upon the earth, and has his warfare in heaven, ploughs the sea, feeds upon air, tills the soil, is a voyager over the deep, a fisher in the floods, a fowler in the air, in heaven an heir even joint-heir with Christ. These things he does by his diligence. 20. Hear also things above man's natural power. Moses walked along the bottom of the sea, the Apostles upon the surface, Habbacuc flew without wings, Elijah conquered upon earth, and triumphed in heaven. Farewell, my son; love me for I also love you.

Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLIV. [A.D.389.]

S.Ambrose here first dwells on the distinction between God and the Universe which is His work. He then speaks of the six days of Creation, and of the mystical meaning of the numbers seven and eight, applying various passages of Scripture in which they occur, and bringing forward analogies from nature. AMBROSE TO HORONTIANUS. 1. You have done well to mark the prophet's distinction between the Creator and His works, or rather, God's own distinction, for Moses wrote not of himself, but by inspiration and revelation, particularly in what relates to the formation of the world. For the One being impassible, |296 the other liable to suffering, he has referred that which was impassible to God the Creator, but the passible part, without life or motion of its own, but receiving life and motion and form from its Creator, he has assigned to the world; and as this world, after its creation, ought not to be left without a ruler, or unprotected by any father, he therefore plainly describes the invisible God as the Ruler and Governor of this visible world. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2. He therefore states the creation of the world to have taken place in six days, not that God required time to form it in, for He can do in a moment what He wills, for He spake the word, and they were created, but because things which are made, need some certain order, and order requires both time and number. And especially for the purpose of giving us a model for our works has He observed a certain number of days and certain seasons; for we also require time wherein to do aught perfectly, so as not to be precipitate in our counsels and works; nor to neglect their proper order. For when we read that God, as Scripture tells us, has made all things in wisdom, and by a certain counsel disposition and order, it is agreeable to reason that He should first have made the heavens which are the most beautiful; it is fitting also that we should first raise our eyes thither and conceive that it behoves us to aim at arriving thither, and that we should consider that it is to be preferred to all earthly habitations.

3. Wherefore in six days He created the world, on the seventh day He rested from His works. The number seven is good, and we treat it not according to the manner of Pythagoras and other philosophers, but according to the form and divisions of spiritual grace, for the prophet Isaiah has set forth the seven principal virtues of the Holy Spirit. This sacred seven, like the

venerable Trinity of the Father Son and Holy Ghost, knows neither time nor order, and is the origin of number, not bound by any of its laws. Wherefore as the heaven the earth and the sea were formed in honour of the eternal Trinity, and also the sun moon and stars, so in like manner we observe that it is according to this sevenfold circle of spiritual virtues, and this swiftly |297 revolving orbit of Divine operation, that a certain sevenfold ministry of planets, whereby this world is illuminated, has been created. And their service is said to agree with the number of these stars, which are fixed, or, as they are called in Greek, a)planei=j . The North has likewise received its Latin name (Septemtrio) from being irradiated by seven stars, upon the brightness of which as their guide pilots are said specially to fix their gaze.

4. And this peculiar property has come down from heaven to earth; for not to speak of the sevenfold fashion of the head, in the two eyes, the two ears and nostrils, and the mouth whereby we enjoy the taste of great sweetness, how wonderful is it that in the seventh month most men are conceived, and he that is afterwards born receives at that time the commencement of his vital course. But in the eighth month we perceive that by a natural law the season of bringing forth is suspended, and if some fatal compulsion has opened the barriers of the womb, the danger both of the mother and her offspring is nigh at hand. 5. But he who is born on the seventh day, although he be born well, is born to labour, but he who on the eighth day, obtains the mysteries of regeneration, is consecrated by grace, and called to the inheritance of the celestial kingdom. Great in the virtues of the Spirit is the grace of the holy number seven, but the same grace answers to the number seven, and consecrates the number eight. In the first we have the name, but in the latter the fruit, and therefore the grace of the Spirit, conferred on the eighth day, restored to Paradise those whom their own fault had banished.

6. The Old Testament too knew this number eight which in Latin we call the Octave, for the preacher says, give a portion to seven and also to eight. The number seven belongs to the Old Testament, the number eight to the New, for then Christ rose, and the day of new salvation shone upon all. This is the day whereof the Prophet says, This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it: for on that day the brightness of full and |298 perfect circumcision was infused into the hearts of men. On this account the Old Testament also gave a part to eight in the solemnity of circumcision. But this still lay in darkness: then came the Sun of righteousness, and by the consummation of His passion revealed His rays of light; these He unfolded to all, and opened the brightness of eternal life.

7. These then are that seven and eight whereof Hosea says that by that number he purchased to himself, and acquired the fulness of faith, for thus it is written, So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley, and a measure of wine . But in the former verses God had commanded him to hire to himself an harlot, and it is manifest that he did so, in that he has mentioned the price of her hiring. Now the fifteen pieces of silver are made up of the numbers seven and eight, wherefore they represent these numbers. And by the price of the two Testaments, that is, of perfect faith,

the prophecy hath received the consummation of its faith and the Church her fulness. For by the first Testament the people of Israel were gained, by the second the heathen and Gentiles. And so by a perfect faith the harlot is hired, seeking herself a consort either among the Gentiles, or from the adulterous people of the Jews, who had deserted their Lord, the Author of their virgin faith, and spread their congregations over the breadth of the whole world.

8. With regard to the words, an homer of barley, and half an homer of barley, in the homer we have a full measure, in the half homer the measure is but partly full; thus we read in our Lord's own words, I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law. And in another place the Lord says by the prophet Micah, Then shall there be peace in the land of Israel, when the Assyrian shall come into his land; and there arose against him seven shepherds, and eight bites of men. For the faithful people will then enjoy perfect peace and be freed from all temptations and vanities, when peace and grace shall have shut out the vanity of this world from our hearts, the peace, that is, of the Old, the grace of the New Testament. |299 9. The seven shepherds are the precepts of the law, whereby the flock not yet endued with reason are led through the wilderness by the rod of Moses, and governed. The eight bites of man are the commandments of the Gospel, and the words of the Lord's mouth. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Those bites are good whereby we have tasted the gift of eternal life, and in the Body of Christ have received the remission of sins. In the Old Testament the bite of death is bitter, wherefore it is said, Prevailing death has devoured. In the New Testament sweet is the taste of life, which has swallowed up death, wherefore the Apostle says, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sling, O grave, where is thy victory?

10. Moreover, to use the testimony of the Apostles, when God made man, He rested from all His works on the seventh day. But when the Jews wilfully disobeyed the commands of their God, the Lord said, If they shall enter into My rest. And therefore the Lord appointed another day, whereof He says, To-day if ye will hear My voice. For in general Scripture speaks of two days, yesterday and to-day, of which it is said, Jesus Christ the same, yesterday to-day and for ever. On the first day the promise is made, on the second it is fulfilled. But since on the former day neither Moses nor Joshua brought the people into their rest, Christ, to Whom the Father said, This day have I begotten Thee, has brought them in to-day, for by His Resurrection Jesus has obtained peace for His people. The Lord Jesus is our rest; Who says, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. For rest is in heaven, not on earth.

11. Why then need I watch the rising and setting of the stars, at whose rising the fallows should be ploughed up and pierced by the hard plough-shares, and at whose setting the fruitful crop should be cut down by the sickle? One star suffices for me in the place of all others, the bright and morning Star, at Whose rising was sown the seed not |300 of corn but of martyrs; when Rachel wept for her children, and offered in the stead of Christ her children washed in her own tears. The setting of this Star raised from the tomb not the senseless relics of the funeral pile, but the triumphant bands of the re-animated dead. 12.

Let then this number seven be observed by us, seeing that the life of man passes through seven stages to old age, as Hippocrates the teacher of medicine has explained in his writings. The first age is infancy, the second boyhood, the third youth, the fourth adult age, the fifth manhood, the sixth fulness of years, the seventh old age. Thus we have the infant, the boy, the youth, the young man, the man, the elder, the aged.

13. Solon however made ten periods of life, each of seven years; so that the first period, or infancy, should extend to the growth of the teeth, to chew its food, and utter articulate words so as to seem intelligible; boyhood again extends to the time of puberty and of carnal temptation; youth to the growth of the beard; adult age lasts until virtue has attained its perfection; the fifth is the age of manhood, fitted, during its whole course, for marriage; the sixth belongs also to manhood, in that it is adapted to the combat of prudence, and is strenuous in action; the seventh and eighth period also exhibit man ripe in years, vigourous in faculties, and his discourse endowed with a grace of utterance not unpleasing; the ninth period has still some strength remaining, and it speech and wisdom are of a chastened kind; the tenth period fills up the measure, and he who has strength to reach it, will after a full period of years knock late at the gate of death.

14. Thus Hippocrates and Solon recognized either seven ages, or periods of age consisting of seven years. In this then let the number seven prevail; but the octave introduces one uninterrupted period during which we grow up into a perfect man, in the knowledge of God, in the fulness of faith, wherein the measure of a legitimate period of life is completed. 15. In our inward parts also the virtue of the seventh number is manifested; for it is said that we have within us seven organs, the stomach, heart, lungs, spleen, liver. |301 and the two kidneys, and outwardly seven also, the head, the hinder parts, the belly, two hands and two feet. 16. Very excellent are these members, but subject to pain. Who then can doubt that the office of the Octave, which has renewed the whole man, so as not to be susceptible of pain, is more exalted? Wherefore the seventh age of the world being completed, the grace of the Octave has shone upon us, that grace which has made man to be no longer of this world, but above the world. But now we live not according to our own life but to that of Christ. For to us to live is Christ, and to die is gain, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God. So says the Apostle, whence we gather that the day of the world is come to a close. Again, at the last hour the Lord Jesus came, and died for us, and we are all dead in Him, that we may live to God. It is not then our former selves that now live, but Christ liveth in us.

17. The number seven is passed away, the octave is arrived. Yesterday is gone, to-day is come, that promised day wherein we are admonished to hear and follow the word of God. That day of the Old Testament is passed away, that new day is come, wherein the New Testament is perfected, whereof it is said, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made ivith their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. He adds too the reason why the Testament was

changed, Because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. 18. The priests of the Law, the tribunals of the Law have passed away; let us draw nigh to our new High Priest, to the throne of grace, to the guest of our souls, to the Priest, Who is not made after the law of the carnal commandment, but elected after the power of an endless life . For He took not this honour to himself, but was chosen by the Father, as the Father Himself saith, Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedech. Other priests offered for |302 themselves and for their people; this Man, not having sin, that He should offer for Himself, offered Himself for the whole world, and by His own blood entered into the Sanctuary.

19. He then is the new Priest and the new Victim, not of the law but above the law, the universal Mediator, the Light of the world, Who said, Lo I come, and came. To Him then let us draw near in the fulness of faith, adoring and beseeching and hoping in Him, Whom with our eyes we see not, but Whom we embrace with our hearts, to Whom be glory and honour for ever, Farewell, my son; love me, for I love you,

Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLV. [A.D. 385.]

S. Ambrose replies to the inquiry of Sabinus whether he had written concerning Paradise, and what was his opinion concerning it. Having first touched on the historical description of the place, he proceeds to the mystical explanation of it. And having shewn that Paradise is situate in the principal region of the soul, he teaches what is signified by the several parts thereof, and what men should imitate in the serpent. Lastly, having declared the greatness of human weakness and what great love God hns shewn us from the beginning, he exhorts men to fly the pleasures of the senses, AMBROSE TO SABINUS. 1, Having read my work on the six days of creation, you have thought good to enquire whether I have added ought concerning Paradise, and to express your strong desire to know what opinion I hold concerning it. I have, in truth, written on this subject, though not yet a veteran priest.

2. The opinions about it I have found to be many and various. Josephus, as an historian, tells us it is a place filled with trees and thick shrubs, and that it is watered by a river which divides itself into four streams. Its waters being thus gathered into one, this region does not entirely empty and deprive itself of its feeders, but up to this day bursts out into fountains and sends forth its winding streams, nourishing by them her offspring as from the full breasts of a pious mother. |303 3. Others expound it differently, but all agree that in Paradise is the deep rooted Tree of life, and the Tree of Knowledge whereby good and evil are discerned, the other trees also, full of vigor, and life, endued both with breath and reason. Wherefore we conclude that the real Paradise is no earthly one which can be seen; that it is placed in no spot of ground, but in the highest part of our own nature, which receives animation and life from the powers of the soul, and from the communication of the Spirit of God.

4. Moreover, Solomon by inspiration of the Spirit has plainly shown that Paradise is in man himself. And seeing that he declares the mysteries either of the soul and the Word, or of Christ and the Church, he says of the virgin soul, or of the Church which he wished to present as a chaste virgin to Christ, A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring scaled up, a fountain closed. 5. 'Paradisus' is the Greek, 'hortus' the Latin name. And in the Latin text we read that Susannah was in a paradise. Adam too was in a paradise. Let it not

trouble you then that some Latin manuscripts have the word 'hortus,' others 'paradisus.' 6. Where the chaste wife is, there also is the virgin; the chosen virgin has indeed her barriers and enclosures, but both are in a garden, that thus by the shade of virtue they may be shielded from the heats of the body and concupiscence of the flesh.

7. Hence also Paradise is in our highest part, thick set with the growth of many opinions, and wherein chiefly God hath placed the Tree of life, that is, the root of piety, for this is the true substance of our life, that we should offer due service to our Lord and God. 8. He has likewise planted within us a seed-plot of the knowledge of good and evil; for man alone of all creatures of the earth possesses the knowledge of good and evil. Divers other plants are also there, whose fruits are virtues. 9. Now since God knew that man's affections, once endued with knowledge, would more readily incline towards craft than towards perfect prudence, (for how could the qualities of His work be concealed from His discerning |304 eye, Who had set up certain boundaries in our soul?) He desired to cast out craft from Paradise, and as the provident Author of our salvation, to place therein the desire of life and the discipline of piety. Wherefore He commanded man to eat of every tree which is in Paradise, but that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil he should not eat.

10. But since all creatures are subject to passions, lust, with the stealth of a serpent, has crept over man's affections: well therefore has holy Moses represented lust under the similitude of a serpent; for it creeps upon its belly like a serpent, not walking on foot, nor raised up on legs, gliding along by the sinuous contortions, as it were, of its whole body. Its food, as that of the serpent, is earthly, for it knows not heavenly food, but feeds on carnal things, and changes itself into various kinds of desire, and bends to and fro in tortuous wreaths. It has poison in its fangs, whereby the belly of every luxurious man is ripped up, the glutton is slain, the licker up of dishes perishes. How many have been burst by wine, weakened by drunkenness, distended by gluttony. 11. Now I understand why the Lord God breathed on the face of man; for there is the seat and there are the incitements to lust, the eyes, the ears, the nose and the mouth; it was to fortify our senses against lust. Now it was this lust, which, as a serpent, inspired us with craft, for it is not lust but labour and constant meditation, which, by God's grace, gives perfect wisdom.

12. Now since the posterity of Adam are involved in the snares of the serpent, let us imitate herein the fraud of the serpent, and not run our head into danger, but be careful of its security beyond that of our other members, for the head of every man is Christ. Let this remain safe, that the poison of the serpent may not harm us. For Wisdom is good with an inheritance, that is, with faith, for there is an inheritance to them that believe in God. 13. But if that first man, who, dwelling in Paradise, conversed with God, could fall so easily, though made of that virgin clay which had lately been formed and created by the word of God, nor as yet clotted with gore and the murder of kindred, nor polluted by iniquity and shame; |305 nor condemned in our flesh to the curse of a guilty posterity; how much more easily afterwards did the smooth-worn path of sin lead the human race to a greater fall, when, one after another, generations more and more depraved succeeded others less wicked?

14. For if the magnet has such natural power as to attract iron to it, and transfuse itself into the character of iron, so that often when persons, wishing to try the experiment, apply iron rings to the same stone, it retains all equally firmly: whereas, if to that ring to which the stone adheres you add another, and so on in succession, although the natural power of the magnet reaches through all in succession, it hinds the first with a firm, the hindermost with a slighter bond: if such he the case, how much more must the condition and nature of the human race have fallen from a pure state into one less pure, seeing that it was always attracted to a generation more wicked than itself? 15. For if the power of nature is diminished even by passing through those substances which are not capable of sin, how much more must its vigour be abated by minds and bodies polluted by the stain of crime? Wherefore, seeing that wickedness had increased, that innocence had decayed, that there was no one that did good, no, not one; the Lord came in order to form anew, nay to augment, the grace of nature; that where sin had abounded, grace might much more abound. It is plain then both that God is the Creator of man, and that there is one God not many gods; but that there is one God Who made the world, and one world, not many worlds, as the philosophers assert.

10. First therefore He created the world, and then its inhabitant, man, that the whole world might be his country. For if, up to this day, wherever the wise man goes, he finds himself a citizen, he understands his own position, he considers himself no where as a stranger or sojourner, how much more was that first man an inhabitant of the whole world, and, as the Greeks say, a cosmopolite, he who was the recent creation of God, conversing continually with Him, the fellow-citizen of the saints, the seed-plot of virtue, set over all creatures in the earth sea and |306 air, who considered the whole world to be his dominion; whom the Lord defended as His own work, and as a loving Father and Maker never deserted? In fine He so cherished this His creation, as to redeem him when lost, to receive him when banished, when dead to raise him to life by the passion of His Only-begotten Son. Wherefore God is the Author of man, and, as a good Creator, loves His own work, as a gracious Father, abandons not him, whom, in the character of a rich householder, He has redeemed at the cost of His own possessions.

17. Let us be on our guard therefore that this man, that is, our understanding be not enervated by that woman, that is passion, who was herself deceived and beguiled by the pleasure of our senses; that she do not circumvent and draw him over to her own maxims and opinions. Let us fly pleasure as a serpent; it has many allurements, and especially as regards man. For other animals arc captivated by greediness after food; man, in that the powers of his eyes and ears are more varied, is exposed to greater dangers. Farewell; love me, as you indeed do, for I love you.

Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLVI. [A.D.389.]

Sabinus, who was Bishop of Placentia, had written to S. Ambrose to tell him of an Apollinarian heretic, who appears, after being condemned at Placentia, to have gone to Milan. S. Ambrose in this reply states how he had answered him from Holy Scripture, and refuted his false interpretations, especially of the passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, and announces that he has baffled him, and that he is 'preparing to flee.' AMBROSE TO SABINUS. 1. The man of whom you have written to me as a disseminator of pernicious doctrines is a very light character, and has already received the reward of his poison. For he has been replied to publicly, and what he had sown in private he has reaped openly. I had previously esteemed him vain and envious only, but when this language of his reached |307 my ears, I immediately answered that he was infected by the venom of Apollinaris, who will not admit that our Lord Jesus became a servant for us when He took upon Him our flesh; and this, although the Apostle declares that He took on Him the form of a servant. This is the bulwark, this is the hedge of our faith; he who destroys this shall be destroyed himself, as it is written, Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

2. At first I gently asked him, Why do you what is in itself good with evil intent? For I esteem it a favour if any one who reads my writings will tell me of any thing which causes him surprise. And this, first, because even in things which I know I may be deceived. Many things pass by the ear unheeded, many tilings sound differently to others, it is well, if it be possible, to be on one's guard in all matters. Next, because it does not become me to be disturbed, seeing that many questions are mooted concerning the words of the Apostles and those of the Gospel and our Lord Himself, if things are found in my writings also, which people consider subjects of dispute. For many indulge their own humour, like that man who compassed the whole world, that he might find some one to censure, not one whom he might deem worthy of imitation.

3. Now this man discovered a nasty means of cavilling at something in my writings, since in commenting upon the passage in which the Lord Jesus said, I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I stated that it was intended to show that He is the Father of the Son and the Lord of the creature. Nevertheless in the Psalm the Son has plainly called the Father,

Lord: They that looked upon Me shaked their heads: help Me, O Lord My God. For speaking in the form of a servant He called Him Lord Whom He knew to be His Father; though equal in the form of God, proclaiming Himself to be a servant according to the substance of His flesh; for slavery is of the flesh, lordship of the Godhead.

4. First then your great sagacity perceives that what is said in the Gospel has reference to the times of the Gospel, when the Lord Jesus dwelt among men in human form; but now we know Christ according to the flesh no longer. |308 Be it that He was so seen and known by them of old, now old things are passed aivay, all things are become new. But all things are from God, Who has reconciled us by Christ unto Himself; for we were dead, and therefore One was made a servant for all. Why do I say, a servant? He was made sin, a reproach, a curse. For the Apostle has said that He was made sin for us, that the Lord Jesus was made a curse for us. He has said, when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall He also Himself be subject. Peter also said in the Acts of the Apostles, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. Then he said also, that God had glorified His Servant Jesus, and no one brings any charge against him concerning the time. But in the Apocalypse He is called a Lamb by John, in the Psalm He is called a worm and no man. He was made all these things that He might blunt the sting of our death, that He might take away our slavery, that He might abolish our curses, our sins, our reproaches.

5. These things and others and many more you have written me word that you answered to one who consulted you; and, seeing that they are contained in Holy Scripture, how should any one hesitate to utter what has been thus piously written, tending as they do to the glory of Christ, not to His disparagement? For if it is said of His gift, that is, of the manna, that he that gathered little had no lack , he that gathered much had nothing over, could He Himself suffer diminution or increase? For in what respect was He diminished by taking upon Him our bondage, our infirmities? He was humbled, He was in the form of a servant, but He was also in the glory of God the Father. He was a worm upon the Cross, but He also forgave the sins of His persecutors. He was a reproach, but He is also the glory of the Lord, as it is written, The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. What did He lose Who is wanting in nothing? He had indeed no form or comeliness, but He had the fulness of the Godhead. He was accounted weak, but He ceased not to be the Power of God. He was seen in human form, but there shone upon earth the Divine Majesty and the glory of the Father.

6. Well therefore has the Apostle repeated the same |309 word, saying of the Lord Jesus, Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant. What is the meaning of in the form of God but in the fulness of the Godhead, in the expression of the Divine perfection? Being therefore in the fulness of the Godhead, He emptied Himself of it, and received the fulness of human nature and perfection: as nothing was wanting to Him as God so neither was there any thing wanting to His completeness as Man, that in either form He might be perfect. Wherefore David also says, Thou art fairer than the children of men.

7. The Apollinarian is confuted, he has no refuge to turn to, he is caught in his own net. For he himself had said, He took upon him the form of a servant, He was not chosen to be a servant. I ask again therefore, what is the meaning of in the form of God? He replies, In the nature of God. For there are those, says the Apostle, which by nature are no gods. I enquire, what is the meaning of took upon Him the form of a servant? Doubtless, as I have stated, the perfection of the nature and condition of man, that He might be in the likeness of man. And he has said well the likeness, not of the flesh, but of men, for He is in the same flesh. But since He alone was without sin, but all men are in sin, He was seen in the form of man. Wherefore the prophet also says, He is a man yet who can know him ? Man according to the flesh, but beyond man according to the Divine operation. When he touched the leper He was seen as man, but above man when He cleansed him. When He wept over Lazarus dead, He wept as man, but He was above men when He commanded the dead to come forth with bound feet. He was seen as man when He hung upon the cross, but above man when the graves were opened and He raised the dead.

8. Nor has the Apollinarian venom any cause for complaining because it is thus written, And being found in fashion as a man, for Jesus is not hereby denied to be man, for in another place Paul himself calls Him, The Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, but |310 rather His manhood is established. For it is the custom and manner of Scripture so to express itself, and we read also in the Gospel, And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father. In the same way therefore that He is called as the only-begotten, yet it is not denied that He is truly the only-begotten Son of God, so He is said to be as man, yet it is not denied that the perfection of manhood existed in Him. 9. While, then, He was in the form of a servant, humbled even unto death, He yet remained in the glory of God. What injury then was His state of subjection to Him? We read that He was made a servant, because we read that He was made of a Virgin and created in the flesh, for every creature is a servant, as the Prophet says; For all things serve Thee. Wherefore also God the Father says, I have found David My servant, with My holy oil have 1 anointed him. He shall call Me, Thou art my Father, my God, and my strong salvation; and I will make him My first-born; and in another Psalm, Preserve Thou my soul for I am holy: save Thy servant, and afterwards in the same Psalm, Give Thy strength unto Thy servant, and help the son of Thy handmaid. Thus I have collected the words of the Father and of the Son, that I may answer not with human arguments but by the Divine oracles.

10. In another passage He says, Into Thy hands I commend My spirit, and, Thou hast set My feel in a large room, and, I became a reproof among all Mine enemies. And in the same Psalm, Shew Thy servant the light of Thy countenance. By the mouth of Isaiah too the Son of God Himself says, From my mother's womb the Lord hath called My name, and He hath made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand hath He hid Me, and made Me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He hid Me; and said unto Me, Thou art My servant, O Israel. For the Son of God is also called Israel, as in another place, But thou, Israel, My Servant Jacob, whom I have chosen. For He alone hath truly not only seen but also declared God the Father.

11. And it goes on, In whom I will he glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for |311nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. And now saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him and Israel. Who hath gathered the people of God but Christ? Who is glorified before the Lord? Who is the Power of God? He to Whom the Father hath said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant, and He to Whom He says Behold, I will give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, that Thou mightest be My Salvation unto the end of the earth. Of Him He has also spoken by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, saying, I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My Servant David, He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and My Servant David a Prince among them. Now king David was already dead, and therefore the true David, the truly humble, the truly meek, the true Son of God, strong of hand, is announced by this name; he also is intended in the book of the prophet Zechariah, where God the Father says, Behold I will send my servant, the Orient is His name. Did then His being clothed in filthy garments deprive the Sun of righteousness of the brightness of His Godhead?

12. And why need I say more? Shall we deem servitude to be a state of greater weakness than that of being made sin, of being a curse, a reproach, than the infirmities which He bore for our sakes that we might be saved from them? For He was made all of these that He might relieve the world from them. But they will not admit that He was made a servant, a reproach, a curse, because they affirm that the Word and the flesh are of one substance, and say, Because He redeemed us He is called a servant, and ought to be called sin. And they do not perceive this to be the glory of Christ, that in His Incarnation He took upon Him the state of a servant that He |312 might restore liberty to all; He bore our sins, that He might take away the sin of the world.

13. He was made a servant, He was made sin and a curse, that thou mightest cease to be a servant of sin, and that He might absolve thee from the curse of the Divine judgment. He therefore took upon Him thy curse, for Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. He was made a curse upon the cross, that thou mightest be blessed in the kingdom of God. He was disgraced, He was vilified and set at nought. He said, I have laboured in vain, through Whom Paul was enabled to say, I have not laboured in vain. This He did that He might confer on His servants the fruit of good works and the glory of the preaching of the Gospel, whereby the world might be released from the burthen of its toil. 14. On hearing these things the partridge was left in the midst of her days, she who cried that she might gather the things which she did not lay, and was overcome by the voice of the Lord Jesus. And even now is she preparing for flight.

Farewell; love me, for I love you.

Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLVII. [A.D. 390.]

This brief letter was sent with a book which Sabinus had asked for. It is a friendly invitation to a regular correspondence, as bringing friends together in spirit who are several in body. AMBROSE TO SABINUS. 1. I have transmitted the volume you asked for, written more clearly and neatly than the one which I had previously sent, in order that by the facility of its perusal your judgment of it might be unimpeded. For the original copy was written not for appearance, but for use, for I do not always employ a scribe, especially at night, at which time I am unwilling to be a trouble and a burthen to others, and further, because the words I am then dictating flow on with a kind of impetuosity, and in a rapid stream. 2. But as I am desirous to select with precision the |313 words which my old age employs in its familiar intercourse, and to proceed with a slow step, I think the use of my own hands in writing befits me better; that I may seem rather to conceal my words than lustily give vent to them; and may not have to blush at the presence of him who is writing for me, but, having no one in the secret of my words, may weigh what I write with eye as well as with ears. For, in the words of Scripture, the tongue is swifter than the hand; My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

3. And though you may perhaps say that the swiftness is here attributed to the writer, the meaning will nevertheless not escape you that it is only the swiftness of a ready writer which can take down the words of the prophetic tongue. The Apostle Paul also wrote with his own hand, as he says himself, I have written unto you with mine own hand. He did it to show honour, we do it from bashfulness. 4. But while your judgement of my book is still in suspense, let us entertain each other by letters; the advantage whereof is that although severed from each other by distance of space we may be united in affection; for by this means the absent have the image of each other's presence reflected back upon them, and conversation by writing unites the severed. By this means also we interchange thoughts with our friend, and transpose our mind into his.

5. Now if, according to your admonition, there is any savour of ancient writings in our letters, not only do our minds seem to be united by this progress in true doctrine, but also the form and fashion of a more intimate converse seems to be set forth, in that the discussion

which is thus entered upon by mutual inquiry and reply appears to place in presence of each other those friends who in this manner challenge and engage one another. 6. And why need I produce the example of our ancestors, who by their letters have instilled faith into the minds of the people, and have written to whole nations together, and have shewn themselves to be present although writing from a distance, according to the words of the Apostle, that he was absent in body, but present in spirit, not only in writing but also in judging. Again, he condemned them |314 while absent by epistle, and also absolved them by epistle; for the epistle of Paul was a certain image of his presence and form of his work.

7. For the epistles of the Apostles were not, like those of others, weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence weak, and his speech contemptible, but his letter was of that kind that such as was the substance of his work such also was the form of his precept; for such, says he, as we are in word by letters when absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present. He imprinted the image of his presence on his letters, he declared its fruit and testimony in his work. Farewell; love me, as indeed you do, for I love you.

Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLVIII.

S. Ambrose in this letter begs Sabinus to examine the books which he sends to him carefully, and to criticise them freely, as a proof of true friendship, and at the same time adding to the value of the works. AMBROSE TO SABINUS. 1. You have sent me back my volumes, and I shall hold them in greater esteem owing to your judgment. I have therefore sent you others, not so much because I was delighted at wishing for your favourable judgment, as of that truth which I have asked and you have promised to declare to me; for should any thing strike you I would rather it had the correction of your judgment before it goes abroad beyond the power of recal, than that you should praise what is blamed by others. It is on this account that I have requested to have your opinion of those things which you asked me to write, for I have not so much desired that what I publish from time to time should be read by you, as that they should be submitted to the account which your judgment shall take of them. And this judgment, as one said of old, will not require a long sitting and delay. For surely it is easy for you to judge of my writings. |315

2. Thus far, on your invitation, I have thought it right to proceed; it is now your part to discern clearly and examine carefully what requires correction, that you may thus escape being inculpated in those faults which may have stolen unawares upon myself. For somehow over and above that want of caution which envelops me as with a mist, every one is beguiled in what he himself writes, and its faults escape his ear. And as a man takes pleasure in his children even though deformed, so also is a writer flattered by his own discourses however ungraceful. How frequently are words put forth uncautiously or understood less charitably than one means; or some ambiguity escapes from us; things, moreover, which are to be subjected to the judgment of others we ought to weigh not so much by our own as by another's opinion, and to separate from it every grain of malevolence.

3. Be so kind therefore as to lend an ear of keen attention, peruse the whole thoroughly, test my discourses, see whether they contain, not rhetorical charms and persuasive words, but a sound faith and a sober confession. Affix a mark on words of doubtful weight and which are deceitful in the scales, that the adversary may not make out any thing to tell in his favour. Let him meet with defeat if he enters into the contest. That book is in a bad condition, which cannot be defended without a champion; for a book which goes forth without a mediator has to speak for itself; my book however shall not go forth from me, unless it receive authority

from you. When then you bid it go forth, and give your word for it, let it be left to its own keeping. 4. But, since the kingdom of God is not in word but in power, if a word offend you consider the power of its profession. By profession I mean that decision of faith which we hold, as handed down by our fathers, against the Sabellians and Arians, that we worship God the Father and His Only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, that this Trinity is of one Substance Majesty and Divinity; that in this Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, we baptize, as it is written; that the Son, co-eternal with the Father, took upon Him our flesh, born of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, equal to the Father as touching His |316 Godhead, in the form of God, that is, in all the fulness of the Godhead Which dwells in Him, as the Apostle says, bodily; Who, in the person of man, took upon Him the form of a servant, and humbled Himself even unto death.

5. Wherefore as against Photinus this is our sentence, and as against Apollinaris it is also a proper safeguard; our confession, namely, that as in the form of God He lacked nothing of the Divine nature and fulness, so in that human form there was nothing wanting in Him so as to cause Him to be judged imperfect as Man; for He came in order to save man altogether. Truly it would not have been fitting that He Who had accomplished a perfect work in others should suffer it to be imperfect in Himself; for if aught was wanting to Him as Man, then He did not redeem the whole man, and if He did not redeem the whole man, He deceived us, for He said that He had come in order to save the whole man. But since it is impossible for God to lie, He deceived us not; wherefore, seeing that He came to redeem and save the whole man, He took upon Him the whole of that which belonged to human perfection.

6. Such, as you will remember, is my belief. Should my words in any passage raise a doubt, still they will not raise any prejudice as to my faith, for if the mind continue sted-fast, it extends its protection over ambiguous language, and preserves it from error. 7. This preface then I send you, and will insert it, if you please, in the books of our letters, and place it among their number; that so it may be recommended by your name, and by our letters to each other our mutual love in the Lord, may be increased: that, finally, you may so read as to give me your judgment, and to communicate to me whatever may strike you, for true love is proved by constancy. For the present we have chosen that which old men find more easy, the writing of letters in ordinary and familiar language: subjoining, should such present itself, any appropriate passage from the sacred Scriptures. Farewell, my brother, and love one who is your lover, for I greatly love you. |317

Letters 41-50 — LETTER XLIX. [A.D. 390.]

S. Ambrose says that he never feels less solitary, than when by himself writing to a friend. He then dwells on the benefit of solitude; especially in that we may then have God present with us, and lay open our souls to Him. AMBROSE TO SABINUS. 1. Since you also take pleasure in receiving my letters, by means of which, although separated from each other, we discourse together as if present, I will for the future more frequently converse with you by letter when I am alone. For I am never less alone than when I seem to be so, nor ever less at leisure than in the intervals of labour. For then I summon at pleasure whom I will, and associate to myself those whom I love most or find most congenial; no man interrupts or intrudes upon us. Then it is that I more intimately enjoy you, that I confer with you in the Scriptures, that we converse together more at length.

2. Mary was alone when addressed by the Angel, alone when the Holy Ghost came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her. She was alone when she effected the salvation of the world, and conceived the Redemption of the universe. Peter was alone when the mystery of the sanctification of the Gentiles all over the world was made known to him. Adam was alone, and he fell not, because his mind adhered to God. But when the woman was joined to him he lost his power of abiding by the celestial precepts, and therefore he hid himself when God walked in Paradise. 3. And even now, while I read the sacred Scriptures, God walks in Paradise. The book of Genesis, wherein the virtues of the Patriarchs bud forth, is Paradise; Deuteronomy, wherein grow the precepts of the Law, is also |318 Paradise, wherein the tree of life brings forth good fruit, and diffuses over all nations the precepts of eternal hope.

4. So when I hear, Love your enemies, when I hear, Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor; when I hear, unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; when I hear these things and do not perform them, nay, when I barely love him who loves me, when I will not part with what I have, when I desire to avenge the injuries I have received, and to recover what has been wrested from me, whereas the Scripture bids me give up more than I have been asked for or deprived of, I perceive that I am acting contrary to the commands of God. Thus opening the eyes of my conscience, I perceive that God is present and walking

with me; I desire to hide, I desire to clothe myself; but I am naked in His sight unto Whom all things are naked and opened! I am abashed therefore, and desire to conceal the shame of my crimes as though they were the secret members of my body; but since God sees all things, since I am manifest to Him, though covered with leaves and shaded by thickets, I think to conceal myself from Him by the covering of my body. This is that coat of skins, in which Adam was clothed when he was cast out of Paradise, neither shielded from the cold, nor protected from scorn, but exposed to misery as well as guilt.

5. From whence it appears that it is when alone that we offer ourselves to God, that we open to Him our souls, that we put off the cloak of fraud. Adam was alone when placed in Paradise; alone also when made in the image of God: but when cast out of Paradise he was not alone. The Lord Jesus was alone when He redeemed the world; for it was no herald or messenger, but the Lord Himself alone Who redeemed His people, although He, in Whom the Father always dwells, can never be alone. Let us also then be alone, that the Lord may be with us. Farewell: love me, for I also love you. |319

Letters 41-50 — LETTER L.

This letter contains an interesting discussion of the question how an evil man like Balaam could be employed by God to utter true prophecies, and deals with other difficulties which arise out of Balaam's history. AMBROSE TO CHROMATIUS. 1. Does God lie? Truly He lies not, because it is impossible for God to lie. And further, does this impossibility arise from infirmity? No, truly, for how can He be Almighty if He cannot do all things? What then is impossible to Him? Not that which is difficult to His Power, but what is contrary to His Nature. It is impossible, it is said, for Him to lie. This impossibility comes not of infirmity, but of Power and Majesty, for truth admits not of falsehood, nor God's Power of the weakness of error. Wherefore let God be true and every man a liar. 2. The truth therefore is always in Him; He remains faithful; change or deny Himself He cannot. But if He deny that He is true, He lies, but to lie belongs not to power but to weakness. Nor can He change, for His nature admits not infirmity. This impossibility therefore comes of His fulness, which cannot be diminished or increased, not of infirmity, which, in that it increases itself, is weak. Whence we gather that this impossibility on the part of God is indeed most powerful. For what can be more powerful than to be ignorant of all infirmity?

3. There is however another weakness of God which is stronger than men, and a foolishness of God which is wiser than men, but this has reference to the Cross, the former to His Godhead. If then His weakness is strength, how can that which comes of His power be weak? Let it therefore be an axiom with us that God lies not. 4. But there was no diviner of auguries in Israel according to the law of God. How then was it that Balaam said that he was forbidden by the oracle of God to go and curse the people of Israel, and yet he went, and the Angel of the Lord who had forbidden his going, met him, and stood in the way of the ass that carried him, and nevertheless the Angel himself bid him go, only he must speak that which |320 should be put into his mouth? If there was to be no deceiver in Israel, how did this oracle of God, declaring things for true, come to him who was a deceiver? If he spoke as the oracle of God, whence did he derive the grace of the Divine inspiration?

5. But you are not to wonder that the Lord should put into the mouth of a diviner what he should speak, when you read in the Gospel that it was put into the mouth even of the prince of the Synagogue, one of the persecutors of Christ, that it is expedient that one man should die for the people? Herein then is no merit of prophecy, but an assertion of the truth;

that by the testimony even of adversaries the truth might be declared, so that the perfidy of unbelievers might be confuted by the words even of their own diviners. Just so Abraham the Chaldaean is called to belief, that the superstition of the Chaldaeans might be put to silence. It is not therefore the merit of him who utters, but rather the oracle of God Who calls, the grace of God Who reveals. 6. Now what was the guilt which Balaam incurred, but that he spoke one thing, and designed another? For God requires a clean vessel, not one defiled by uncleanness and pollution. Balaam therefore was tried, not approved, for he was full of deceit and treachery. Again, when he first enquired whether he should go to that vain people, and was forbidden, he excused himself: afterwards, when more honourable messages were sent, he who ought to have refused consent, seduced by ampler promises and more abundant gifts, was led again to enquire of God, as if many gifts could influence the mind of God.

7. Answer was made to him as to a covetous man, not as to one who sought the truths that so he might rather be deceived than rightly informed. He set out, an Angel met him in a narrow place, and shewed himself to the ass, |321 but not to the diviner. To the former he revealed himself, the latter he crushed; yet, that he might at length be recognized by him, he opened his eyes also. He saw, but even yet he did not believe the manifest oracle, and though his very eyes ought to have convinced him, he answered confusedly and doubtingly. 8. Then the Lord, being angry, said to him by the Angel, Go with the men, but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that shall thou speak. As an empty instrument you shall give utterance to My words. It is I Who will speak, not you; you will only echo what you hear and do not understand. You will gain no advantage by going, because you will return without either a reward of money or progress in grace. Again, these are his first words, How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? in order to shew that the benediction of the Hebrew people depended not on his will but on the grace of God.

9. From the top of the rocks, he says, I see him; for I cannot embrace within my ken this people, which shall dwell alone, marking out their boundaries, not so much by the occupation of space as by the abode of virtue, and extending them into eternal ages by the distinctive peculiarity of their manners. For which of the bordering nations shall be numbered with this one, which is raised above their fellowship by its exalted righteousness? Who shall understand the nature of its generation? Their bodies we indeed perceive to have been compounded and fashioned of human seed, but their minds have sprung from higher and wondrous seed-plots. 10. Let my soul die with their souls, die to this bodily life, that with the souls of the just it may attain to the grace of that eternal life. Herein even then was revealed the excellence of our heavenly Sacrament and of holy Baptism, by the operation whereof men die to original sin and to evil works; that being transformed by newness of life into fellowship with the just they may rise again to live as do the just. And what wonder is it that it should be so, when men die to sin in order to live to God?

11. Balak hearing this, was wroth and said, 'I brought thee to curse and thou blessest.' He answered, 'I am |322 reproved for that of which I am not conscious; for I speak nothing of

my own, but utter sounds like a tinkling cymbal.' Again, being carried to a second and a third place, although he wished to curse, he blessed; He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel; the Lord his God is with him. And afterwards he commands seven altars and sacrifices to be prepared. He ought, indeed, to have departed, but his weak mind and mutability of purpose led him to believe that he could turn aside the Will of God: he himself, the while, being in a trance, desired one thing but spoke another. 12. How goodly, said he, are thy tents, O host of the Hebrews! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side and as cedar trees beside the waters. A man shall come out of Jacob, and shall subdue many nations, and his kingdom shall be exalted on high: in the earth also he shall extend his dominion in Egypt. Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee. Now to whom did he point but to the people of Christ? God blesses him into whose heart the Word of God enters, even to the dividing asunder of the soul, and of the joints and marrow; in him Balaam would have found the grace of the Lord if he had acted according to the intent and purpose of his heart. But since an evil mind is confuted by its own counsels, and the secrets of the soul are betrayed by events, his mind was thus discovered by the treachery which followed.

13. Therefore also he met with a worthy reward of his malice. For finding while in his trance that he could not curse, he gives his advice to the king, saying, ' Such is the utterance of what God has commanded, hear now my counsel against the oracles of God. This people is just, it has the protection of God: since it has not given itself to divinations and auguries, but to the eternal God above; and therefore its faith excels that of others. But sometimes even faithful minds fall through corporeal charms and the blandishments of beauty. Numerous are your women, and many of them not uncomely; now the male sex is in no respect more prone to fall than through the frailty with which it is captivated by female beauty, particularly if their |323 minds are excited by frequent converse, and thus become inflamed as by a torch; if, while they drink in the hope of enjoying, their passions are kept in suspense. Let your women therefore cast their hooks by their converse, let them offer no obstacles to a first access, but roam abroad and spread themselves through the camp, exposed to view and affable of speech. Let them so artfully deal with these men as not to admit them to carnal intercourse until they shall have proved the strength of their love by becoming participators in sacrilege. For they may thus be deprived of the protection of heaven, if they shall themselves depart by sacrilege from the Lord their God.'

14. Unrighteous therefore, as the counsellor of fornication and sacrilege, was Balaam; for thus it is plainly written in the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist, when the Lord Jesus says to the Angel of the Church of Pergamos; Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication; so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Wherefore it appears that from hence has flowed the impiety of the Manichees, like that of Manasseh, who mingle and unite sacrilege with impurity. 15. Neither, then, was God unjust, nor His purpose mutable; for He detected Balaam's mind and the secrets of his heart, and He therefore tried him as a diviner, He did not choose

him as a prophet. Surely he ought to have been converted if it were only by the grace of such great oracles and the sublimity of his revelations, but his mind, full of iniquity, brought forth words but did not yield belief, seeking to frustrate by its counsels that event which it had predicted. And since he could not defeat the prophecy, he suggested deceitful counsels whereby the fickle people of the Jews were tempted but not overcome; for by the righteousness of one priest all the counsel of this wicked man was overthrown, and that the host of our fathers could be delivered by one man was much more wonderful than that it could be deceived by one man.

10. This little gift I have sent to your Holiness, because |324 you wish me to compile somewhat from the interpretations of the ancient authors. But I had undertaken to write letters in a familiar style, savouring of the tone of thought of our fathers; and should you relish their flavour I shall be emboldened to send you of the same kind hereafter. For I prefer conversing garrulously with you like an old man concerning heavenly things, which is called in Greek adolesxh~sai: Isaac went forth into the field, adolesxh~sai, seeing in his mind, on the approach of Rebecca, the mysteries of the Church which was to come: this conversing with you with the words of an old man, that I may not seem to have abandoned my art, I prefer, I say, to uttering in a more vehement style things no longer adapted to our studies or strength. Farewell: love me, for I also love you.

[Footnotes moved to the end and numbered. Marginal biblical references and running headers mostly omitted] 1. spiritum. Rom. x. 10. 2. sacramentum. 3. refrigerat. 4. The Latin title is 'Magister equitum et peditum 'When the Praefecti Praetorio became civil rather than military officers, the chief command of the armies was transferred to two high officers, called, one 'Magister equitum,'and the other 'Magister peditum. When the empire was divided these became four, and eventually the number was increased to eight, who were all called 'Magistri equitum et peditum.' See Gibbon ch. xvii. 3. 5. i. e. the 'Comes Orientis,' under whose jurisdiction the matter was, and who had sent the report to the Emperor, see Lett. xl. 6. 6. sospitatis indicio. 7. This sentence as it stands in the text is incomplete, the 'quia' having no correlative. The 'at vero quia seems like 'at enim' in Classical Latin, or perhaps the 'quia' should be omitted.

8. See Letter xix, 7. S. Ambrose in De Abraham B 1. c 9, 93 alludes to the use of the veil in Christian marriages. 9. This name appears in the reply of the Milan Synod as Plotinus, which is probably the true form. 10. There are three laws in the code of Theodosius directed against the Manichees, one of the year 372, A.D. which forbade them to hold assemblies, one of 389, A.D. and one of 391. A.D. ordering their banishment. It is probably the second of these that is referred to, though Gothofred refers it to the third, in which case the date of the Letter must be altered. 11. All these names except Geminianus occur in the list of Bishops present at the Council of Aquileia. See p. 60. 12. nou~j. 13. This whole passage is full of expressions borrowed from Virgil. 14. Exod. xiv. 29. S. John xxi. 7. Bel and the Dragon 36.

15. This title seems here to be applied especially to the constellations of the Pleiades and Hyades, each of which consisted of seven stars. 16. See note on Letter xxvi. 9. 17. morsus hominum. E.V. 'principal men.' 18. Devoravit mors praevalens. The E. V. is, 'He will swallow up death in victory.' The Vulg. has, 'Praecipitabit mortem in sempiternum.' 19. The word 'vitae' is here inserted as necessary to the sense, and to the accuracy of the quotation. 20. nouj. 21. diminuit. Exod. xvi. 18. 22. ampliavit. 23. This agrees with the LXX, kai\ a!nqrwpo&j e0sti kai\ gnw&setai au)to&n; 24. specie. 25. puerum. 26. 'Ecce ego mittam servum meum, Oriens nomen Ejus.' Vulg. has 'Ecce ego adducam servum meum Orientem.' 'Oriens nomen Ejus' comes in v. 12. 'Behold I will bring forth my servant the Branch.' The same word in the original is used also in Is. iv. 2. Jerem. xxiii. 5. xxxiii. 15. and in all those passages the Vulg. renders it by 'Germen.' In the passages of Zech. and, Jerem. the LXX. have the word a0natolh&. The word in the original means 'a sprout' or 'shoot.'

27. See Letter xxxii. 1. 28. He is quoting from a letter of Cicero's. Ep. ix. 3. Longi subsellii, ut noster Pompeius appellat, judicatio et mora. 29. He is here quoting from Cicero De off. iii. 1, when; Cicero gives as a saying of Scipio Africanus, on the authoritvof Cato, 'nuquam se minus otiosum esse quam quum otiosus, nec minus solum quam quum solus esset.' It is quoted, again by S. Ambrose in De off. Min. iii. 1, 107. 30. This is the reading of most MSS, according to the, Benedictine Editors. And, though the connection of ideas is somewhat abrupt, they explain it to be, that, as the gift of faith was bestowed on Abraham the Chaldean, so the gift of prophecy was bestowed on Balaam. All the other Editions have 'Balaam' instead of 'Abraham.' This makes the connection easier, but then 'adscitur ad fidem' is strangely applied to him, and it could only mean, 'is employed to utter the truth.' He might be called a Chaldean as the common name among the Romans for Eastern diviners generally.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LI. [A.D. 390.]

This is the famous Letter addressed by S. Ambrose to Theodosius after the massacre at Thessalonica. The details of that occurrence are too familiar to need repeating here. In this Letter S. Ambrose explains to the Emperor why he had avoided meeting him on his return to Milan, and urges him with respectful and most affectionate, but firm remonstrance, to follow David in penitence as he had followed him in crime, and tells him that God Himself had in a vision forbidden him to offer the Sacrifice of the Eucharist in his behalf while he remained impenitent. The Letter, far from deserving Gibbon's scornful title of 'a miserable rhapsody on a noble subject,' may rather be regarded as a model of dignified remonstrance, well befitting an eminent prelate addressing a great earthly Sovereign. AMBROSE, BISHOP, TO HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS. 1. VERY pleasant to me is the remembrance of your long friendship, and I also bear a grateful sense of those benefits which at my frequent intreaties you have most graciously extended to others. You may be sure then that it could not be from any ungrateful feeling that on your arrival, which I was wont to long for so ardently, I shunned your presence. The motives of my conduct I will now briefly explain. |325

2. I found that I alone in all your court was denied the natural right of hearing, in order to deprive me of the power of speaking too: for you were frequently displeased at decisions having reached me which were made in your Consistory. Thus I have been debarred from the common privilege of men, though the Lord Jesus says, Nothing is secret which shall not be made manifest. Wherefore I did my utmost to obey with reverence your royal will, and I provided both for you and for myself; for you, that you should have no cause of disturbance, to which end I endeavoured that no intelligence should be brought me of the Imperial decrees; and as to myself, I provided against my not seeming to hear, when present, from fear of others, and thus incurring the charge of connivance, and also against hearing in such manner that while rny ears were open my mouth must be closed, and I must not utter what I heard, lest I should injure those who had fallen under suspicion of treachery.

3. What then was I to do? was I not to listen? But I could not close my ears with the wax of the old tales. Must I disclose what I heard? But then I had reason to fear that the same

result which I apprehended from your commands would ensue from my own words; that they might become the cause of bloodshed. Was I then to be silent? But this would be the most miserable of all, for my conscience would be bound, my liberty of speech taken away. And what then of the text, if the priest warn not the wicked from his wicked way, the wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but the priest shall be liable to punishment, because he did not warn him? 4. Suffer me, gracious Emperor. You have a zeal for the faith, I own it, you have the fear of God, I confess it: but you have a vehemence of temper, which if soothed may readily be changed into compassion, but if inflamed becomes so violent that you can scarcely restrain it. If no one will allay it, let no one at least inflame it. To yourself I would willingly trust, for you are wont to exercise self-control, and by your love of mercy to conquer this violence of your nature.

5. This vehemence of yours I have preferred secretly to |326 commend to your consideration, rather than run the risk of rousing it publicly by my acts, And so I have preferred to be lacking somewhat in duty rather than in humility, and that others should complain of my want of priestly authority, rather than that you should find any want of respect in me, who am so devoted to you; and this in order that you may restrain your emotions, and have full power of choosing what counsel to follow. I alleged as my reason, bodily sickness, which was in fact severe, and not to be mitigated but by more gentle treatment; still I would rather have died than not have waited two or three days for your arrival. But I could not do so. 6. An act has been committed in the city of Thessalonica, the like of which is not recorded, the perpetration of which I could not prevent, which in my frequent petitions before the court I had declared to be most atrocious, and which by your tardy revocation you have yourself pronounced to be very heinous: such an act as this I could not extenuate. Intelligence of it was first brought to a synod held on the arrival of the Galilean Bishops: all present deplored it, no one viewed it leniently; your friendship with Ambrose, so far from excusing your deed, would have even brought a heavier weight of odium on my head, had there been no one found to declare the necessity of your being reconciled to God.

7. Is your Majesty ashamed to do that which the Royal Prophet David did, the forefather of Christ according to the flesh? It was told him that a rich man, who had numerous flocks, on the arrival of a guest took a poor man's lamb and killed it, and recognizing in this act his own condemnation, he said, I have sinned against the Lord. Let not your Majesty then be impatient at being told, as David was by the prophet, Thou art the man. For if you listen thereto obediently and say, I have sinned against the Lord, if you will use those words of the royal Prophet, O come let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker, to you also it shall be said, Because thou repentest, the Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die. 8. Another time, when David had commanded the people to be numbered, his heart smote him, and he said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that 1 have done, and now, I |327 beseech thee O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly. And Nathan the prophet was sent again to him, to offer him three things, to choose one of them, which he would; seven years famine in the land, or to flee three months before his enemies, or three days pestilence in the land. And David said, I am in a great

strait, let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man. His fault lay in wishing to know the number of all the people which were with him, a knowledge which ought to have been reserved for God.

9. And Scripture tells us that when the people were dying, on the very first day and at dinner time, David saw the Angel that smote the people, he said, Lo, I have sinned and done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father's house. So the Lord repented, and commanded the Angel to spare the people, and that David should offer sacrifice: for there were then sacrifices for sin, but we have now the sacrifices of penitence. So by that humility he was made more acceptable to God, for it is not wonderful that man should sin, but it is indeed blameable if he do not acknowledge his error, and humble himself before God. 10. Holy Job, himself also powerful in this world, saith, I covered not my sin, but declared it before all the people. And to the cruel king Saul Jonathan his son said, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; and Wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood to slay David without a cause? For although he was a king he still would have sinned in slaying the innocent. Again when David was possessed of the kingdom, and heard that innocent Abner had been slain by Joab the Captain of his host, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord for ever from the blood af Abner the son of Ner, and he fasted for sorrow.

11. This I have written, not to confound you, but that these royal examples may induce you to put away this sin from your kingdom; for this you will do by humbling your soul before God. You are a man; temptation has fallen upon you; vanquish it. Sin is not washed away but by |328 tears and penitence. Neither Angel nor Archangel can do it. The Lord Himself, Who alone can say I am with you; even He grants no remission of sin save to the penitent. 12. I advise, I entreat, I exhort, I admonish; for I am grieved that you who were an example of singular piety, who stood so high for clemency, who would not suffer even single offenders to be put in jeopardy, should not mourn over the death of so many innocent persons. Successful as you have been in battle, and great in other respects, yet mercy was ever the crown of your actions. The devil has envied you your chief excellence: overcome him, while you still have the means. Add not sin to sin by acting in a manner which has injured so many.

13. For my part, debtor as I am to your clemency in all other things; grateful as I must ever be for this clemency, which I have found superior to that of many Emperors and equalled only by one, though I have no ground for charging you with contumacy, I have still reason for apprehension: if you purpose being present, I dare not offer the Sacrifice. That which may not be done when the blood of one innocent person has been shed, may it be done where many have been slain? I trow not. 14. Lastly, I will write with my own hand what I wish should be read by yourself only. As I hope for deliverance from all tribulation from the Lord, it has not been from man, nor by man's agency that this has been forbidden me, but by His own manifest interposition. For in the midst of my anxiety, on the very night whereon I was about to set out, I saw you in a vision coming into the Church, but I was withheld from

offering Sacrifice. Other things I pass over, which I might have avoided, but I bore them for your sake, I believe. May the Lord cause all things to turn out peacefully. Our God gives us divers admonitions, by heavenly signs, by prophetic warnings; and by visions vouchsafed even to sinners, He would have us understand that we ought to beseech Him to remove from us commotions, that He would bestow peace on you, our rulers, that the Church, for whose benefit it is that we should have pious and Christian Emperors, may be kept in faith and tranquillity. |329

15. Doubtless you wish to be approved by God. To every thing there is a season, as it is written; It is time for Thee Lord, saith the prophet, to lay to Thine hand, and, It is an acceptable time to God. You shall make your oblation when you have received permission to sacrifice, when your offering will be pleasing to God. Would it not be a delight to me to enjoy your Majesty's favour, and act in accordance with your will, if the case permitted it? Prayer by itself is a sacrifice; it obtains pardon while the oblation would be rejected, for the former is evidence of humility, the latter of contempt: for God Himself tells us that He prefers the performance of His commandments to sacrifice. God proclaims this, Moses announces it to the people, Paul preaches it to them. Do that which you understand is for the time better. I will have mercy, it is said, and not sacrifice. Are not those therefore rather to be called Christians who condemn their own sin than those who think to excuse it? The just accuses himself in the beginning of his words. He who, having sinned, accuses himself, not he who praises himself, is just.

16. I would that previously to this I had trusted rather to myself than to your accustomed habits. Remembering that you quickly pardon, and revoke your sentence, as you have often done, you have been anticipated, and I have not shunned that which I had no need to fear. But thanks to the Lord, Who chastises His servants, that they may not be lost. This I share with the prophets, and you shall share it with the saints. 17. Shall not I value the father of Gratian at more than my own eyes? Your other sacred pledges too claim pardon for you. On those whom I regarded with impartial affection I conferred by anticipation a name that is dear to me. You have my love, my affection, my prayers. If you believe my words, I call on you to act according to them; if, I say, you believe, acknowledge it, but if not, excuse my conduct in that I prefer God to my sovereign. May your gracious Majesty, with your holy offspring, enjoy in happiness and prosperity perpetual peace. |330

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LII. [A.D.392.]

TITIANUS, or Tatianus, for both forms of the name are given, was a person in high position under Theodosius, and filled the office of Pnetorian Prrefect. He had incurred, as this Letter implies, the enmity of the Emperor's favourite minister Rufinus, who eventually procured his exile. He is here congratulated on Rufinus' removal from the position of 'Master of the offices,' and thereby from exercising an unfavourable influence on some private suit in which Tatianus was engaged. AMBROSE TO TITIANUS. 1. You have obtained a harmless victory, enjoying the security of victory without the bitterness of entreaty; for Rufinus from being Master of the Offices , has been made in his consulate a Praetorian Praefect. By this he has acquired more power for himself, but to you he can be hurtful no longer, for he is become the Praefect of another district. I greatly rejoice both with him, as a friend, in having thus received an increase of honour, and at the same time a relief from odium, and also with you, as a son. And this, because you are delivered from him whom you deemed would be too rigid a judge to you, so that if you shall have arranged your business with your grand-daughter, it will have arisen from your affection, not from fear.

2. Exert yourself, therefore, to obtain an adjustment, both the hope and profit of which are now greater: the hope, because the father of your grand-daughter, who promised himself much from the sentence of Rufinus, has no longer anything to hope from him; for Rufinus is now concerned about other things, and neglects the past, or has laid it aside together with the office which he then held; the father now looks rather to the merits of his cause, than to a patron of his sentiments; the fruit too of an adjustment will be sweeter, for the credit of it must be ascribed to yourself; for you might have scorned it, and have not |331 done so, regarding the pious claims of kindred, rather than the angry suggestions of injury. Farewell: love me as a son, for I love you as a parent.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LIII. [A.D.392.]

S. AMBROSE here writes to Theodosius to express his grief at the death of Valentinian II, and mentions the preparations made for his burial. S. Ambrose spoke his funeral oration, which is extant, and is full of expressions of deep attachment. Valentinian had been slain by Arbogastes, who put Eugenius on the throne. AMBROSE TO THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS. 1. YOUR Majesty's letter has broken my silence; for I had persuaded myself that in sorrow so great I could do nothing better than withdraw into retirement. But not being able to conceal myself in any retreat, or abdicate my bishopric, I at least retired within myself by silence.

2. I am filled, I confess, with bitter grief, not only because the death of Valentinian has been premature, but also because, having been trained in the faith and moulded by your teaching, he had conceived such devotion towards our God, and was so tenderly attached to myself, as to love one whom he had before persecuted, and to esteem as his father the man whom he had before repulsed as his enemy. I have mentioned this not for the sake of recalling former wrongs, but as a proof of his conversion. For the one he learnt from others, the other was his own, and retained by him when once received from you, so firmly, as to fortify him against all the arguments of his mother. He .professed that he owed his education to me, he longed for me as for a careful parent, and when some pretended to have received tidings of my arrival, he anticipated it with impatience. Moreover, on those very days of public mourning, although he had within the limits of Gaul holy and eminent bishops of the Lord, he thought proper nevertheless to write to me to confer upon him the Sacrament of Baptism. By this request, in an unreasonable but affectionate way, he gave testimony of his love towards me. |332

3. Shall I not then sigh after him with my inmost spirit, shall I not embrace him in the secret recesses of my heart and soul? Shall I deem him dead to me? Yes, indeed to me he is assuredly dead. How thankful was I to the Lord, that he was so changed towards me, so improved, and had assumed a character so much more mature. How thankful also was I to your Clemency, in that you had not only restored him to his kingdom, hut also, what is more, had disciplined him in your own faith and piety. Shall I not weep therefore

that he, while fresh in years, and before he had obtained as he desired the grace of the Sacraments, has met with a sudden death? It has been a solace to my mind that you have yourself condescended to testify to my grief. I have your Majesty for judge of my affections and interpreter of my thoughts.

4. But hereafter we shall have time for sorrow; let us now care for his sepulture, which your Clemency has commanded to take place in this city. If he has died without Baptism, I now keep back what I know. We have here a most beautiful porphyry vessel, and well adapted for the purpose; for Maximian the colleague of Diocletian was so buried. There are also very precious tablets of porphyry, to encase the covering in which the royal remains are inclosed. 5. All this was prepared, but we waited for your Majesty's order; and its arrival has comforted your holy daughters, sisters of your son Valentinian, who greatly afflict themselves, and the more in that for a long while they received no answer. This has been no small solace to them, but so long as his remains lie unburied, they do not spare themselves, for they daily imagine that they are celebrating the funeral of their brother. And in truth they never are without many tears and heavy sorrow, and whenever they visit his body they return almost lifeless. It will be for their good therefore, and for that of his beloved remains, that the burial should shortly take place, lest the heat of summer should wholly dissolve them, for its first fervour is scarcely past.

6. I observe your command and commend it to the Lord; may He love you, for you love the Lord's servants. |333

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LIV. [A.D.392.]

THE Eusebius to whom this and the following letters are addressed is probably not the Bp. of Bologna who took a leading part in the Council of Aquileia, though he appears to be also connected with Bologna, (Lett. lv. 2.). S. Ambrose does not write to him in the style in which he would address an eminent Ecclesiatic. He was probably a layman, on very intimate terms with S. Ambrose, as the whole tone of the Letters implies. Both are on affairs of private life, both, especially the latter, are written in a tone of playful pleasantry and a not irreverent adaptation of sacred things, such as has often marked the familiar correspondence of a great Bishop. Eusebius seems to have had a son Faustinus, and this son a large family, of whom another Faustinus an Ambrosius and an Ambrosia are here mentioned. It was to this Eusebius, on the occasion of Ambrosia's dedication as a professed Virgin, that S. Ambrose wrote the treatise 'De Institutione Virginis.' She is the 'sancta soror,' the ' holy sister' of Lett. liv.

AMBROSE TO EUSEBIUS. 1. The Secretary of the Prefecture, who had got into trouble on account of the works at Portus is now safe in port. He came at the right moment, for as soon as I received your letters I saw the Prefect, and interceded for him; and he immediately pardoned him, and ordered the letter which he had dictated for the sale of his goods to be recalled. Even if his arrival had been less speedy, no man would more readily have admitted the embarrassments attending that work of repairing the port than he who would have made shipwreck therein had he not had you for his pilot; and from whence he could otherwise only have escaped with his bare life. 2. The little Faustinus is suffering from a cough, and has come to his holy sister to be cured, and came willingly, for he found that the complaint of his stomach is better cared for here. He also considers me to be a physican and looks to me for his dinner. So he has his medicine here twice a day, and he had begun to get strong, but while from their too great love they keep him away, his stomach-cough has |334 returned, worse than before, and unless he returns to his medicines he will still suffer from it. Farewell: love me, for I also love you.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LV. [A.D.392.]

AMBROSE TO EUSEBIUS. 1. THE two Faustinuses are herewith restored to you, the two little Ambroses stay with me. You have in the father what is best, in the younger son what is most agreeable; for you have at once the summit of virtue, and shew forth the grace of humility, I have what is intermediate between father and younger son. With you is the head of the whole family, and the continuous succession of a name handed down; with me remains that frugal mean which both depends upon the head, and has a common being with what follows it. You have him who is our common rest, who when he comes to me in my turn, smooths all the cares of my soul. You have him who alike by his life and works, and by his offspring has found favour with our Lord, you have him who in the storms of this world nourished a spiritual dove, to bring him the fruit of peace, anointed with the oil of chastity. You have him who built an altar to the Lord, he whom God blessed together with his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply; with whom He established the covenant of His peace, that it might be unto him and his sons for perpetual generations.

2. You have then one who is an heir of Divine benediction, a partner in grace, a sharer in righteousness. But take care, I beseech you, that this our husbandman Noah, the good planter of the fruitful vineyard, does not become inebriated with the cup of your love and favour, as one filled with wine, and so indulge too long in rest, and then if haply he fall asleep the longing for our Shem awake him. 3. There also is Japhet the youngest of the brethren, who with pious reverence may cover his father's nakedness, |335 whom his father may see even in sleep and never dismiss from his remembrance, but keep him ever in his sight and in his bosom, and when he wakes may know what his younger son has done unto him. In Latin his name signifies ' healthI in that grace is spread over his lips and over his life, wherefore God hath blessed him, because he, going backward, one may say, to Bologna, covered his father with the pious garment of charity, and shewed honour to piety; of whom also his father said, God shall enlarge Japhet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem. Wherefore also in the enumeration of this generation he is preferred to his elder brother, he is substituted for him in the blessing: he is preferred in regard of honour to his name, he is substituted in regard of the prerogative of elder birth and the honour due to nature.

4. Now in Latin Shem signifies a 'name.' And truly is this Ambrose of ours a good name, in whose tents Japhet may be enlarged, because a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. Let him therefore also be blessed, let his name be above gold and silver, let the seed of Abraham be in his portion, let all his blessing rest on his posterity, and on the whole family of the just man. But no one is cursed, all are blessed, for blessed is the fruit of Sarah. 5. The Ambroses salute you, the beloved Parthenius salute you, so does Valentinian, disposed to humility, which is in Hebrew 'Canaan', being as it were the servant of his brother, to whom he has also given place as regards his name. And therefore he is like Nimrod, mighty in his double name, a great hunter upon the earth, of whom it is said; Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. For being somewhat rude in intellect, but of great bodily strength, he surpasses in strength those whose genius he cannot equal; so that he would seem to carry with him the Comacine rocks, and to resemble them in his outward appearance, being as he is somewhat like a bull, wrathful at being set aside, at being deprived of his paternal name, |336 at being subjected, through an inhabitant of the capital, to one from Bologna, for he knows not the blandishments of infancy, and sprung without suffering injury from his nurse's bosom.

Farewell: love me for I love you.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LVI. [A.D. 392.]

A NOTE in p. 71 gives a brief outline of the schism in the Church of Antioch up to the time of the Council of Aquileia, which made some efforts to bring about a settlement. Meletius was then succeeded by Flavian, so that there still remained two rival Bishops, Flavian and Paulinus. Another opportunity for closing the schism came at Paulinas' death, at the end of 388 A.D., but so far from allowing the wound to be so healed Paulinus on his deathbed consecrated Evagrius as his successor in violation of the Canons of Nicaea, (Theod. H.E. v. 23) which 'do not allow a Bishop to appoint his successor, but require all the Bishops of the province to be summoned to elect, and forbid consecration without at least three consecrating Bishops.' The western Bishops therefore continued to press Theodosius to call a Council to deal with the matter, which was accordingly assembled at Capua. Flavian, though ordered by the Emperor, did not appear, and the Council referred the question to the decision of Theophilus of Alexandria and the Bishops of Egypt, who were not committed to either side, and in this letter S.Ambrose replies to Theophilus who had written to him that Flavian still refused to submit himself to their decision and again appealed to the Emperor, and urges him to summon Flavian once more, and endeavour to bring the matter to a peaceful issue, advising him to consult also Siricius, the Bishop of Rome.

He points out that both parties rely rather on the weakness of their opponent's case than on the soundness of their own, and expresses a hope that an end may be put to the schism, and peace restored to the Church. Tillemont, in note 41 on the Life of S, Ambrose, discusses the date of the Synod of Capua, and fixes it at the end of A.D. 391, chiefly on the ground that Theodosius did not return to Constantinople from Milan till November of that year, while it must have been held before the disturbance in the west occasioned by the revolt of Arbogastes and the death of Valentinian, which took place in the spring of A.D. 392.

AMBROSE TO THEOPHILUS. 1. EVAGRIUS has no good ground for preferring his claim, Flavian has cause to fear, and therefore avoids the trial. Let our brethren pardon our just grief, for on account of these men the whole world is agitated, yet they do not sympathize with our grief. Let them at least patiently |337 suffer themselves to be censured by those whom they perceive to have been for so long a time harassed by their obstinacy. For between

these two who would agree upon nothing which appertains to the peace of Christ, a grievous discord has arisen and spread through the whole world. 2. To this shipwreck of pious peace the holy Council of Capua had at length opened an haven of tranquillity; that communion should be given to all throughout the East who profess the Catholic faith, and that the cause of these two men should be referred to the judgment of your Holiness, and to our brethren and fellow-bishops of Egypt, as assessors. For we deemed your judgment likely to be true, in that, having embraced the communion of neither party, it would be inclined by no favour towards either side.

3. But while we were hoping that by these most equitable decrees of the Council a remedy was now provided, and an end put to discord, your Holiness writes word that our brother Flavian has again had recourse to the aid of prayers, and to the support of Imperial Rescripts. And thus the toil of so many Bishops has been spent to no purpose; we must have recourse once more to the civil tribunals, to the Imperial Rescripts, once more must they cross the seas, once more, though weak in body, exchange their own country for a foreign soil, once more must the Holy Altars be deserted that we may travel to distant lands, once more crowds of indigent Bishops, whose poverty was before no burthen to them, but who now need external aid, must suffer want themselves, or at any rate use for their journey what else had fed the poor.

4. Meanwhile Flavian, alone exempt, as he fancies, from the laws, does not come when all others are assembled. The money-lender and debtor meet each other, these men alone cannot meet: Flavian by his own will deprives himself of Episcopal fellowship, and will not appear in person either at the Imperial order, or when cited by his brethren. 5. Nevertheless, even this cause of offence does not induce me to consider our brother Evagrius entirely in the right, although he seems to himself the more defensible |338 either because Flavian avoids him, or because he thinks his opponent to be in no better case than himself, each of them relying more on the defects of his opponent's ordination than on the validity of his own. We however would recall them to a better course, wishing them to be aided rather by the goodness of their own cause than by the defects of others.

6. Now since you have stated in your letter that some form may be devised touching this matter, whereby the discord of our brethren may be removed; and as the holy Synod has trusted the right of cognizance to the unanimous judgment of yourself and our other fellow-bishops from Egypt, it is fitting that you should again summon our brother Flavian, so that, if he should persist in not choosing to appear, you may then without prejudice to the decrees of the Council of Nice, and also of the Synod of Capua, take such measures for the preservation of general peace as may not destroy what has been built up: For if I destroy what I have built, or build again what I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Let the grace of that peace which has been obtained be thus preserved by all, and the refusal of either party to appear will not have the effect of frustrating it.

7. Moreover we are of opinion that it will be well for you to refer to our holy brother the Bishop of the Roman Church; for we do not doubt that what you shall determine he also

will approve. For the resolution that is come to will be useful, and our peace and quiet will be secure, if such a decree is made by your advice as shall not create discord in our communion. And thus we also, receiving the series of your decrees, and assured that the Roman Church has given its undoubting approbation to what has been done, shall with gladness participate in the result of this trial. |339

Letters 51-60 — LETTER ON THE CASE OF BONOSUS. [A.D. 392 or 393.]

THIS letter is certainly not written by S. Ambrose, though included among his letters. The writer of it speaks of 'our brother Ambrose.' Tillemont discusses the authorship in a note, (45.) and makes it probable that it was written by Siricius. The case of Bonosus had been brought before the Synod of Capua, and they had decided that it should be referred to the Bishops of Macedonia, under the presidency of Amysius Bishop of Thessalonica, as being his nearest neighbours. These Bishops seem to have written a letter to consult Siricius, the Bishop of Rome, and this is believed to be his reply, in which he declines to interfere with their decision, only adding a few remarks upon one point. Bonosus was Bishop of Sardica in Illyria, and the founder of an obscure sect. They were accused of Photinianism, and Bonosus is called a fore-runner of Nestorius, but the Helvidian doctrines of which this letter speaks are the most clearly ascertained of their errors. The sect survived at least till the vith Century.

A LETTER CONCERNING THE DECIDING OF THE CASE OF BONOSUS, ACCORDING TO THE DECREE OF THE SYNOD OF CAPUA. 1. You have written to us a Letter concerning Bishop Bonosus in which, either from love of truth or from modesty, you enquire our opinion. But since it has been the judgment of the Council of Capua that those who are neighbours to Bonosus and his accusers should be assigned as his judges, and specially the Macedonian Bishops, who, with the Bishop of Thessalonica, should judge of his acts and writings, we have to remark that the function of judging cannot appertain to ourselves. Otherwise, were the question of the Synod at this day still open, we might well have decided concerning these things which are included in what you have written at length. Having taken upon yourselves this judgment, it is now your part to form your decision on the whole question, to give no power of retreat or escape either to the accusers or the accused; for, being chosen by the Synod to conduct the examination, you have taken upon you its functions.

2. Again, when Bishop Bonosus, after your judgment, sent to our brother Ambrose to enquire his opinion whether he should break into and enter upon the church which was closed

to him, he received for reply that he must do nothing rashly, that everything must be carried on modestly, patiently and in order, that nothing contrary to your decision must be attempted, that you, to whom the Synod had committed such authority, would appoint what appeared to you agreeable to |340 justice. The first point therefore is that judgment should be given by those to whom the power of judging has been given; for you, as we have said, judge in place of the entire Synod; as to ourselves it does not befit us to judge as though by the authority of the Synod. 3. Assuredly we cannot deny that he is justly blamed concerning the sons of Mary, and that your Holiness deservedly repudiated the opinion that from the same Virgin womb, of which according to the flesh Christ was born, other offspring was produced. For the Lord Jesus would not have chosen to be born of a Virgin, if He had conceived she would be so wanting in continence as to suffer that birthplace of the Lord's Body, that palace of the eternal King, to be polluted by human intercourse. To propound such an opinion as this, what is it but to fortify the unbelief of the Jews who say that it was impossible He could be born of a Virgin, and who, thus confirmed by the authority of Christian Bishops, will strive with greater earnestness to overthrow the true faith?

4. What else can be the meaning of that text wherein the Lord says to His Mother of John the Evangelist, Woman, behold thy son, and again to John of Mary, Behold thy mother? With what purpose was it that while the Lord was hanging upon the cross and atoning for the sins of the world, He declared also the integrity of His Mother? Wherefore was it said but that unbelief might close its lips and be silent, nor dare to offer any insult to the Mother of the Lord? He therefore, in pronouncing upon and asserting His Mother's chastity, likewise bears witness that she was only espoused to her husband Joseph; and that she was ignorant of that carnal commerce which is the accustomed right of the marriage bed; for, had it been that she was to conceive children of Joseph, He would not have chosen to separate her from the company of her husband.

5. But if this is not enough, the Evangelist has added his testimony, saying that the disciple took her unto his own home. Did he then cause a divorce? Did he carry her off from her husband? How can he who reads this in the Gospel stagger and waver to and fro as one who has been shipwrecked? 6. This then is the testimony of the Son concerning His Mother's chastity, this is the rich heritage of Mary's immaculate Virginity, this is the consummation of the entire work. He spake thus, and gave up the ghost, crowning the whole mystery with a good end of filial duty. 7. We have also read and perused the whole of the instructions, as well what relates to Senecio being joined with our brother and fellow-bishop Bassus in the government of his Church, as what relates to other matters, and we now look for the direction of your sentence. |341

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LVII.

VALENTINIAN II. having been murdered by Arbogastes, one of his Generals, the latter, not venturing to claim the empire for himself, set up Eugenius, who was really his puppet, as Emperor of the West. Theodosius temporised with him, till he should be fully prepared to attack him, and it was whilst he was thus for a time accepted as Emperor that S. Ambrose addressed this letter to him. He excuses himself in it for withdrawing from Milan when Eugenius came there, on the plea that he was bound to fear God rather than man, and reproves him for granting the restoration of their former revenues to the heathen temples, which Gratian and Valentinian had before refused, and exposes the futility of his plea that he was merely granting favour to his friends, reminding him that God sees the heart. He quotes at length the conduct of the Jews in the time of Antiochus, as recorded in the Book of Maccabees, as a precedent which Christians were bound to follow. At the same time he says that he is willing to address Eugenius in matters which do not affect his duty to God.

TO THE MOST GRACIOUS EMPEROR EUGENIUS, AMBROSE, BISHOP, SENDS GREETING.

1. I withdrew from Milan from fear of God, to Whom I am wont to refer, as far as I am able, all my acts, never turning my mind from Him nor making more account of any man's favour than of the grace of Christ. By preferring God to every one else I wrong no man, and trusting in Him, I dare to tell your Majesties, the Emperors, my poor thoughts. Wherefore I will not refrain from saying to your most gracious Majesty what I never refrained from saying before other Emperors. And that I may preserve the order of events, I will touch one by one the points which relate to this transaction. The illustrious Symmachus, when prefect of the city, memorialised the Emperor Valentinian the younger, of august memory, begging that he would command what had been withdrawn from the temples to be restored. He performed his part in accordance with his own wishes and mode of worship. It became me also, as Bishop, to recognize the duties of my office. I presented two petitions to the Emperors wherein |342 I declared that a Christian man could not contribute to the expenses of the sacrifices; that I had not advised the withdrawal of the payments, but that I did advise that they should not be now decreed, and lastly, that he would seem to be giving rather than restoring these expenses to the images; for what he had not withdrawn, he could not be said to restore, but of his own free-will to give it for the uses of supersition. Lastly, if he

had done so, he either must not come to the Church, or if he did, he would either not find a priest, or one who would withstand him. Nor could it be offered as an excuse that he was only a catechumen, for it is not lawful for catechumens to contribute to the expense of idols.

3. My petitions were read in the Consistory; Count Bauto, a man of the highest military rank, and Rumoridus, himself too of the same dignity, and from the first year of his boyhood attached to the Gentile worship, were present. Valentinian then listened to my suggestion, and did nothing but what our faith reasonably required. And they submitted to his officer. 4. Afterwards I openly addressed myself to the most gracious Emperor Theodosius, and hesitated not to speak to him face to face. He having received the intimation of a similar message from the Senate, although it was not the whole Senate who asked it, at length gave his consent to my suggestion, and so for some days I did not come near him, nor was he displeased thereat, for I did not act for my own advantage but for his profit, and that of my own soul also; I was not ashamed to speak in the king's presence.

5. Once more an Embassy was sent from the senate to the Emperor Valentinian, of blessed memory, when he was in Gaul, but was able to extort nothing from him. At that time I was absent and had not written anything to him. 6. But when your Majesty assumed the reins of government it was found that this boon had been granted to men of eminence in the state but in religion heathens. And perhaps it may be said, your Majesty, that it is not a restitution to the temples on your part, but a boon to men who had deserved well of you. But the fear of God ought, |343 you know, to lead us to act with constancy, as is done in the cause of liberty not only by priests but by those who serve in your armies or are reckoned among the provincials. Envoys petitioned you, as Emperor, for restitution to the temples, but you consented not; others again required it, but you resisted; yet subsequently you have thought fit to grant it as a boon to the petitioners themselves.

7. The Imperial power is indeed great, but let your Majesty consider the greatness of God; He sees all hearts, He scrutinizes the inmost conscience, He knows all things before they come to pass, He knows the secrets of your breast. You will not suffer yourselves to be deceived, and do you hope to hide anything from God? Has not this suggested itself to your mind? Although they urged their suit with such perseverance, ought not your Majesty from respect for the most high and true and living God, to have resisted still more perseveringly, and to have refused what was derogatory to the Divine law? 8. Who grudges your bestowing upon others whatsoever you chose? We do not pry closely into your munificence, nor are we jealous of the advantages of others; but we are the ministers of the Faith. How will you offer your gifts to Christ? your acts will be estimated by few, your wishes by all; whatever they have done will be ascribed to you, whatever they have not done to themselves. You are indeed Emperor, but you ought all the more to submit yourself to God. Else how shall the priests of Christ dispense your gifts?

9. There was a question of this kind in former times, and then persecution itself yielded to the faith of our fathers, and heathendom gave way. For when the game that was used every fifth year was kept at Tyre, and the wicked king of Antioch had come hither to see

it, Jason sent special messengers from Jerusalem, to carry three hundred silver drachms, and give them to the sacrifice of Hercules. But our fathers would not give the money to the heathen, but sent trusty persons to make declaration that such money was not to be devoted to sacrifices to the gods, for this was not convenient, but was to be applied to other expenses. |344 And it was decreed that, forasmuch as Jason had said that the silver was sent for the sacrifice of Hercules, that which was sent ought to be so applied. And yet seeing that they who brought it pleaded in opposition, in their zeal and devotion, that it should not be employed for sacrifice but for other exigencies, the money was applied to build ships. They sent the money, that is, because they were compelled, but it was not applied to sacrifices, but to other public expenses.

10. Again, they who brought the money might have been silent, but they were led to violate secrecy because they knew whither it was being carried, and so they sent men who feared God, and who were to do their endeavour that the money might be applied to the equipment of ships, and not to the temple. Thus they entrusted the money to men who were to plead the cause of the Divine law, and He who cleanses the conscience was made Judge of the matter. If those who were in the power of others took these precautions, it cannot be doubted what it was your Majesty's duty to do. You, whom no man constrained, who were in no man's power, ought certainly to have referred for advice to the priest. 11. For my own part, although I was alone in the resistance I then made, still others both willed and advised it. Being thus bound by my own words both before God and before all men, I have felt that I had no other choice or duty but to consult for myself, for I could not properly trust to you. For a long time I stifled and concealed my grief, I gave no hint to any one, but now I am no longer at liberty to dissemble, or to be silent. And this was why, at the beginning of your reign, I made no reply to your letters, because I foresaw that what you have done would happen. Afterwards, when you found I did not answer, and sent to demand a reply, I said, 'The reason why I do not write is that I think it will be wrung from him .'

12. But when a just occasion for the exercise of my office |345 arose, I both wrote and petitioned for those who were anxious on their own account, with a view of shewing that in the cause of God a due fear of Him affected me, and that I did not set a higher value on flattery than on my own soul; but that in the matters wherein petition is proper to be made to you, I paid just deference to your authority, as indeed it is written, honour to whom honour, tribute to whom tribute. For seeing that I cordially deferred to a private person, how should I not defer to the Emperor? But as you desire deference to be shewn to yourselves, suffer us to defer to Him from Whom you would fain prove your authority to be derived.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LVIII. [A.D.393.]

IN this letter S. Ambrose informs Sabinus that Paulinus and Therasia had resolved to give up all their wealth to the poor, and retire to Nola, and complains of the objections raised against such self-denial, ending with a mystical interpretation of David dancing before the ark. AMBROSE TO SABINUS, BISHOP. 1. CREDIBLE information has reached me that Paulinus, the lustre of whose birth was inferior to none in the region of Aquitania, has sold both his own possessions and those of his wife, and entered upon a course of life which enables him to bestow upon the poor the property which has been converted into money; while he himself having become poor instead of rich, as one relieved of a heavy burden, has bid farewell to his home his country and his kindred, in order to serve God more diligently; and he is reported to have chosen a retreat in the city of Nola, to pass the rest of his days in avoiding the turmoil of life.

2. The lady Therasia too approaches closely to his zeal and virtue, and objects not to the resolve he has taken. Having transferred her own property to other owners, she follows her husband, and contented with his little plat of ground will console herself with the riches of religion and |346 charity. Offspring they have none, and therefore desire to leave behind them good deeds. 3. When the great of the world hear this, what will they say? That a man of his family, his ancestry, his genius, gifted with such eloquence, should have seceded from the senate, that the succession of a noble family should become extinct, such things, they will say, are not to be borne. And though they, when they perform the rites of Isis, shave their heads and eyebrows, they nevertheless call it an unworthy deed should a Christian man out of zeal for holy religion change his habit.

4. Truly I grieve that, while falsehood is so respected, there should be such negligence as regards the Truth, that many are ashamed of seeming too devoted to our holy religion, not considering His words Who says, Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me before men, of him will I also be ashamed before My Father Which is in heaven. But Moses was not thus ashamed, for though invited into the royal palace he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. David was not thus ashamed when he danced before the Ark of the testimony in the sight of all the people. Isaiah was not thus ashamed, when he walked

naked and bare-foot through the people, proclaiming the heavenly oracles. 5. Viewed by the outward eye what can be a more unseemly spectacle than an imitation of the gestures of players, and a wreathing of the limbs after the manner of women? Lascivious dances are the companions of luxury and the pastime of wantonness. What did David himself mean by singing, O clap your hands together, all ye people? If we regard the bodily action we must suppose that he clapped his hands as if mingling with female dancers, and shouted with unseemly noise. Of Ezekiel too it is said, Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot.

6. But the things which viewed corporeally are unseemly, when viewed in regard to holy religion become venerable, so that they who blame such things will involve their own souls in the net of blame. Thus Michal reproves David for his dancing and says to him, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of |347 his handmaids! And David answered her, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord, and I will be yet more vile thus, and will be base in mine own sight, and of the maid-servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour. 7. David therefore did not shrink from female censure, nor was he ashamed to hear their reproaches for his religious service. For he played before the Lord as being his servant, and was the more pleasing to Him in that he so humbled himself before God, as to lay aside his royal dignity and to offer to God the very lowest ministry, as though he were a servant. She also who censured such dancing was condemned to barrenness and had no children by the king, that she might not bring forth a proud offspring; and so, as it turned out, she obtained no continuance of descendants or of good deeds.

8. If any one is still doubtful, let him hear the testimony of the Gospel, for the Son of God said, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced. Therefore were the Jews abandoned, because they danced not, nor clapped their hands, and the Gentiles were called in, who gave to God spiritual applause. The fool foldeth his hands together and devoureth his own flesh, that is, he entangles himself in corporeal matters, and devours his own flesh, like prevailing death, and so he shall not find eternal life. But the wise man, who so holds up his works that they may shine before his Father Which is in heaven, has not consumed his flesh but has raised it to the grace of the resurrection. This is that glorious dance of the wise man which David danced, and thus by the loftiness of his spiritual dancing he ascended even to the throne of Christ, that he might see and hear the Lord saying to his Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand!

9. Now if you are of opinion that this interpretation of the dancing has not been made unreasonably, do not spare yourself the trouble of reading a little further, in order that we may consider together the case of Isaiah, how, as is well known to you, he was uncovered, not in mockery but |348 gloriously, in the sight of the assembled people, as one who reported with his own mouth the oracles of God. 10. But perhaps it may be said, Was it not then disgraceful for a man to walk wholly uncovered through the people, seeing that he must be met both by men and women? Must not the sight itself have shocked the eyes of all, especially

of women? Do not we ourselves generally shrink from looking upon naked men? And are not men's persons concealed by garments that they may not offend the eyes of beholders by an unseemly spectacle?

11. In this I also acquiesce; but consider what it was this act represented, and what was set forth under this outward show; it was, that the young men and maidens of the Jews should be led away prisoners, and walk naked, like as My servant Isaiah, it is said, hath walked naked and barefoot. This might also have been impressed in words, but God chose to render it more expressive by example, that the sight itself might thus strike greater terror, and what they shrunk from in the person of the prophet, that they might dread for themselves. In which of the two then does the baseness most shock us; in the person of the prophet, or in the sins of those unbelievers which deserved to fall into this great misery of captivity? 12. But what if there was nothing worthy of reproach in the prophet's body? He indeed alluded not to corporeal but to spiritual things; for in his ecstasy of mind he says, not I will hearken what I shall say, but, what the Lord God shall say in me. Nor does he consider whether he is naked or clothed. Again, Adam before his sin was naked, but knew not he was naked, because he was endued with virtue; after he had committed sin he saw that he was naked, and covered himself. Noah was uncovered, but he blushed not, because he was full of gladness and spiritual joy, while he who derided him for being naked, himself remained subject to the disgrace of perpetual baseness. Joseph too, that he might not be basely uncovered, left his garment, and fled away naked; now which of the two was base in this instance, she who kept another's garment, or he who put off his own?

13. But that it may be more fully evident that the |349 prophets regard not themselves nor what lies at their feet, but heavenly things, when Stephen was stoned he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; and therefore he felt not the blows of the stones, he regarded not his bodily wounds, but his eyes were fastened on Christ, he clung closely to him. So also Isaiah looked not on his own nakedness, but offered himself to be the organ of the Divine voice, that he might utter what God spake within him. 14. But be it supposed that he saw himself, could he not do that which he was commanded? Could he believe that to be base which God enjoined? Sarah, because she laughed, was convicted of unbelief; Abraham was praised, because he doubted not the word of God; yea, he received a very great reward, because he believed that at God's command, even parricide might be piously committed.

15. What cause for shame then had the prophet here, when one thing was enacted, but that of which it was a figure was quite different? The Jews, being deserted by God for their wickedness, began to be vanquished by their enemies, and were fain to betake themselves to the Egyptians, to be a protection to them against the Assyrians, whereas had they consulted for good, they ought rather to have returned to the faith. The Lord, being angry, shews that their hope was vain in thinking that the offence against Him could be removed by a greater sin, for that very people in whom the Jews were trusting, were them selves to be vanquished. This was the meaning as regards the actual history. 10. But this history itself is a figure,

signifying that he trusts in the Egyptians who is given up to impurity, and enslaved to wantonness. For no man abandons himself to excess but he who departs from the precepts of the true God. But as soon as a man waxes wanton, he begins to fall off from the true faith. And then he commits two grievous crimes, lassitude as regards the flesh, and sacrilege as regards the mind. He then who follows not the Lord his God ingulfs himself in impurity and lust, those pestilential passions of the body. But he who has engulfed and plunged himself in such wallowing places, falls |350 also into the snare of unbelief; for the people sat down to eat and to drink, and required that gods should be made for them. Hereby the Lord teaches us that he who gives up his soul to these two kinds of vices, is stript of the garment, not of a woollen vest, but of living virtue; that clothing which is not temporal but eternal. Farewell, love me, for I also love you.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LIX. [A.D.393.]

S. AMBROSE here writes to Severus, Bishop of Naples, to tell him of one James, a presbyter of Persia, who was seeking a retreat from the world in Campania. This leads him to dwell on the contrast of the many troubles with which he is surrounded at Milan. AMBROSE TO SEVERUS, BISHOP. I. JAMES, our brother and fellow-presbyter, has come from the depths of Persia, and chosen the coast of Campania and your pleasant abodes for his resting-place. You see in what spot he has anticipated for himself the enjoyment of a haven sheltered, as it were, from the storms of this world, where, after his long toils, he may spend the remainder of his life. 2. For your coast, removed not only from danger, but from all tumult, fills the senses with tranquillity, and transports the mind from the fearful and raging billows of care to an honourable rest. So that those words of David concerning the holy Church, which belong in common to all, appear to be especially fitting and appropriate to yourselves; For He hath founded it upon the seas, and prepared it upon the floods. For a mind undisturbed by inroads of barbarians and the evils of war, has leisure for prayer, devotes itself to the service of God, cares for the things of the Lord, cherishes those things which belong to peace and tranquillity.

3. We meanwhile, exposed to the outbreaks of the barbarians and the storms of war, are tossing in the midst of troubles, and from these toils and dangers can only gather |351 that those of our future life will be still more grievous. Wherefore that saying of the Prophet seems to accord with our condition, I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction. 4. For since I have now lived in the body fifty and three years, among the shadows of this world, whereby the truth of future perfection is obscured, and have already endured such heavy afflictions, am I not camping in the tents of Cushan, and having my habitation among the dwellers of Midian? For these, owing to their consciousness of their darksome works, dread being judged even by mortal men, but he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. Farewell, my brother; love me, as indeed you do, for I also love you.

Letters 51-60 — LETTER LX. [A.D.393.]

IN this Letter S. Ambrose urges Paternus not to break the laws both of God and man by promoting a marriage between his son and his daughter's daughter, who were within the forbidden degrees of relationship, and shews him what confusion would arise from such an union. AMBROSE TO PATERNUS. 1. I HAVE read your greeting, my like-minded friend Paternus, but the question on which you ask my advice, wishing to marry your son to your grand-daughter by your daughter, is by no means paternal, but unworthy of you both as grand-father and as father. Consider therefore what it is you ask about, for in all that we wish to do, we ought first to investigate the nature of the deed, and then we shall be able to estimate whether it is worthy of praise or blame. For instance, carnal intercourse with women is a pleasure to some, physicians even say it is healthful to the body; but we must consider whether it be with a wife or a stranger, with a married or an unmarried woman. If a man have commerce with one who is espoused and given to him he calls it marriage; he who assails the chastity of |352 one who belongs to another commits adultery, by the very name of which the temerity of the attempt is generally repressed. To slay an enemy is accounted a victory, to slay a criminal is justice, to slay an innocent man murder, and if a man is conscious of this he withholds his hand. Wherefore I beg that you also will consider what it is you propose.

2. You wish to arrange a marriage between our children. But I would ask whether you would have equals or those who are unequal joined together? if I mistake not, they are wont to be called 'pairs .' He who yokes oxen to the plough, or horses to the chariot, chooses pairs, that both their age and their form may harmonize, that there be no natural difference, nor blemish of diversity. You are proposing to unite your son and your grand-daughter by your daughter, that is, that he should marry his sister's daughter, true though it is that he was born of a different mother from his professed mother in law. Consider what restraint is implied in the very names; he is called her uncle, she is called his niece. Does not the very sound of the names recal you, when the one has in it the sound of grand-father, and the other refers alike to uncle and to grand-father? How great again is the confusion of the other terms? You will be called both grand-father and father in law, she too will receive the different names of niece and daughter in law. The brother and sister also will

exchange different names, she will be the mother in law of her brother, he the son in law of his sister. The niece will marry her uncle, and the affection of these your unstained offspring be exchanged for an irregular love.

3. On this point you tell me that the holy man your Bishop is looking for my sentiments. I cannot think or believe this. For if this were so, he would himself have chosen to write, but by not doing so he has intimated that he considers there is no ground for doubt upon the point. For how can there be any such doubt, when the prohibition of marriage between first cousins extends, according to the Divine law, to those who are related in the fourth |353 degree. But this is the third degree, which even by the civil law seems to be excepted from the fellowship of marriage. 4. But let us first inquire what are the decrees of the Divine law, for you allege in your letters that an union between such persons must be considered as allowed by that Law, in that it is not forbidden. I however assert that it is actually forbidden; for seeing that first cousins are forbidden slighter familiarities, much more must I deem this forbidden which contains within it the bond of a much closer union. For he who affixes censure to lighter offences does not acquit but rather condemn heavier ones.

5. But if you consider it to be permitted because it is not specially forbidden, neither will you find it forbidden by the words of the Law that the father should take his daughter to wife. But is this lawful, merely because it is not forbidden? By no means; it has been interdicted by the law of nature, by that law which is in the hearts of each of us, by the inviolable rule of piety, on the ground of nearness of kin. How many things of this kind will you find which are not forbidden in the law promulgated by Moses, but which are yet forbidden by the voice of nature. 6. There are many things which are lawful, but which are not expedient, for all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient, all things are lawful, but all things edify not. If then the Apostle recalls us even from those things which edify not, how can we imagine that may be done which is not permitted by the oracle of the Law, and which edifies not, because it differs from the rule of piety? Yet those very things in the old Law which were more severe were mitigated by the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

7. What is so usual as a kiss between an uncle and a niece, which he owes to her as a daughter, she to him as a parent? Will you therefore cast suspicion on this kiss of unoffending piety by proposing such a union, will you deprive your beloved offspring of a sacrament so venerable? 8. But if the Divine law pass by you unheeded, at least the laws of Emperors, from whom you have received such ample honours, ought not to have been so disregarded. Now the Emperor Theodosius forbad even cousins by |354 either the fathers' or mothers' side to be united under the name of marriage, and affixed a severe penalty upon any rash union of brothers' children. And yet these are equal as regards each other, but, as they are bound together by the ties of mankind and brotherly union, he would have them owe their birth to piety.

9. But you will say this rule has been relaxed in favour of some. The law however is not prejudiced thereby, for that which is [not] enacted for general use is only profitable to him

in whose favour the relaxation takes place, and so the odium is much less. Now although we read in the Old Testament of one calling his wife his sister, it is unheard of that any man should marry his niece and call her his wife. 10. It is indeed a curious plea which leads you to assert that your grand-daughter is not connected with your son, her uncle, by any close bond, merely because they have no relationship by the father's side . As if an uterine brother and sister, born that is, of the same mother but by a different father, would be united together when of a different sex, for as much as they have no relationship by the father's side , but are only united to each other by the mother's side.

11. You ought therefore to relinquish your intention, which, even were it lawful, would not tend to propagate your family, for your son owes to us grand-children, your dear grand-daughter owes to us great-grand-children. Farewell to you and all yours. [Footnotes moved to end and renumbered. Biblical references and running titles omitted.] 1. The Magister officiorum was a sort of Chief Secretary of state, both for home and foreign affairs. A summary of his duties may be, seen in Gibbon ch. xvii, iv, 2. It was the influence which this post gave him over Theodosius which enabled Rufinus to stir the Emperor's passionateness to the crime of Thessalonica. 2. The adjective Portuensis generally refers to the town called Portus, which grew up in the times of the Emperors on the harbour of Ostia. It is probable therefore that the reference is to some work of which the person spoken of had the superintendence.

3. As Lake Larius was sometimes called Lacus Comacinus in the times of the Emperors, (Dict of Geogr. voc. Comum,) it is probable that the 'Comacinae rupes' were some familiar rocks on its margin. The comparison to a bull is simply an adaptation of Virgil's 'Et faciem tauro propior,' Georg. iii. 58. 4. The word 'bonis' must certainly here be inserted in the text, 'uterque alienae magis ordinationis vitiis quam suis bonis fretus,' as suggested by the Benedictine Editors. It occurs just below in tbe corresponding sentence, 'suis potius bonis quam alieno vitio defendi.' 5. He is sometimes spoken of as Bishop of Nairsus in Dacia Mediterranea (see Note in p. 67.) but Tillemont (note 43 in Life of S. Ambrose) has made it probable that there were two Bishops of the name of Bonosus,one of Nairsus, and the other of Sardica, the latter of whom is the one dealt with by the Synod of Capua.

6. He is referring to the 'Memorial of Symmachus.' p. 94. The 'two petitions,' libellos duos, are Letters 17 and 18. 7. 2 Macc. iv. 18 sqq. 8. He means that the reason why he declines all communication with Eugenius, who wished to secure his great political influence on his side, was, that he felt sure that Eugenius, though at present temporising with both parties, would in the end yield to the pressure of the pagan party, and restore the revenues to the heathen temples. 'Extorquendum' is, in accordance with late Latin idiom, a mere future passive. 9. confusus fuerit. 10. confundar 11. See Letter xliv. 9, and note e there. 12. compares. 13. The argument here turns on the Latin words. 'Avunculus,' uncle, is a mere diminutive of 'avus,' grandfather; and the one word 'neptis' is used both for niece and granddaughter without any distinction. 14. The 'not' is inserted according to the suggestion of the Benedictine Editors. There seems a contradiction in terms without it.

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXI. [A.D.394.]

This letter was addressed to Theodosius after his victory over Eugenius. S. Ambrose in it explains his absence from Milan, and after expressing his gratitude to God for His blessing on the arms of Theodosius, urges the Emperor to a merciful use of his victory. AMBROSE TO THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS. 1. You seem to have supposed, most blessed Emperor, |355 as I understood from your Majesty's letters, that I had removed to a distance from Milan because I believed your cause was forsaken by God. But in my absence I was not so foolish, nor so unmindful of your virtues and good deeds, as not to feel sure that the assistance of heaven would aid your piety, and assist you to rescue the Roman Empire from the cruelty of a barbarian robber, and the rule of an unworthy usurper. 2. Wherefore I made immediate haste to return, as soon as ever I was aware that he whom I thought it right to avoid was gone, for I had not deserted the Church of Milan, which the judgment of God had committed to me, but I shunned the presence of one who had involved himself in sacrilege. So I returned about the first of August, and from that day I have been in residence here, and here your Majesty's letter has found me.

3. Thanks be to our Lord God, Who has responded to your faith and piety, and revived among us the pattern of ancient sanctity, giving to us to see in our own times what we marvel at in the Lessons of Holy Scripture, so effectual a presence, I mean, of Divine aid in battle , that no mountain tops delayed your passage, no hostile arms presented any impediment. 4. For this you think I ought to give thanks to the Lord our God; and this I will willingly do, conscious of your good deeds. That victim is certainly pleasing to God, which is offered in your name; and how great faith and devotion does this evince! Other Emperors, as soon as ever they gain a victory, order triumphal arches or other badges of triumph to be erected, but your Clemency |356 provides a victim for God, and desires that oblations and thanksgivings should be offered to the Lord by the priests.

5. I therefore, though unworthy and unequal to such an office, and to the offering of such prayers, will yet tell you how I have acted. I carried with me your Majesty's letter to the altar, and laid it thereon, bearing it in my hand, when I offered the Sacrifice; that so your faith might speak with my voice, and the Imperial letter itself might perform the functions

of the priestly oblation. 6. Truly the Lord is merciful to the Roman Empire, seeing that He hath chosen such a prince and parent of princes, whose virtue and power, raised on so great and triumphant an eminence of dominion, is supported by such humility as to vanquish Emperors in valour and priests in humility. What shall I wish for, or what shall I desire? You possess everything; from your stores therefore I will obtain the sum of my wishes; your Majesty is pitiful, and has great clemency.

7. But I desire for you again and again an increase of mercy, than which the Lord hath given nothing more excellent; that by your clemency, the Church of God, as it rejoices in the peace and tranquillity of the innocent, so it may also rejoice in the absolution of the guilty. I would chiefly ask you to pardon those who have sinned for the first time. May the Lord preserve your Clemency. Amen.

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXII. [A.D. 394.]

IN this letter also S. Ambrose urges on Theodosius a merciful use of his victory, and appeals to him specially for some of the defeated party who had sought the protection of the Church. He acknowledges the greatness of the request, but pleads for it on the score of the divine favour which had been miraculously displayed in his behalf. AMBROSE TO THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS. 1. ALTHOUGH I lately wrote to your Clemency even a second time, still I was not satisfied to fulfil my duty of corresponding with you letter by letter; for your gracious |357 benefits have so often laid me under obligation that by no services can I pay my debt to your Majesty, most blessed Emperor. 2. The very first occasion ought not therefore to have been omitted, but through your chamberlain I ought to have offered to you my thanks, and laid before you the expression of my duty; and this that my omitting to write previously might not seem to arise from sloth rather than necessity: I had also to inquire for some mode whereby I might offer to your Goodness my proper and dutiful greeting.

3. Rightly then do I send my son Felix the Deacon, to convey to you my letter, and to offer to you in my name both my dutiful respects, and also a memorial in behalf of those who, suing for mercy, have fled to the Church, the Mother of your piety. Their tears have constrained me to anticipate your Clemency's mind by my petition. 4. Our request is indeed a great one, but it is addressed to one on whom the Lord has bestowed unheard-of and wonderful things, to one whose mercifulness we have experienced, and whose piety we have as a hostage. We confess then that we look for even more, for as you have surpassed yourself in valour, so also you must surpass yourself in pity. For your victory is considered to have been bestowed on you in the primitive manner, and miraculously, as it was on Moses, on holy Joshua the son of Nun, on Samuel and on David, not by human respect but by the outpouring of celestial grace. Wherefore we look for a measure of pity corresponding to that by means of which such a victory has been earned.

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXIII. [A.D.396.]

THIS, the longest and latest, and certainly not the least interesting, of S. Ambrose's Letters, is addressed to the Church of Vercellae, which, owing to intestine divisions, had been for some time without a Bishop. S.Ambrose first urges them to remember Christ's Presence among them, and to proceed to Election with that thought especially in their minds. He then speaks of two followers of Jovinian, Sarmatio and Barbatianus, |358 who had introduced their evil doctrines among them, and so fostered divisions. This leads him to dwell at length on the evils of sensuality and the benefits of self-denial, on the profit of fasting, and the excellence of a virgin life, and bids them 'stand fast,' and not be led astray by false teachers. Then he recurs to the subject of the election of a Bishop, and bids them lay aside all evil feelings, and choose one worthy of so high an office, setting before them the examples of our Lord Himself, of Moses and Aaron. He then speaks of the qualities to be looked for in a true Bishop, and urges them to choose one worthy to succeed to the see of the holy martyr Eusebius, and, recurring to the examples of the old Testament, dwells on the history of Elijah. He ends by a general exhortation to all the Church of Vercellae to the chief Christian virtues, after the model of S. Paul's Epistles, to which the outline of this letter bears a general resemblance. Some questions as to its genuineness have been alluded to in the notes. There seems no sufficient reason for doubting that it is a genuine letter of S. Ambrose. It is thoroughly Ambrosian in style and method, and in its treatment of Scripture, especially of the history of the old Testament and of the lives of the great saints of the old dispensation. It was written not more than a year before S. Ambrose's death.

AMBROSE, SERVANT OF CHRIST, CALLED TO BE BISHOP, TO THE CHURCH OF VERCELLAE, AND TO THEM WHO CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, GRACE UNTO YOU FROM GOD THE FATHER AND HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON BE FULFILLED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. 1. I AM overcome by grief that the Church of the Lord, which is among you, has still no Bishop, and alone in all the regions of Liguria and Aemilia, of Venetia and the adjacent parts of Italy, stands in need of those ministrations which other Churches were wont to ask at her hands, and, what causes me still more shame, the contention which causes this delay is ascribed to me. For as long as there are dissensions among you, how can either we |359 determine anything, or you

make your election, or any man accept the election, so as to undertake among men who are at variance an office difficult to bear the weight of, even among those that agree?

2. Are you the scholars of a confessor, are you the offspring of those righteous fathers, who as soon as they saw holy Eusebius , though before he was unknown to them, put aside their own countrymen, and forthwith approved of him; and required no more than the sight of him for their approval? Rightly did he who was chosen unanimously by the Church, turn out so eminent a man, rightly was it believed that he whom all demanded was chosen by the judgment of God. It is fitting therefore that you follow the example of your fathers, especially since it behoves you, who have been trained by so holy a Confessor, to be better than your fathers, forasmuch as you have been trained and taught by a better preceptor; and to show forth a visible sign of your moderation and concord, by unanimously agreeing to the choice of a Bishop.

3. If the Lord has said, If two of you shall agree as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven: For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in, the midst of them; how much less, when many are assembled in the name of the Lord, where all agree together in their petitions, how much less ought we in any wise to doubt that there the Lord Jesus will be present to inspire their will and grant their petition, to preside over the ordination and confer the grace? 4. Make yourselves therefore worthy that Christ should stand in the midst of you; for wheresoever is peace there is Christ, for Christ is Peace; wheresoever is righteousness there is Christ, for Christ is Righteousness. Let Him stand in the midst of you, that you may see Him, that it be not said to you also, There standeth One among you, |360 Whom ye know not. The Jews saw Him not, for they believed not on Him; we behold Him by devotion, and see Him by faith.

5. Let Him therefore stand in the midst of you, that you may have the heavens which declare the glory of God, opened to you; that you may do His will and work His works. The heavens are opened to him who sees Jesus, as they were opened to Stephen, when he said, Behold I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Jesus stood as an intercessor, He stood, as being eager to assist His soldier Stephen in his combat; He stood as being prepared to crown His martyr. 6. Let Him therefore stand in the midst of you, that you may not fear Him when seated on His throne, for seated thereon He will judge, according to the saying of Daniel, I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the books were opened, and the Ancient of days did sit. And in the 82nd Psalm it is written, God standeth in the congregation of princes, He decideth among gods. So then being seated He judges, standing He decides. He judges concerning them that are not perfected, He decides among the gods. Let Him stand for you as a Defender, as the good Shepherd, that cruel wolves may not attack you.

7. Nor is it without reason that my admonition directs itself to this point; for I hear that Sarmatio and Barbatianus have come among you, vain boasters, who assert that there is no merit in abstinence, no grace in a strict life, none in virginity, that all are to be rated at one

price, that they who chastise their flesh, in order to bring it into subjection to the body, are beside themselves. But had the Apostle Paul thought it a madness, he never would have practised it himself, nor written it for the instruction of others. Yet he thus glories, saying, But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself be found a reprobate . So that they who chastise not their own bodies, yet would fain preach to others, are themselves accounted reprobates. |361

8. For is there aught so reprobate as that which excites us to impurity, to corruption, to wantonness? as the fuel of lust, the enticer to pleasure, the nurse of incontinence, the incentive of desire? What new school has sent forth these Epicureans? No school of philosophers, as they affirm, but of ignorant men who are setters forth of pleasure, who persuade to luxury, who hold chastity to be useless. They were with us, but they were not of us, for we blush not to say what the Apostle John said. It was when placed here that they first fasted, within the monastery they were under restraint; there was no room for licence, all opportunity of jesting and altercation was cut off. 9. This these men of delicacy could not bear. They departed, and when they desired to return were not received, for I had heard many things concerning them against which it behoved me to be on my guard; I admonished them, but in vain. Thus they began to boil over and spread abroad what might prove the miserable incentives of all kinds of vice. Thus they lost the fruits of their fasting, they lost the fruits of having contained themselves a little while. And now with Satanic malice they envy others those good works, the fruits of which they have themselves lost.

10. What virgin can hear without grieving that her chastity will have no reward? Far be it from her readily to give credence to this, still less let her lay aside her earnestness, or change the intention of her mind. What widow, were she to find her widowhood profitless, would choose to preserve inviolate her first marriage-vow, and live in sorrow, instead of allowing herself to be comforted? What wife is there who hearing that no honour is due to chastity, might not be tempted by unwatchful heedlessness of mind or body? And that is why the Church, in her sacred Lessons, in the discourses of her priests, daily sends forth the praises of chastity, the glory of virginity.

11. Vainly then has the Apostle said, I wrote to you in an Epistle not to company with fornicators: and lest perhaps they should say, 'We speak not of the fornicators of this world, but we say that he who has been baptized into Christ ought not to be deemed a fornicator, but whatever |362 his life may be, it will be accepted by God,' the Apostle has added; Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, and below, If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? And to the Ephesians, But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints, adding straightway, For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. This, it is plain, is said of the baptized, for they receive an inheritance who are baptized into the death of Christ, and are buried

together with Him, that they may rise together with Him. Wherefore they are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, heirs of God because the Grace of God is conveyed to them, and coheirs of Christ because they are renewed according to His life; heirs also of Christ because by His Death He grants to them as Testator His inheritance.

12. Now such as these, who have somewhat to lose, ought more to take heed to themselves than they who have nothing. These ought to act with greater caution, to avoid the snares of vice and the incentives to sin, which chiefly arise out of meat and drink. The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 13. Even Epicurus himself, whose example these men prefer to that of the Apostles, he, the champion of pleasure, while he denies that it produces evil, denies not that certain consequences flow from it, from which evils are generated: he maintains too that not even the life of the licentious, which is filled with pleasures of this kind, can be said to be objectionable, unless it be assailed by the fear of pain or death. How far removed he is from the truth, may be discovered even from this, that he declares pleasure to be the work of God in man as its originator, as his follower Philomarus maintains in his Epitomes, referring this opinion to the Stoics as its authors. |363

14. But this is refuted by holy Scripture, which teaches us that pleasure was instilled into Adam and Eve by the snares and enticements of the Serpent. For the Serpent itself is pleasure, and, in accordance with this, the passions of pleasure are various and slippery, and infected by the poison, so to speak, of corrupt enticement. Hence it is plain that Adam, deceived by the sensual appetite, fell from his obedience to God, and the reward of grace. How then can pleasure recal us to Paradise, when it alone cast us out of Paradise? 15. Wherefore the Lord Jesus, willing to strengthen us against the temptations of the Devil, fasted before His combat, to teach us that otherwise we cannot conquer the snares of evil. Moreover, the Devil himself employed the force of pleasure in launching the first dart of his temptations, saying, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. To which the Lord replies, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God; nor would He do it, although within His power, that He might teach us by this wholesome precept to attend rather to love of reading, than to pleasure. Now seeing they deny that we ought to fast, let them be prepared with some reason why Christ fasted, unless it were that His fast might be an example to us. Lastly in a subsequent instance He has taught us that except by fasting evil cannot easily be conquered. These are His words, This kind of evil spirits goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

16. Or what can be the meaning of Scripture which teaches that Peter fasted, and that it was while he was fasting and praying that the mystery of the baptism of the Gentiles was revealed to him? what but to convince us that the Saints themselves by fasting are advanced in virtue? It was while fasting that Moses received the Law, and in like manner, Peter, while fasting, was taught the grace of the New Testament. To Daniel also it was vouchsafed through fasting to stop the mouths of the lions, and to behold the events of times to come. Lastly, what hope of salvation can there be for us, unless by fasting we wash

away our sins, since Scripture says, Fasting and alms purge away sin? |364 17. Who then are these new teachers who deny the merit of fasting? Are they not heathen words which say, Let us eat and drink? And well does the Apostle tell them, saying, If after the manner of men I have fought with the beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. That is to say, What did it profit me to contend even unto death, save that I might redeem my body? For in vain is it redeemed if there is no hope of the resurrection. If therefore all hope of this is to be abandoned, let us eat and drink, let us not lose the fruit of things present, seeing that future things are not within our grasp. It is for those then to indulge in meat and drink, who have nothing to hope for after death.

18. Lastly, the Epicureans, the champions of pleasure, assert that death is nothing to us: what is dissolved, they say, is insensible, and what is insensible is nothing to us. By this they show plainly that they live by the body only and not by the mind, and do not perform the functions of the soul but of the body only, in that by separation of soul and body they deem all their vital functions to be dissolved, the merits of their virtues and all vigor of their souls to perish, that with his bodily senses the whole man fails, and that, though the body itself is not immediately dissolved, the mind leaves not a relic behind it. Then they would have the soul perish sooner than the body, whereas even according to their own opinion they ought to remember that the flesh and bones remain after death; and, would they abide by the truth, they ought not to deny the grace of the resurrection.

19. Well therefore does the Apostle, confuting these persons, admonish us not to be overthrown by such opinions, saying, Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners. Be sober unto righteousness and sin not; for some are ignorant of God. To be sober then is good, for drunkenness is sin. 20. But as to Epicurus, this advocate of pleasure, him of whom we make such frequent mention, in order to prove that these men are disciples of the heathens, and follow either the sect of the Epicureans or the man himself who |365 was excluded even by philosphers from their company as the pattern of luxury, what if we can prove even him to be more tolerable than these men? Now he asserts, as Demarchus tells us, that it is not drinking-bouts, nor banquettings, nor the birth of sons, nor the embraces of women, nor a large supply of fish and such delicacies provided for sumptuous feasts, it is not these which make life sweet, but sober discourse. He added also that they who are not excessive in seeking the dainties of the table, are moderate in the use of them. The man who cheerfully limits himself to the juices of plants and to bread and water, despises delicate feasts, for from these arise many evils. Elsewhere too they say that it is not excessive banquets and revels which make pleasure sweet, but a temperate life.

21. Seeing then that philosphy has renounced these men, shall not the Church exclude them? They themselves too, as is usual in a bad cause, often attack themselves by their own arguments. For although it be their main opinion, that there is no sweetness of pleasure but that which arises from eating and drinking; yet, perceiving that they cannot lay down so shameful a definition without the utmost disgrace, and that none stand by them, they have

sought to disguise it under the gloss of colourable arguments, and thus one of them has said, In seeking pleasure by means of feasting and song, we have lost that which is derived from hearing that Word whereby alone we can be saved. 22. Do we not then perceive in this complicated discussion how inconsistent and variable these men are? Scripture condemns them, for it has not passed over those whom the Apostles confuted, as Luke records in the Acts of the Apostles, which he has written in narrative style, Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans , and of the |366 Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods.

23. Yet not even from this number did the Apostle part devoid of success. For Dionysius the Areopagite, and Damaris his wife, with many others, believed. And thus by their acts this assembly of the learned and eloquent proved themselves vanquished by the simple discourse of the faithful. What then do these men mean by attempting to pervert those whom the Apostle has won, and Christ redeemed with His own blood, insisting that the baptized have no need to apply themselves to the exercise of virtue; that they are not injured by revellings, by excess of pleasure; that they who deprive themselves of such things are foolish; that virgins ought to marry and bear children; widows also ought to renew that carnal commerce which they had better never have known; and that although they might be able to contain themselves they are mistaken in refusing again to enter into the bond of marriage?

24. What then? Shall we put off the man and put on the beast? shall we strip off Christ, and be clothed over and over with the garments of Satan? The very heathen sages held that pleasure was not to be esteemed honourable, lest they should seem to couple men with brutes, and can we instil the habits of animals into the human breast, and engrave on the rational mind the irrational instincts of wild beasts? 25. Yet there are many kinds of animals, who when they have lost their mate, will no longer copulate, but lead, as it were, a solitary life. Many also feed on simple herbs and only quench their thirst in the pure stream; you may also often see dogs refuse food which they have been forbidden, and, if bid to refrain, close up their hungry jaws. Do men then require to be recalled from that in which even mute animals have learnt from man's teaching not to transgress?

26. But what is more excellent than abstinence, which |367 makes even the years of youth to be old, and produces an old age of conduct? For as by excess of food and drunkenness even old age is inflamed, so on the other hand, the insolence of youth is restrained by sparing food and by the flowing stream. Fire without us is quenched by the pouring on of water, no wonder then if even internal heat is allayed by draughts from the brook; for the flame is nourished or fails, according as it is fed or not. As hay, stubble, wood, oil, and the like are the fuel of fire, and feed it, and if you withdraw or do not supply them the fire is quenched, so also the warmth of the body is nourished or diminished by food; by food it is excited and by food allayed. Gluttony therefore is the mother of lust.

27. And shall we not say that temperance is accordant with nature, and with that Divine law, which in the very origin of all things, gave us to drink of the fountains and to eat of the fruit of trees? After the flood the just man found himself tempted by wine. Wherefore

let us use the natural drink of temperance, and would that we all could do so. But since we are not all strong, the Apostle says, Use a little wine for thine often infirmities. It is to be drunk then because of infirmity not for pleasure, and therefore as a remedy, sparingly, not as a luxury, profusely. 28. Again, Elijah, when the Lord God was training him to the perfection of virtue, found a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head; and in the strength of that meat he fasted forty days. Our fathers, when they passed over the sea on foot, drank water, not wine. It was when fed on their homely food and drinking water, that Daniel repressed the rage of the lions, and the Hebrew children saw the fiery furnace playing round their limbs with harmless flames.

29. And why should I speak of men only? Judith, in no wise moved by the luxurious banquet of Holofernes, won a triumph which men's arms had found desperate, by the sole merit of her temperance, delivering her country from invasion, and slaying with her own hand the captain of the host: a manifest example both that this warrior dreaded by the people had become enervated by his luxury, and that temperance in food had made this woman stronger |368 than men. It was not in her sex that she surpassed nature, but by her spare diet she conquered. Esther obtained favour from the proud king by her fasts. Anna, a widow of about fourscore and four years, serving in the temple with fastings and prayers night and day, came to the knowledge of Christ, and John the Teacher of abstinence, and, as it were, a new Angel upon earth, was His herald.

30. O foolish Elisha! to feed the prophets with wild and bitter gourds; O Ezra unmindful of Scripture though from memory thou dost restore Scripture! O sinless Paul, to glory in fasting, if fasting avails nothing! 31. But how can that not profit whereby our vices are purged? And if you offer it together with humility and mercy, then, as Isaiah has said by the Divine Spirit, thy bones shall be made fat, and thou shalt be like a watered garden! Thy soul then is fattened, and its virtues are enriched by the spiritual fat of fasting, and thy fruits are multiplied by the richness of thy mind, that thou mayest be made drunk, as it were, with soberness , as is that cup whereof the Prophet speaks, And my cup which inebriateth me, how goodly is it! 32. But not only is that temperance praiseworthy which is sparing in food, but that also which restrains desires. For it is written, Go not after thy lusts, but refrain thyself from thine appetites. If thou givest thy soul the desires that please her, she will make thee a laughing stock to thine enemies! and again, Wine and women will make men of understanding to fall away! Hence Paul teaches temperance even in marriage; for he who commits excess therein is, as it were, an adulterer, and violates the Apostolical law.

33. But how can I express the greatness of the grace of virginity, which was counted worthy to be chosen by Christ, to be the bodily temple of God, wherein dwelt, as we read, the fulness of the Godhead bodily! A virgin conceived the Saviour of the world, a virgin brought forth the Life of the universe. Ought not then virginity to be above all other states which was profitable to all in Christ? A virgin |369 bore Him Whom this world cannot contain or support. He, born of the womb of Mary, preserved inviolate her chastity, and the seal of her

virginity. Therefore Christ found in the Virgin what He would take for His own, what the Lord of all would assume to Himself. By the woman and the man our flesh was cast out of Paradise, by the Virgin it was re-united to God. 34. And what shall I say of the other Mary , the sister of Moses, who, leading the female band, passed on foot over the straights of the sea? By the same grace Thecla was reverenced even by lions, so that the unfed beasts, lying at the feet of their prey, underwent a holy fast, neither with wanton look nor sharp claw venturing to harm the virgin, for even by a look the sanctity of virginity is profaned.

35. Again, with what reverence has the holy Apostle spoken, Noiv concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, yet I give my judgement as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord. Commandment he has not, but counsel; for that which is above the Law is not commanded, but counselled and advised. Nor is any authority assumed, but grace is shewn, and that not by any chance person, but by him who hath obtained mercy of the Lord. Are then the counsels of these men better than those of the Apostles? The Apostle says, I give my counsel, but they dissuade all from leading a virgin's life. 36. And we ought to wonder at the greatness of the commendation of it which the Prophet, or rather Christ in the person of the Prophet, has expressed in one short verse. A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Christ says this to the Church, whom He would have a virgin without spot or wrinkle. Virginity is a fertile garden, which bears many fruits of a good odour; a garden inclosed because it is surrounded on all sides with the Avail of chastity; a fountain sealed, in that virginity is the fountain and source of modesty, and that which keeps unbroken the seal of purity; that fountain wherein is reflected the image of God, since with chastity of body accords likewise holy simplicity. |370

37. Nor can any one doubt that the Church herself is a virgin, whom even at Corinth the Apostle Paul espoused, that he might present her a chaste virgin to Christ. Thus in his first Epistle he gives counsel and sets a high value on the gift of virginity, for that it is not disquieted by the needs of this present world, nor defiled by its corruptions, nor agitated by its storms. In the latter he espouses the Corinthians to Christ, that so, in the purity of that people, he may ratify the virginity of the Church. 38. Answer me now, O Paul, in what way for the present distress dost thou give counsel? He that is unmarried, thou sayest, careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord, adding further, the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. She has therefore a bulwark against the storms of this world, and thus shielded and fortified by the Divine protection she is disquieted by none of the blasts of this world. Counsel then is good, because therein lies profit, but in commandment is a bond. Counsel leads forward the willing, commandment binds the reluctant. So that if any follow this counsel, and repent not, she hath profited; on the other hand, if she change her purpose, she hath no ground to accuse the Apostle, for she ought to have judged better of her own weakness, and thus she is responsible to herself for her own choice, for she has bound herself by a bond and knot heavier than she can bear.

39. Wherefore, as a good physician, who desires both to preserve for the strong the stability of their virtue, and to restore health to the weak, he gives to the one counsel, to the other a remedy; Whoso is weak, let him eat herbs; let him take a wife; he that is stronger, let him use the strong meat of continence. And he well adds; He that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well, but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the |371 Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment, and I think also that I have the Spirit of God. Now having the counsel of God consists in examining all things diligently, in urging what is best, and pointing out what is safest.

40. A careful guide points out many ways, that each person may walk on which he will, and which he finds suitable for himself: provided only he lights on one which will lead him into the camp. Good is the way of virginity, but, being lofty and steep, it requires the stronger sort. Good too is the way of widowhood, not so difficult as the former, but, being rocky and rough, it requires the more cautious sort. Good too is the way of matrimony, but, being smooth and direct, it arrives by a longer circuit at the camp of the faithful, and this way is trodden by the larger number. We have therefore the rewards of virginity, the merits of widowhood, there is also a place for conjugal chastity. They are the degrees and advances of several virtues. 41. Stand stedfast therefore in your hearts, that no man may unsettle or overthrow you. The Apostle has taught us what 'to stand' signifies, that is, what was said to Moses, For the place whereon thou standest is holy ground; for no one stands but he who stands by faith, who stands firm in the resolution of his heart. In another place too we read, But as for thee, stand thou here by Me. Both are addressed to Moses by the Lord, both the place whereon thou standest is holy ground, and stand thou here by Me, that is to say, 'thou standest with Me, if thou standest in the Church. For the place itself is holy, the land itself bears the fruit of holiness, and is rich with the haunts of virtueI

42. 'Stand therefore in the Church, stand where I appeared to thee, there I am with thee. For where the Church is, there is the most secure resting-place for thy soul; there is the support of thy mind, when I appeared to thee out of the bush. Thou art the bush, I am the fire: the fire in the bush, and I in the flesh. And therefore am 1 the fire, that I may give thee light, that I may burn up thy thorns, that is, thy sins, and discover to thee My grace.' |372 43. Stand firm therefore in your hearts, and drive away from the Church those wolves which seek to carry off prey. Let there be no sloth in you, nor an evil mouth or bitter tongue. Sit not with vain persons, for it is written, I have not dwelt with vain persons. Listen not to those who detract from their neighbours, lest, hearing others, ye be yourselves excited to do likewise, and it be said to each of you, Thou satest and spakest against thy brother.

44. Sitting we speak against others, but standing up we praise the Lord, as it is said; Behold now, praise the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord; ye that stand in the house of the Lord. He who sits, to speak of the habit of the body, is, as it were, dissolved by ease, and relaxes the

energy of his mind. But the careful watchman, the unwearied scout, the wakeful sentinel who keeps the outposts of the camp, these stand. The brave warrior also, who would prevent the designs of his enemy, stands ready in his rank ere he is looked for. 45. Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall. He who stands is free from detraction, for it is by the talk of the idle that slander is disseminated and rancour displayed. Wherefore the Prophet says, I have hated the congregation of the wicked, and will not sit among the ungodly. And in the 37th Psalm, which is full of moral precepts, he has placed in the very outset, Be not malignant among them that are malignant, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers. Malignity does more harm than malice, for its property is neither pure simplicity nor open malice; but a hidden malevolence, and it is more difficult to guard against what is concealed than against what is known; and so our Saviour bids us beware of evil spirits, for they captivate us by the outward show of charming pleasures, and the false show of other things, holding forth honour as a lure to ambition, wealth to riches, power to pride.

40. Wherefore in every act, but especially in the search after a Bishop, by whose model the life of all is formed, malignity ought to be absent, that by a composed and peaceful exercise of judgment he may be preferred to all |373 who is to be chosen from all and who may heal all. For a gentle-minded man is the physician of the heart, of that whereof our Lord also in the Gospel has professed Himself a Physician, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 47. He is the good Physician, Who has taken upon Him our infirmities, Who has healed our sicknesses, and yet He, as it is written, glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest, but He that said unto Him, even the Father, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee, as He saith also in another place, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedeck. And as He was to be the type of all priests, He took upon Him our flesh, that in the days of His flesh, He might offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto God the Father, and though He were the Son of God, might even learn obedience from the things He suffered, in order to teach us, that He might become to us the Author of salvation. Finally, having accomplished His sufferings, and being Himself made perfect, He gave health to all, He bore the sin of all.

48. Thus He Himself chose Aaron the High Priest, that human ambition might not sway the choice, but the grace of God; no voluntary offering, nor taking upon himself, but a heavenly call, that he might offer gifts for sins, who could have compassion on sinners for that he himself also, it is written, is compassed with infirmity. A man should not take this honour to himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron; so also Christ did not assume but received His priesthood. 49. And further, since the succession derived by descent from Aaron produced heirs of his race rather than partakers of his righteousness, therefore there came the antitype of that Melchisedeck whom we read of in the Old Testament, the true Melchisedeck, the true King of Peace, the true King of Righteousness, for this is the interpretation of his name; being without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, whicli also has reference to the Son of God, for in His Divine generation, He had no mother, and in His birth from the Virgin Mary He knew no father; Who, born of the |374 Father alone before the world, and from the Virgin

alone in the world, could have no beginning of days, for He was in the beginning. And how could He have any end to His life, Who is the Author of life to all? He is the Beginning and the Ending. But this is referred to also by way of example, that a Bishop ought to be without father and without mother, in that it is not nobility of birth, but holiness of life and preeminence in virtue that is chosen in him.

50. Let him possess faith and ripeness of conduct, not one without the other, but let both continue in one, with good works and deeds. Wherefore the Apostle Paul wishes us to be imitators of those who by faith and patience possess the promises of Abraham, of him who by patience was counted worthy to receive and possess the grace of the blessing promised to him. The prophet David has admonished us that we ought to be imitators of holy Aaron, for he has proposed him to us, among the saints of the Lord, as an example for our imitation, saying, Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among such as call upon His Name. 51. An example worthy to be followed by all truly was he, seeing that when death, owing to the rebels, was spreading among the people, he placed himself between the living and the dead, thereby to arrest death so that no more might perish. Of a priestly mind and temper truly was he, who thus with pious zeal offered himself, as a good Shepherd, for the Lord's flock. Thus he broke the sting of death, checked its violence, refused to let it pass. Thus piety aided his services, because he offered himself for those who resisted.

52. Wherefore let those also who separate themselves learn to fear the anger of the Lord, and to appease His priests. What? did not the earth open and swallow up Dathan Korah and Abiram on account of their schism? For when Korali Dathan and Abiram stirred np two hundred and fifty men against Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from them, they rose up against them, saying, Let it suffice for you that all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. |375 53. Wherefore the Lord was angry and spake to the whole congregation. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and hath drawn His saints to Himself; and those whom He hath not chosen, He has not so drawn to Himself. And the Lord commanded that Korah and all those who together with him had rebelled against Moses and Aaron, the priests of the Lord, should take censers, and put incense therein, that he who was chosen of the Lord, might be declared to be holy among the ministers of the Lord.

51. And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi, seemeth it but a small thing unto you that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord? and below, Seek ye the priesthood also? for which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord: and what is Aaron that ye murmur against him? 55. The whole people therefore, weighing the cause of offence, that these men, though unworthy, wished to fill the office of the priesthood, and therefore separated themselves, murmuring against the Lord, and censuring His judgment in the choice of their priests, were seized with great fear, and oppressed with apprehension of punishment. But at the general entreaty that all may not be involved in destruction through the insolence of a few, the guilty are marked out, and

two hundred and fifty men with their leaders are separated from the rest, the earth quakes and is rent asunder in the midst of the people, a deep gulf is opened and swallows up the offenders, and thus they are removed from the pure elements of creation, so as neither to pollute the air by breathing it, nor the heavens by looking on them, nor the sea by their touch, nor the earth by their burial.

50. The punishment ceased, the wickedness ceased not; for owing to this very act a murmuring arose among the people that by means of the priests the people had perished. Indignant at this the Lord would have destroyed all, had He not first been moved by the prayers of Moses and Aaron, and afterwards, at the intercession of Aaron His |376 priest, (in order to render their pardon more humiliating,) consented to spare their life at the prayer of those, whose prerogative they had denied. 57. Miriam the prophetess herself, she who with her brethren had crossed the straights of the sea dryshod, because, being still ignorant of the mystery of the Ethiopian woman, she had murmured against her brother Moses, became leprous white as snow, and even at the prayer of Moses was scarcely healed of this great plague. This her murmuring however is to be considered as a type of the Synagogue, which, uninstructed in the mystery of this Ethiopian woman, that is, of the Gentile Church, utters daily reproaches, and envies that people by whose faith she herself will also be relieved from the leprosy of her unbelief, according as we read, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

58. And that we may observe that it is Divine rather than human grace which operates in priests, of all those rods which Moses received from the tribes and laid by, the rod of Aaron alone budded, and thus the people perceived that the Divine commission is a gift which is to be looked for in a priest, and though they before thought that a similar prerogative belonged to themselves, they now ceased to claim the same privilege for a merely human election. But this rod, what else does it indicate, but that priestly grace never decays, and in the utmost lowliness has in the exercise of its functions the flower of strength committed to it, or because this also has reference to a mystery? Nor is it without a meaning that we deem this to have taken place near the end of the life of Aaron the priest. It appears to be intimated that the ancient Jewish people, decaying and worn away by the long-continued infidelity of their priesthood, will in the latter times be reclaimed to zealous faith and devotion by the example of the Church, and by the aid of reviving grace will again put forth the blossoms which have so long been dead.

59. But what is signified by the fact that on the death of Aaron it was not to all the people, but to Moses alone, who is among the priests of the Lord, that God gave the |377 command to invest with the garments of Aaron the priest Eleazar his son, what but to teach us that a priest ought to be consecrated by a priest, and clothed with his proper garments, that is, with priestly virtues; and then, when it appears that he lacks no part of his priestly array, but is complete in all things, that he should be brought near to the holy altars. For being about to offer for the people, he ought to be chosen by the Lord, and approved by the people; and this lest some grave cause of offence should be found in him whose duty it is

to intercede for the sins of others. No ordinary degree of virtue befits a priest, for he ought sedulously to shun not only more heinous sins, but even the smallest; he ought to be open to compassion, not to revoke his promise, to raise the fallen, to sympathise with sorrow, to preserve meekness, to love piety, to drive away or stifle wrath, to be a trumpet to rouse the people to devotion, or to soothe them into tranquillity.

60. It is an old saying; Accustom yourself to be single-minded that your life may be as a picture, and ever preserve the same stamp which it has received. How can he be one and the same, who at one time is inflamed with anger, at another, boils with bitter indignation, whose countenance burns and then changes to paleness, varying and changing colour every moment. But suppose that it is natural to be angry, or that for the most part there is cause to be so; it also is the part of a man to moderate his wrath, and to resist being carried away by brutal fury, so as riot to know how to be appeased; it is his duty not to embitter family discord, for it is written, A wrathful man diggeth up sin. He is not one with himself who is double-minded, nor he who cannot restrain his wrath, of whom David says well, Be ye angry, and sin not. Such a one does not command his anger, but rather indulges his natural passions, which cannot indeed be prevented but may be moderated. Although then we are angry, let our passion admit only such emotion as is according to nature, not sin which is contrary to nature. For it is intolerable that he who undertakes to govern others should be unable to govern himself. |378

61. And so the Apostle has given us a model, that it behoves a Bishop to be blameless, as he also says elsewhere, For a Bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. For how can the compassion of the almsgiver and the avarice of the coveter agree together? 62. I have set down those things which I have learnt are to be avoided; it is the Apostle who teaches what virtues are needed, and he tells us that the gainsayers are to be convinced with patience, and commands a Bishop to be the husband of one wife, and this not in order to exclude him from marriage, (for this is beyond the bounds of the precept,) but that by conjugal chastity he may preserve the grace of his Washing; nor again, that he may feel that he has the sanction of Apostolical authority for begetting children after he is a priest, for he speaks of one having children, not of one begetting them or marrying again.

03. And I have thought it better to touch upon this, because many persons argue as if the being husband of one wife had reference to a man marrying once after Baptism, seeing that by Baptism all the sin which would interpose any obstacle is removed. True indeed it is that in Baptism all sins and offences are washed away, so that even to one who has polluted his body with many women not united to him by wedlock, all is remitted. But Baptism does not dissolve marriage, if a man has married again, for it is sin, not the Law, which is destroyed by the Bath, and in marriage there is no sin but a law. Being therefore a law it is not dissolved as if it were a fault, but retained, in that it is a law. Now the Apostle has laid down a rule saying, If any be blameless, the husband of one wife. So that if any man be blameless, the husband of one wife, he conies under the forms of the rule for undertaking

the priestly office, but he who marries again incurs not indeed the sin of pollution, but loses the prerogative of a priest.

61. We have declared what the law prescribes, let us speak also of what is prescribed by reason. But in the first place we are to understand that the Apostle has not ordained this with reference to Bishops and Presbyters |379 only, but that the Fathers of the Nicene Council have also decreed that no man should be a cleric at all who has contracted a second marriage. For how can he give consolation or honour to a widow; how can he exhort her to continue a widow, or to preserve that faith to her husband which he has not preserved to his own first marriage? Or what difference would there be between the people and the priest, if they were bound by the same laws? The life of the priest ought to be pre-eminent as well as his graces, for he who obliges others by his precepts ought himself to observe the precepts of the law.

65. How vehemently I resisted ordination! and when I was at last constrained to consent, how I strove that it might be postponed! but the popular impulse prevailed over prescribed rules. And yet it was approved by the judgement of the Bishops of the West, and its example followed by those of the East; and this notwithstanding the prohibition to ordain a novice, lest he be lifted up with pride. If my ordination was not postponed, it was owing to a constraining force, and if proper humility be not wanting to the priest, where the fault does not lie with him no blame will be imputed. G6. But if even in other Churches such deliberation is used in ordination, how much care is required in that of Vercellae, where two duties seem equally required of the Bishop, monastic severity and ecclesiastical discipline. For Eusebius of blessed memory was the first to bring together in the West these two differing requisites, and though living in the city observed the monastic institute, and with the government of his Church united the sobriety of an ascetic life. Great increase accrues to the grace of the priesthood |380 when young men are thus obliged to practise abstinence and to obey the laws of chastity, and, though living within the city, to renounce its customs and ways.

67. Hence sprung those famous men Elijah, Elisha, and John the son of Elizabeth, who clothed in sheepskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, wandered about in deserts, in mountains thickets and precipices, among pathless rocks, in horrid caves, through marshy fords, of whom the world was not worthy. Hence Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, who were brought up in the royal palace, were fed sparingly as though they had been in the desert, with coarse food and water to drink. Rightly then did the king's servants prevail over kingdoms, shake off the yoke and set at nought captivity, subdue kingdoms, conquer the elements, quench the violence of fire, escape the edge of the sword, stop the mouths of lions, out of weakness were made strong, shrank not from the mockings of men, seeing that they hoped for heavenly rewards, nor dreaded the darkness of the prison, since on them had shone the brightness of eternal light.

68. Following their example, holy Eusebius left his country and kindred, and preferred foreign sojourn to the enjoyment of home. For the faith's sake he also chose and desired the hardships of exile, having for his companion Dionysius of blessed memory, who chose

a voluntary banishment in preference to the Emperor's friendship. Thus when these illustrious men, beset by arms, hemmed round by soldiers, were being carried off from the greater church, they triumphed over the imperial power. Troops of soldiers and the din of arms could not rob them of their faith, but they subdued the fierceness of the brutal mind, depriving it of power to hurt the Saints. For, as it is written in Proverbs, the king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion. 69. He confessed himself vanquished, by requesting them to relinquish their purpose, but they deemed their pen of reeds more powerful than his iron swords. Thus it was unbelief, not the faith of the Saints, which was wounded |381 and fell: they for whom a heavenly abode was prepared needed not a sepulchre in their own country. They wandered through the world as having nothing, yet possessing all things. Every place whither they were sent appeared full of delights, nor could they feel any want who always abounded in faith. They were tempted but not overcome, in fastings in labours, in watchings, in prisons; out of weakness they were made strong. Fed to the full by fasting they looked not for the charms of pleasure; refreshed by the hope of eternal grace, the burning summer parched them not, nor did the cold of icy regions break them down; for the warm breath of devotion invigorated them; they feared not the bonds of men, for Jesus had loosed them; they desired not to be redeemed from death, for they looked forward to be raised again by Christ.

70. Holy Dionysius again prayed that his life might close in exile, fearing that, if he returned, he should find the minds of the clergy or people perplexed by the doctrines and customs of the unbelieving, and he won this grace and carried with him with calm mind the peace of the Lord. Thus as holy Eusebius first lifted up the standard of confession, so blessed Dionysius, dying in his exile, won a higher title even than martyrdom. 71. Now this endurance in holy Eusebius throve under the monastic discipline, and by being accustomed to a stricter rule, he imbibed a power of bearing hardships. For it is certain that in the higher kinds of Christian devotion these two things are the most excellent, the Clerical function and the Monastic rule. The first is trained to be obliging and courteous in its behaviour, the second is accustomed to abstinence and endurance; the one lives as on a theatre, the other in secret; the one is seen, the other hidden. It is the saying of one who was a noble combatant, We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels. Worthy truly was he to have Angels as his spectators, when he wrestled that he might attain the prize of Christ, when he contended that he might lead on earth an Angel's life, that he might overcome the wickedness of spirits in heaven, for he wrestled with spiritual wickedness. Rightly was the world a spectator of him whom it was called on to imitate. |382

72. Thus one of these lives is on the stage, the other in the cell; the one contends with the distractions of the world, the other with the lusts of the flesh; the one subdues, the other flees from corporal pleasures; the one regulates, the other refrains itself, for to the perfect it is said, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Now he follows Christ who can say, Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. 73. Paul denied himself, when, knowing that chains, bonds and tribulations awaited him in Jerusalem, he voluntarily exposed himself to these dangers, saying, Neither

count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus. And though many stood round him, weeping and beseeching, they did not affect his resolution, so strict a censor over itself is a ready faith.

74. Thus the one kind of life fights, the other retires into seclusion; the world is triumphed over by the one, and placed at a distance by the other; to the one the world is crucified, and to it the world, to the other the world is unknown; the one has more temptations and therefore a more signal victory; the other falls less frequently and more easily keeps guard over itself. 75. So also Elijah himself, that the word of his mouth might be confirmed, was sent by the Lord to the brook Cherith. Both Ahab and Jezebel threatened him, Elijah feared and rose up, and went in the strength of that spiritual meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God; and he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there, and afterwards was sent from thence to anoint kings. Thus he was inured to endurance by dwelling in the desert, and as though fed by coarse viands unto the fatness of virtue, went forth increased in strength.

76. John also grew up in the desert, and baptized the Lord, and there first exercised himself in constancy, that afterwards he might reprove kings. 77. And now, seeing that we have cursorily passed over, in treating of holy Elijah's dwelling in the desert, the names of places which are not without meaning, let us return to |383 consider this. Elijah was sent to the brook Cherith, there the ravens fed him, in the morning they brought him bread, in the evening flesh. And with reason did they bring him bread in the morning, for bread strengthens man's heart., and it was with mystical food that the prophet was fed. In the evening he was supplied with flesh. Understand what thou readest; for Cherith is understanding, Horeb signifies, 'heart' or 'as heart;' of Beersheba the signification is the 'well of the seventhI or ' of the oath.' 78. Elijah first went to Beersheba, to the mysteries and sacraments of the Divine and holy Law, afterwards he was sent to the Brook, to the stream of that river which makes glad the city of God. Here you perceive the two Testaments, and their single Author; the ancient Scriptures as a deep and dark well whence you have to draw water with difficulty, for He Who was to fill it full was not yet come, as He said in after times, I am not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it. Therefore the Saint is commanded by the Lord to pass over the brook, for he who shall drink of the New Testament is not only a river, but out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water, rivers of understanding, rivers of meditation, spiritual streams, which yet are dried up in time of unbelief, lest the profane and faithless should drink of them.

79. And there the ravens acknowleged the Lord's prophet whom the Jews acknowleged not. They fed him whom that royal and noble nation persecuted. Who is Jezebel who persecuted him, but the Synagogue, vainly flowing, vainly abounding in the Scriptures, which it neither keeps nor understands? Who are the ravens that fed him, but they whose young ones call upon Him, to whose cattle He giveth fodder, as we read, and feedeth the young ravens that call upon Him. These ravens knew whom they were feeding; for they had a spiritual intelligence, and brought food to that stream of sacred knowledge. 80. He too feeds the

prophet who understands and keeps what is written. Our faith supports him, our advance gives him nourishment; he feeds on our minds and senses, his discourse is sustained by our understanding of it. We give him bread in the morning, in that, placed in the light of |384 the Gospel, we bring to him the stablishing of our hearts. By these things is he nourished and strengthened and fills the mouths of them that fast, to whom the unbelief of the Jews administered no food of faith. All prophetic words are fasting diet to them, for they cannot discern its interior richness, to them it is food weak and thin, such as cannot make fat their bones.

81. Perhaps the reason why they brought him flesh in the evening was that it is, as it were, stronger food, such as the Corinthians, who were weak, could not bear, and were therefore fed with milk by the Apostle; and thus in the evening of the world stronger meat was brought, in the morning of the world bread. And so since it was the Lord Who commanded this food to be administered to him, we may suitably address Him in this place with these prophetic words, Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to praise Thee, and below, Thou preparest their corn, for so Thou providest for the earth. 82. But now I think we have said enough of the teacher, let us now follow up the lives of his disciples, who have given themselves to praise the Divine Name, and celebrate it with hymns night and day. For this is the service of Angels, always to be praising God, and with frequent prayers to propitiate and beseech the Lord. They give themselves to reading, and occupy their minds with continual labours, separated from all female society, they mutually protect each other. What a life this is, wherein there is nothing you need to fear, but much for you to imitate! The pain of fasting is repaid by tranquillity of mind, alleviated by custom, made supportable by rest, or beguiled by occupation; worldly solicitude does not burthen nor outward troubles engross it, nor do the distractions of the city draw down upon it any difficulty.

83. For the maintenance or teaching of this gift an instructor is to be sought: what kind of one he ought to be you perceive, and by your unanimous aid we shall be able to obtain him, if you mutually forgive one another, if any of you consider himself injured by the other. For it is not the sole condition of virtue not to hurt him who has not hurt you, but it consists also in forgiving him who |385 has injured you. We are generally injured by the fraud of others, by the guile of our neighbour, but we must not deem it to be the part of justice to repay guile with guile, and fraud with fraud. For if justice be a virtue, it must be free from the imputation of crime, and not return evil for evil. For what kind of virtue is it for you to do yourself what you punish in another? This is merely to propagate iniquity, not to punish it; and the character of the person whom you injure, whether he be just or unjust, makes no difference, for you ought not to have done evil. Nor does the mode of your trangression signify, whether it proceed from the desire of avenging yourself, or of injuring others, for in neither kind are you free from blame. There is no difference between being ungodly and unjust, and therefore it is said, Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers, and above, I have hated the congregation of the wicked. Thus he comprehends all, without exception; he points to their wickedness without enquiring for the cause.

84. And what can be a better model than the Divine justice? For the Son of God says, Love your enemies. And again He says, Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. So far does He remove the love of revenge from the perfect, that he enjoins upon them charity towards their persecutors. And as in the Old Testament He said, To Me belongeth vengeance, I will repay, so in the Gospel He commands us to pray for them that injure us, that He Who has threatened to punish them may not do so. For He desires you to pardon of your own free-will, with which He agrees according to His promise. And if you call for vengeance, you know that the unrighteous is more severely punished by his own thoughts, than by judicial severity.

85. And as no man's life can be free from adversities, let us take care that they do not befal us by our own fault. For no man is condemned more severely by another's judgment than the foolish man, who is the author of his own misery, is by his own. Wherefore let us avoid such occupations as are troublesome and contentious, which bear no fruit, but only bring obstacles. But we ought to |386 see that we have no cause to be ashamed either of our choice or of our act; for it is the part of a prudent man, to guard against having to feel frequent sorrow for his acts, since it is the prerogative of God alone never td repent. For what is the fruit of justice but calmness of mind, or what does living justly bring with it, but a life of tranquillity? According to the model of the master will be the condition of the whole house. But if this is required in a family, how much more in the Church, where both rich and poor, bond and free, Greek and Scythian, noble and plebeian, are all one in Christ Jesus.

86. Let no man suppose that because he is rich more deference ought to be shewn him. In the Church he is rich, who is rich in faith, for the faithful have a whole world of riches. What wonder is it that the faithful should possess the world, seeing he possesses the heritage of Christ, which is more precious than the world? Ye were redeemed with precious blood, is said to all, and not to the rich only. But if ye would be rich, follow him who says, Be ye holy in all manner of conversation. This is said not to the rich only but to all, for He judges without respect of persons, according to the faithful testimony of His Apostle. Wherefore, says he, pass the time of your sojourning here not in indulgence, nor pride, nor elation of heart, but in fear. Upon this earth ye have received what is temporal, not what is eternal, use therefore those temporal things as knowing that you must shortly depart hence.

87. Trust not therefore in riches, for all these things must be left behind, and faith alone will accompany you; justice indeed, if faith precede, will also be your companion. Why do riches entice you? Not with silver and gold, not with silken vests and riches were ye redeemed from your vain conversation; but with the precious blood of Christ. He therefore is rich who is an heir of God, and co-heir of Christ. Despise not then a poor man, it is He Who hath made thee rich. Scorn not a needy man; lo! the poor crieth, and the Lord heareth him. Reject not a needy man; for Christ, when He was rich became poor, and this for thy sake, that by His poverty He might make |387 thee rich. Exalt not thyself therefore, as though thou wert rich, for He sent forth His disciples without money. 88. And the chief of these said, Silver and gold have I none. He glories in his poverty as if he shunned contamination. Silver and

gold he says, have I none, he does not say, gold and silver, for he who knows not the use of these things knows not the relative value of them. Silver and gold have I none, but faith I have. I am rich enough in the name of the Lord Jesus, which is above every name. Silver I have none, nor do I ask for it, gold I have not, nor do I desire it, but I have that which ye that are rich are without, which even ye esteem of more value, and this I give to the poor, namely, to say in the name of Jesus, Strengthen ye the weak hands and lift up the feeble knees.

89. But if ye would be rich, become poor. For ye shall in all things be made rich, if ye become poor in spirit. It is not money but the disposition which makes a man rich. 90. There are those who humble themselves when riches abound, and this is well and prudently done, for the law of nature is enough for all, and what suffices to her is easily found, but where lust is, there, in the abundance of riches, is still poverty. And no man is born poor, but becomes so. Thus poverty lies not in nature but in our notions of it, and therefore to find riches is easy to nature, but difficult for lust. In proportion to man's gains this thirst for gain increases, and he is, as it were, inflamed by the intoxication of his lusts. 91. Why do ye seek to accumulate riches as though they were necessary? Nothing is so necessary as to know what is not necessary. Why do ye cast the blame upon the flesh? it is not the lust of the belly, but the desires of the mind which make a man insatiable. Is it the flesh which blots out the hope of the future; is it the flesh which takes away the sweetness of spiritual grace; is it the flesh which obstructs faith; is it the flesh which in every way defers to the frantic domination of vain opinions? The flesh loves rather that frugal temperance, which relieves it of its burthen, which endues it with health, for so it rids itself of keen anxiety, and obtains for itself tranquillity.

92. But riches in themselves are not blameable. For the |388 ransom of a man's life are his riches, for he who gives to the poor, redeems his soul. There is therefore scope for virtue even in these material riches. Ye are as it were pilots, in a great sea. If any man steers well his ship, he quickly passes over the sea, and reaches his haven, but he who cannot manage his property is sunk together with his burthen. Wherefore it is written, The rich man's strength is his strong city.

93. And what is this city but Jerusalem, which is in heaven, in which is the kingdom of God? Good is this possession, which brings perpetual fruit. Good is this possession, which we do not leave behind us, but possess in heaven. He who finds himself in this possession says, The Lord is my portion. He says not, My portion stretches and extends itself to such and such limits. He says not, My portion is among such and such neighbours, unless haply with reference to the Apostles, the prophets and the saints of the Lord, for these are the portion of the just. He says not, My portion is in the meadows, or in the woods, or in the fields, unless perchance in the fields of the wood, wherein the Church is found, of which it is written, We found it in the wood. He says not, Troops of horses are my portion, for a horse is counted but a vain thing to save a man. He says not, Herds of oxen asses or sheep are my portion, except so far as he numbers himself among those herds which know their owner,

and with that ass which shuns not the crib of Christ; that lamb too is his portion which was brought to the slaughter, and that sheep which before her shearers was dumb, which opened not his mouth; by whose humility judgment has been exalted. And it is rightly said, before her shearers because, on that Cross He put off what was but accidental, not part of His essence, for He put off His body, but lost not His Divinity.

94. It is not every one therefore who can say the Lord is my portion. Not the covetous man, for avarice comes and says; Thou art my portion, I have thee in subjection, thou art my slave, thou hast sold thyself to me with that gold, thou hast adjudged thyself to be mine with these goods. The sensual man says not, Christ is my portion, because luxury comes and says, Thou art my portion, 1 have brought |389 thee into subjection to myself by that banquet, I have caught thee by the snare of those feasts, I keep thee in my bondage by the constraints of thy gluttony. Wilt thou not acknowledge that thou didst set a higher value on the indulgence of thy appetite than on thy life? I condemn thee by thine own judgment; deny it if thou canst; but thou canst not. Again, thou hast reserved nothing for thy subsistence, thou hast spent it all on thy table. The adulterer cannot say, The Lord is my portion, for lust comes and says, I am thy portion, thou hast enslaved thyself to me by the love of that damsel, by a night spent with that harlot thou hast committed thyself to my dominion. The traitor cannot say, Christ is my portion, because his wickedness immediately seizes upon him and says, He is deceiving thee, O Lord Jesus, this man is mine.

95. We have an example of this, for, Avhen Judas had received the sop from Christ, the devil entered into his heart, as claiming him for his own possession, retaining his right to his own portion, and saying, This man is not Thine but mine; my servant, Thy betrayer; to me, then, he manifestly belongs. With Thee he sits at table, but it is I who feed him, from Thee he has received bread, from me money; with Thee he drinks, but to me he has sold Thy Blood. And the event proved how truly he spoke. Then Christ departed from him, and Judas also left Jesus, and followed the devil. 96. How many masters has he, who deserts that one Master! But let us not desert Him. Who would fly from Him Whom Paul and Timothy follow, bound with chains, but voluntary ones, chains which do not bind but loose, chains in which they glory, saying, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy. Bondage under Him is more honourable than freedom and release from others. Who then would fly from peace, who would fly from salvation, who would fly from pity, who would fly from redemption?

97. Ye see, my sons, what they have become who have followed this course, how they, though dead, still work. Now as we join in praising their virtue, let us also study to attain to their diligence, and silently recognize in ourselves that which we speak of with approval in others. Nothing effeminate, nothing frail can deserve praise, The kingdom of |390 heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Our fathers ate the Paschal lamb in haste. Faith makes good speed, devotion is lively, hope unwearied; it loves not perturbations of the soul, but it loves to pass from profitless inactivity to fruitful labour. Why put off till tomorrow? you may still gain to-day; beware lest you fail to attain the one, and lose the other also. The loss even of one hour is not unimportant; one hour forms part of our whole life. 98. There

are some young persons who wish straightway to arrive at old age, that they may no longer be subject to the will of their elders, and there are old men who would return if they could to youth. Now I can approve of neither of these desires; the young men, disdaining things present, desire that their life may be changed, the old men that it may be prolonged. But it is in the power of the young to become old by gravity of mind, and of the old to grow young by vigorous actions. For it is not age so much as discipline which brings with it correction of life. How much more therefore ought we to lift up our hopes to the kingdom of God, where our life will be renewed, and where there will be a change not of age but of grace.

99. It is not by indolence or sleep that we obtain for ourselves a reward. The sleeper cannot work, there comes no fruit from indolence, but rather loss. Esau, being slothful, lost the first-fruits of blessing, choosing to receive rather than to seek for food. The industrious Jacob found grace at the hands of both his parents. 100. But Jacob, although superior in virtue and grace, gave way to his brother's anger, who was indignant that his younger brother should be preferred to him. Wherefore it is written, Give place unto wrath, to the intent that displeasure against another may not draw you also into sin, while wishing to resist and to be avenged. If you will consent to yield you may remove the blame both from yourself and from him. Imitate the patriarch, who by his mother's advice went into a far country. And who was this mother? Rebecca, that is, patience. For who could give this counsel but patience? The mother loved her son, and chose that he should be separated from herself rather than from |391 God. And thus as a good mother she gave benefits to both her sons, but on her younger son she conferred a blessing which he had power to keep. For she did not prefer one son to the other, but she preferred diligence to sloth, faith to unbelief. And even on her elder son she conferred no little favour, for she sent away the younger, to save him from unworthy fratricide.

101. His piety not his fault having thus banished him from his parents, he conversed with God, he increased in his estate, in his children, in grace. Nor was he elated by these things on meeting with his brother, but he humbled himself and did obeisance, not to his brother, implacable as he was, but to God Whom in his person he honoured. Therefore he bowed down to him seven times, being the number which signifies remission, for it was not a man that he adored, but Him of Whom He foresaw in spirit that He should come in the flesh, to take away the sins of the world. And this mystery is unfolded to you in the reply of Peter, who says, How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, till seven times? Thus you see this forgiveness of sins is a type of that great sabbath, of that perpetual rest of grace; and therefore it receives the gift of contemplation.

102. But what is the meaning of his setting in array his wives, and sons, and all his servants, and commanding them to bow themselves to the earth? It was not to the earth, as an element, which is often filled with blood, which is the receptacle of crimes, and which is made hideous by desolate rocks, or by precipices, or by a barren and hungry soil, but as that Flesh Which was to be our salvation. And perhaps this is that mystery which the Lord has taught thee in the words, I say not unto thee, until seven times, but, until seventy times

seven. 103. Do ye therefore forgive the wrongs done to you, that ye may be the sons of Jacob. Be not provoked as was Esau. Imitate holy David, who as a good teacher, has left us an example in the words, For the love that I had unto them, lo! they take now the contrary part, but I give myself unto prayer, and so when men reviled him, he prayed. Prayer is a good shield, a shield which wards off' contumely, which repels curses, and throws them back on |392 the heads of those who utter them, so that they are wounded by their own weapons: Let them curse, it is said, but bless Thou. That curse of men is to be courted, for it obtains for us a blessing from the Lord.

104. For the rest, my most dearly beloved, remembering that Jesus suffered without the gate, do ye go forth from this earthly city, for your city is Jerusalem, which is above. Do ye dwell there that ye may say, For our conversation is in heaven. Jesus went forth from the city, that ye, going forth from the world, may be above the world. Moses alone, who saw God, had his tabernacle without the camp when he talked with God; and when sacrifices were offered for sin, the blood indeed was carried to the altar, but the bodies were burned without the camp; for no man living among the temptations of this world can lay aside sin, nor can his blood be accepted by God until he has put off the defilement of this body. 105. Love hospitality, for thereby holy Abraham found favour in God's sight, received Christ as his guest, and Sarah, already worn with age, obtained grace to bear a son; Lot also escaped the flames which destroyed Sodom. And thou also mnyest receive Angels, if thou wilt offer hospitality to strangers. And what shall I say of Rahab, who, by performing this office, escaped destruction?

106. Compassionate those who are kept in bondage, as though ye also were bondsmen. Console those who are under sorrow; It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. From the one we win the merit of discharging a duty, from the other the stain of a transgression. And again in the one case the reward is yet hoped for, in the other it is received. Sympathise with those who suffer as if ye suffered together with them. 107. Let a woman be obedient not servile to her husband, let her offer herself to be ruled not coerced. Let the husband also direct his wife as her governour, honour her as the companion of his life, share with her as his fellow-heir in grace. 108. Mothers, wean your own children, love them, and pray for them, but pray that their life may be prolonged above this earth, rather than in it, for there is nothing |393 longlived in this earth, and that which seems permanent is at the best short and fragile. Admonish them rather to take up the Cross of Christ than to love this life.

109. Mary, the mother of the Lord stood by the cross of her Son; it is no other than the holy Evangelist John who teaches me this. Others have told us that in the Lord's passion the earth was shaken, the heaven covered with darkness, the sun withdrew its light, the thief, after a faithful confession, was received into paradise. John has taught what the others have not, how when nailed to the Cross He spoke to His mother, esteeming rather this exhibition of pious offices to His mother than that gift of a heavenly kingdom, which, after triumphing over His pains, He conferred. For if it be pious to grant pardon to the thief, much more pious

is it that the Son should shew such solicitous honour to His Mother: Behold, He says, thy son, Behold thy mother. Christ testified from the Cross, and distributed the offices of piety between the mother and the disciple. The Lord made not only a public but also a private Testament, and John signed this His Testament, a witness worthy of so great a Testator, a good Testament, not of money but of eternal life, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, Who says, My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

110. Nor did Mary fall below what became the Mother of Christ. When the Apostles fled she stood before the Cross, and with pious eyes looked upon the wounds of her Son, for she expected to see not the death of her Offspring, but the salvation of the world. Or perhaps because she who was the Palace of the King had learnt that the redemption of the world would ensue from the death of her Son, she thought that by her own death she might add something to the general good. But Jesus needed no helper for the redemption of all, Who without any helper saved all. Wherefore He says, I am become like |394 a man without help; free among the dead. He received the affection of His Mother, but He sought not aid from others. 111. Imitate her, ye holy mothers, who in her only and beloved Son exhibited such an example of maternal virtue, for your children cannot be dearer to you than hers was, nor did the Virgin seek consolation in the bearing of another son.

112. Masters, command your servants not as your inferiors in rank, but as remembering that they are partakers of the same nature as yourselves. Servants also, serve your masters cheerfully, for every one ought cheerfully to endure that state whereunto he is born; and obey not only the good, but also the froward. For what merit has your service, if ye serve the good diligently; but if ye serve the froward also ye have merit, for neither do the free obtain any reward, if, having transgressed, they are punished by the judges, but herein lies their merit if they suffer wrongfully. Thus if ye, considering Jesus Christ, serve even austere masters with patience, ye will have your reward. For the Lord Himself suffered, the just from the unjust, and with admirable patience nailed our sins to His Cross, that he who shall imitate Him may wash away his sins in His blood.

113. In short, turn all of you to the Lord Jesus. Take pleasure in this life so that it be with a good conscience; let the hope of immortality make you patient of death, let your assurance of the resurrection be confirmed by the grace of Christ; let there be truth and simplicity, faith and confidence, abstinence and holiness, industry and sobriety, modest conversation, learning without vanity, sobriety of doctrine, faith not intoxicated by heresy. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen. |395

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXIV .

S. Ambrose replies to Irenaeus, who had asked why the manna, which was given to the children of Israel, was not given now, that the Body of Christ, Which is given to Christians, is the true Manna, of which the other was a type; as it was also of Divine Wisdom, which is the food of souls. AMBROSE TO IRENAEUS, GREETING. 1. You ask me why the Lord God does not now rain manna as He did on our fathers. If you consider. He does rain manna from heaven on those who serve Him, and that day by day. The earthly manna indeed is to this very day found in many places, but it is not now an event so miraculous because that which is perfect is come. Now that which is perfect is the Bread from heaven, the Body born of the Virgin, as to which the Gospel sufficiently instructs us. O how greatly does this excel what went before it! For they who eat that manna or bread, are dead, but he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

2. But there is also a spiritual manna, the dew that is of spiritual Wisdom, which descends from heaven upon those who sincerely seek for it, and which waters the souls of the righteous, and puts sweetness into their mouths. Wherefore he who comprehends this outpouring of divine wisdom receives pleasure from it, nor requires any other food, nor lives by bread alone, but by every word of God. He who is more curious, will ask what that is which is sweeter than honey. The servant of God answers him, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat. And hear further what this bread is, the word, he says, which the Lord hath commanded. Now this food so commanded by God nourishes the soul of the wise, imparting light and sweetness, brightened by the beams of truth, and communicating to it the soothing sweetness of divers virtues and |396 the word of wisdom like that of an honey-comb; for pleasant words, it is written in the Proverbs, are as an honeycomb.

3. And now hear the reason why it was small; it was because a grain of mustard-seed which is compared to the kingdom of heaven is also small, and because faith, which is as a grain of mustard-seed, can remove mountains and cast them into the sea. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. Again, Moses ground the head of the golden calf to powder, and cast it into water, and made the people drink of it; for their heart was hardened by the greatness of their perfidy, and he did thus that it might be softened and made refined by faith. Lastly, that woman who grinds meal well and fine shall be taken, but she who grinds ill shall be

left. 4. Follow then these examples as regards thy faith, that thou mayest be like that soul which excites in itself the love of Christ, and which, as it ascends aloft, is admired by the host of heaven; that it may rise without impediment, that it may soar above this world with joy and gladness, lifting itself on high like the vine stock and like the smoke, sending forth the fragrance of a holy resurrection, and the sweetness of faith, as it is written, Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like the stock of vine burned with smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of ointment?

5. The refined nature of this faith is well expressed by being compared with powder or by the mention of perfume; for we read in Exodus of that prophetic incense which is the prayer of the Saints, as being a subtile perfume and compounded of many things, that it may be set forth in the sight of the Lord, as David also says, Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense. And so it is in the Greek also, kateuqunqh&tw h(proseuxh& mou w(j qumi/ama e0nw-pi/on sou. And in the Revelation of John we read that an Angel, stood at the Altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, it is said, |397 with the prayers of the Saints, ascended up before God out of the Angel's hand.

6. Small too is the navel and the belly of that soul which ascends up to Christ, and therefore it is praised by the words of the spouse saying, Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor, thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies. For it is rounded and polished with all kinds of learning, and is a spiritual drink not failing in fulness, and in the knowledge of heavenly secrets. The belly of the soul is also like the navel, mystical, and not only strong food whereby the heart is strengthened, but also sweet and flowery food whereby it is delighted, is received therein. And perhaps this is what Moses meant, that by many and pious prayers the sacrilege was to be atoned for. 7. In the book of Kings also, when the Lord revealed Himself to holy Elijah, a small still voice was first heard, and then the Lord revealed Himself to him; thereby to teach us that bodily things are solid and gross, but such as are spiritual tender and so fine as not to be perceptible to the eye. In the same way we read in the book of Wisdom that the Spirit of Wisdom is subtile and lively for in her is an understanding spirit, holy, one only, manifold, subtile and lively; and she grinds her words before she speaks, that neither her mode of speech nor her meaning may give offence. Lastly, it shall be said to Babylon herself, when about to be destroyed, And the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee.

8. The manna then was fine, and was gathered each day, not reserved for the day following; because the extemporaneous inventions of Wisdom please the most; when made at leisure they excite not the same admiration as when struck out at the moment by the spark of genius. Or it may be that future mysteries are revealed herein: the manna kept till the rising of the sun was unfit to be eaten, in other words, after the coming of Christ, it lost its grace. For when the Sun of Righteousness arose, and the more illustrious Sacraments of

the Body and Blood of Christ appeared, lower things were to cease, and the people were to take in their stead what was more perfect. Farewell; love me, for I also love you. |398

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXV.

THIS letter contains a mystical explanation of the statement in Exodus xxiv. 6. that Moses put half of the blood of the sacrifices into basons and poured half on the altar. AMBROSE TO SIMPLICIANUS, GREETING. 1. You were perplexed, you tell me, when reading that Moses, after offering sacrifice and the immolation of salutary victims to the Lord, put half of the blood in basons, and sprinkled half on the altar, to know what could be the purport of this. But why need you doubt and inquire of me, when for the sake of the faith, and of acquiring Divine knowledge, you have traversed the whole world, and night and day have devoted the whole time of your life to constant reading? Thus with your keen intellect you have embraced all the objects of the understanding, and are wont to prove as concerns even the books of philosophy, how far they deviate from the truth, many of them being so futile that the words of their writers perished sooner than their life.

2. But since gathering words, like money, is of great profit, and great increase is thereby obtained for the general good of trade, I cannot refrain from mentioning how wonderful is that division of the blood. For part of it seems to signify the moral, and part the mystical discipline of wisdom. That part which is put into basons is moral, that which is sprinkled on the altar is mystical; in that by the Divine gift and a certain inspiration it is instilled into men's minds, that the sentiments they conceive of God may be suitable and full of faith. 3. Moreover, they who have spoken of His majesty, and of heavenly things, whether apostles or holy prophets, have only dared to speak of such things as were shewn them by revelation. Hence Paul has testified in his Epistle that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard words which it is not lawful for a man to utter; Stephen also saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of |399 God, and the Prophet David saw Him sitting on His right hand. And what shall I say of Moses, of whom the Scripture says that there arose not such a prophet since in Israel, who kneiv the Lord face to face, in all the signs and the wonders which he did in the land of Egypt.

4. The mystical part therefore is offered to God, Who by the brightness of the Divine Wisdom, Whose Father and Parent He is, quickens the vigour of the soul, and enlightens the mind. But the Wisdom of God is Christ, on Whose breast John lay, that from that secret source of wisdom he might be known to have imbibed Divine mysteries. He himself, conscious of his gift, has recorded this, for he dreaded to claim for himself, and to ascribe to his own

genius that which he had received. The Lord also said to the Apostles, opening their mouths, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whereby He declared that He is the same Who said to Moses, I will open thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. Wherefore this wisdom, divine, unspeakable, unadulterated and incorruptible, pours her grace into the minds of her saints, and discloses to them knowledge that they may behold her glory.

5. But that is the discipline of moral wisdom which is poured into basons, and is taken and drank from them. The basons therefore are the organs of the senses. The basons are the two eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth and other parts suitable to this function; for the eyes are the recipients and ministers of sight, the ears of hearing, the nose of smell, the mouth of taste, and so with the rest. Into these basons that Word in Whom is the Headship of the priestly and prophetic office poured the half of His blood; that He might quicken and animate the irrational parts of our nature, and endow them with reason. 6. Again, having rehearsed and proclaimed the precepts of the Law to the people, and being about to explain the meaning of that mystical ark of the testimony, and of the candlestick, and of the censers, he slew victims, and offered sacrifice, sprinkling half of the blood on the sacred altar, and putting half in basons.

7. A division therefore is made between that mystical or divine and moral wisdom. For the Lo&goj is a divider |400 of souls and of virtues: the Lo&goj is the Word of God, quick and powerful, which pierces and penetrates even to the dividing asunder of the soul, and which also distinguishes and divides virtues, whose minister, Moses, by the division of the blood, distinguished the kinds of virtue. 8. And forasmuch as nothing is so emphatically declared in the Law as Christ's Advent, or prefigured as His Passion, consider whether this be not the saving victim which God the Word offered by Himself, and sacrificed in His own body. For first both in the Gospel and also in the Law He taught us moral discipline, and manifested it in His own patience and in very act and deed, transfusing into our lives and senses, as if into basons, the very substance and marrow as it were of wisdom, and quickening thereby men's minds to be a seed-plot of virtue, and instructed in piety, and then, drawing near the altar, He poured out the blood of His offering.

9. Should you choose then to understand it thus, the sense is pious; the interpretation also which follows that of Solomon is, if you prefer it, equally concordant, namely, that whereas the prophet Moses put the blood into basons, this is the same blood whereof it is written that Wisdom hath mingled her wine, bidding men to forsake foolishness, and seek after understanding. From the bason then we drink wisdom, discipline, understanding, correction, amendment of life, regulation of habits and counsels, the grace of piety, increase of virtue, a fountain of plenty. 10. But by this sprinkling the blood on the Altar you may understand the cleansing of the world, the remission of all sins. For He sprinkles that blood on the Altar as a Victim to atone for the sins of many. For the Victim is a Lamb, but a Lamb not of irrational nature but of divine power, of Which it is said, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. For not only has He cleansed with His blood the sins of all men, but has also gifted them with divine power. Does not He seem to you to have

indeed shed His blood, from Whose side blood and water flowed over the very altar of His Passion?

Farewell; love me as you do, with the affection of a parent. |401

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXVI.

HERE is a mystical exposition of Aaron's taking the earrings of the women to make the golden calf, and of other details connected with it. AMBROSE TO ROMULUS. 1. THERE is no doubt that letter-writing was invented that we might hold a sort of converse with the absent, but this becomes more excellent in use and example when frequent and pleasant colloquies pass between a parent and his sons, whereby is really produced a sort of image of actual presence, even though they are separate in body; for by such offices love attains its growth, just as it is augmented by our mutual letters between ourselves. All this I begin to experience much more abundantly in these last addresses of your affection, wherein you have thought fit to ask me with what intent Aaron took the gold from the people when they required gods to be made them, and why the head of a calf was fashioned with that gold, and why Moses was so deeply incensed that he commanded every man to rise upon his neighbour and slay him with the sword. For it is a great thing that the absent should suffer no loss either of kindness or of the liberal communication of mutual knowledge. My sentiments on this point, therefore, as you require it, I will offer for the purpose rather of comparison than of instruction.

2. While Moses was receiving the Law on Mount Sinai the people were with Aaron the Priest. Prone as they were to transgress, we do not find that they committed sacrilege so long as the Law was being delivered, but when the Divine Voice ceased, sin overtook them, so that they required gods to be made them. Aaron, thus constrained, asked for their rings and the women's earrings, which, when given to him, he cast into the fire, and the head of a calf was molten of them. 3. We can neither excuse this great priest, nor dare we condemn him. It was not however unadvisedly that he deprived the Jews of their rings and earrings; for they who |402 designed sacrilege could have neither the seal of faith nor ornaments of their ears. The patriarch Jacob too hid the earrings along with the images of the strange gods, when he hid them in Shechem, that no one might come to know of the superstitions of the Gentiles. And he said well, Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives; not as leaving the men their earrings, but in order to shew that they had them not. Fitly also are the earrings taken from the women, that Eve may not again hear the voice of the serpent.

4. Because they had listened to sacrilegious counsel, an image of sacrilege was formed by the melting of their earrings; for he who hears amiss is wont to perpetrate sacrilege. Why the head of a calf came forth, the sequel shews, for it was signified thereby, either that in time to come Jeroboam would introduce this kind of sacrilege, and that the people of the Hebrews should worship golden calves; or else that all unbelief bears the semblance of brutal and savage folly. 5. Moses, incensed by this unworthy act, broke the tables, and ground the head of the calf to powder, that he might abolish all traces of their impiety. The first Tables were broken in order to the restoration of the second, whereby, through the preaching of the Gospel, unbelief was broken to pieces, and done away. And thus Moses brought down this Egyptian pride, and repressed this self-exalting arrogance, by the authority of the eternal Law. Wherefore David also says, The Lord shall break the cedars of Libanus, and shall reduce them to pieces, as a calf of Libanus.

6. The people drank up all their perfidy and pride, that impiety and arrogance might not drink them up. For it is better that every one should prevail over the flesh and its vices, that it may not be said that prevailing death hath swallowed him up, but rather, Death is swalloived up in victory; O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory? And of the Lord it is said, He shall drink of the brook in the way; for He received the vinegar, that He might drink up the temptations of all men. 7. But in his causing every man to slay his neighbour, the |403 parents their children, the brother his brother, we find an evident precept that religion is to be preferred to friendship, piety to kindred. For that is true piety which prefers divine things to human, eternal to temporal. Wherefore also Moses himself said to the sons of Levi, Who is on the Lord's side, let him come to me. And he said unto them. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go throughout the camp, that thus, by the contemplation and love of the Divine Majesty all human ties and affections might be destroyed. It is written that three thousand men were slain, nor need we feel any jealousy of the number being so great, for it is better that by the punishment of a few the body should be exonerated, than that vengeance should be taken on all; nor indeed does any punishment of wrong against God appear too severe.

8. Again, the ministry of the Levites, whose portion is God, was chosen for this work, as being more holy than the others: for they know not how to spare their own who know nothing of their own, for to the holy God is everything. Now he is the true Levite and punisher and avenger, who kills the flesh that he may preserve the spirit, such as he was who says, I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection. And who are such close neighbours as the flesh and the soul? What is so akin to us as the passions of the body? These the good Levite slays within himself with that spiritual sword which is the word of God, sharp and powerful. 9. There is also a sword of the Spirit, which pierces the soul, as was said to Mary, A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Is not the flesh united with the soul by a kind of fraternal bond? Is not discourse also related and akin to our mind? When therefore we check our discourse, that we may not incur the sin of much speaking, we put aside the rights of blood, and loose the bonds of this

fraternal connexion. Thus by the force of reason the soul severs from itself its irrational and, as it were, cognate part.

10. And so Moses taught the people to rise against their neighbours, by whom faith was in danger of being |404 mocked, and virtue hindered, that whatever in us was straying from virtue, perplexed by error, or entangled in vice might be cut off. By this direction to the people he obtained not only a mitigation of the Divine wrath and a turning away of offence, but even conciliated for them grace. 11. Thus, according to our apprehension, we have explained, since you asked it, our sentiments. And do you, if you have aught preferable, impart it to us, that from you and from ourselves we may learn which to choose and follow. Farewell: love me as a son, for I also love you.

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXVII.

S. AMBROSE begins by pointing out that Moses deferred to Aaron in matters connected with the Priesthood, and then goes on to dwell on the rarity and the blessing of true penitence. AMBROSE TO SIMPLICIANUS, GREETING. 1. THE greatness of each person as regards his own functions is taught us in that Scripture lesson by which your attention has been justly attracted, that Moses, than whom no man saw God more intimately, neither arose there a prophet since in Israel whom the Lord knew face to face; he who was constantly with the Lord forty days and nights, when he received the law in the Mount, he, I say, to whom the Lord gave the words which he should speak, is found to have approved the counsel of his brother Aaron more than his own. Was there then any man more prudent and learned than Moses? Nay, of Aaron himself we afterwards read that together with Miriam he transgressed concerning the Ethiopian woman.

2. But I would have you carefully consider this very thing, how Moses excelled in knowledge, Aaron in counsel. Moses was the greatest prophet, who said of Christ, Like unto me, unto Him shall ye hearken. And the Lord Himself says of him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, |405 neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. In the matter of prophecy therefore Moses is preferred as a prophet; but where the subject and function and office relates to the Priesthood, Aaron is preferred as being a Priest. Let us now treat the passage itself. 3. A he-goat was slain for sin; offered for an whole burnt-offering. Moses afterwards sought for it, and it was burnt. And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron which were left alive, saying, Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin-offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation? Ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place as I commanded. Now when Aaron saw that Moses was angry he replied to him meekly, Behold, this day have they offered their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me, and if I had eaten the sin-offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord? And when Moses heard that, he was content. Let us consider what these things mean.

4. Not to sin is an attribute of God alone: to amend and correct one's error and to do penance for one's sin is the part of a wise man. But this is very difficult in this human life. For what is so rare as to find a man who will convict himself, and condemn his own act? Rare is the

confession of sin, rare is penitence, rare among men is the admission of that word. Nature and shame both recoil from it; nature, because all are under sin, and he who wears flesh is subject to transgression. Thus the nature of the flesh, and the allurements of the world are repugnant to innocence and integrity. Shame recoils also, because every man blushes to confess his own fault, thinking more of the present than of the future.

5. Now Moses desired to find a soul free from sin, that it might lay aside the slough of error, and depart, relieved from transgression, without any cause of shame within itself. But such a soul he found not, because an irrational impulse comes quickly on, and a certain flame, whose motions are very swift, feeds upon the soul, and burns up its innocence. For the future is outweighed by the present, |406 moderation by violence, worth by numbers, soberness by pleasure, hardness by luxury, sadness by joy, austerity by blandishments, slowness by too great precipitance. And iniquity, which suggests occasions of doing evil, is a thing swift in its nature, for its feet are swift to shed blood; but all virtue uses gentle and long delays, judging beforehand and looking narrowly into what is to be undertaken. And thus the good mind scrutinizes its own counsels, and examines beforehand what is becoming and excellent; but in iniquity the act outstrips consideration. Penitence therefore is tardy and abashed, because it is oppressed and drawn back by present shame; having, in itself, regard only to things future, the hope whereof is late, the fruit tardy, and so the desire of them is tardy also.

6. During these strivings of hope and virtue shameless-ness runs onward, and by the glare of things present, penitence is excluded, its affections are, as it were, burnt up, and all that has respect to it is lost. The Law seeks and finds it not, for it is scorched by the heat and smoke of iniquity, and the anger, as it were, of the Law is roused. Moses says that the sin-offering ought to have been eaten in the holy place, and rebukes the priests as remiss; Aaron replies that the priestly judgment ought to be cautious; that such a function must not be lightly entrusted to an unsound conscience, lest this error be worse than the first. For by a filthy vessel wine or oil is easily tainted and spoilt. 7. But how could sin be burnt out when the fire was strange fire; and this in the sight of the Lord to Whom even hidden things are known? Can it please the Lord, if a man, while he is yet engaged in sin, and keeps unrighteousness in his heart, professes that he is doing penance? It is the same thing as if one who is sick should feign himself well, he will only become worse; for the pretence of health can avail him nothing; since it is but shadowed forth by words, not sustained by any support of virtue.

8. This strange fire then is lust, this strange fire is every incentive of cupidity, this strange fire is all burning avarice. By this fire man is not cleansed but rather burned |407 up. For where this strange fire is, if any man offer himself in the sight of the Lord, the celestial fire consumes him as it did Nadab and Abihu who were burned together with those sacrifices which had been offered for sin on the sacred Altars. He therefore who would cleanse his sin let him remove from him strange fire. Let him offer himself to that fire only which burns up the fault not the man. 9. And who this fire is, let us learn from the words, that Jesus

shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. This is that fire which dried up her issue of blood who had suffered it for twelve years; that fire, which took away the sin of Zacchaeus when he said that he would give half of his goods to the poor, and if he had taken any thing from any man would restore fourfold. This is that fire, which wiped away the thief s crime, for He is a consuming fire Who said, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. Thus He healed those in whom He found a simple and pure confession; no malice, no fraud.

10. Judas moreover could not obtain a remedy, although he said, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood, for he cherished within his breast strange fire, which urged him on to destroy himself. He was not worthy to be healed, for he wept not through conversion of his inmost mind, nor did he diligently do penance; for such is the love of the Lord Jesus that He would have granted pardon even to him, had he waited for the mercy of Christ. 11. This fault therefore the priests cannot remove, nor the sin of him who offers himself in guile, and still harbours a desire of transgressing. For they cannot eat of that which is full of fraud, and has the serpent's scar within; for the food of the priest lies in the remission of sins. Wherefore Christ the chief of Priests says, My meat is to do the will of My Father which is in heaven. What is the will of God but this, In returning and rest shall ye be saved? In the guileful man therefore there is no food. Neither again can he taste the sweetness of a feast whose conscience is not sincere and pure; for the bitterness of fraud takes away the sweetness of the viands; and an evil conscience will not permit penitence to refresh and feed the guilty soul. |408

12. Such affections therefore, such petitions, such penitence are neither useful nor a pleasure to the priests. And that he-goat offered as an whole burnt offering for sin was deservedly burnt, because strange fire was found in the sacrifice. On that account it was not a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to God; for that is not accepted which has not been approved among the riches of sincerity and truth. 13. And so elsewhere also you read of two he-goats, one whereon was the lot of the Lord, the other that of the scape-goat, and that that whereon was the lot of the Lord was offered and sacrificed, while the one whereon was the lot of the scape-goat was sent into the wilderness to take away the iniquities of the people, or of any sinner. For as there are two men in the field, and one of them shall be taken and the other left, so are there two he-goats, one of which is used for sacrifice, and the other sent into the wilderness. The one is of no use, neither to be eaten nor fed upon by the sons of the priests. For as in matters of food, what is good is eaten, what is useless or bad is thrown away, in the same way we call good works festive, as fit for eating.

14. It will not therefore be pleasing to the Lord if the priest eat of a sacrifice which presents a deceptive offering, not the sincerity of a diligent confession. And therefore that goat is to be sent into the wilderness, where our fathers wandered, where they wandered and could not attain to the land of the resurrection, but the memory of them passed from the land. Hear again what are festive works. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you. For rest in God, which causes tranquillity of mind, is festive and refreshing. And now let us also rest from discoursing. Farewell; love me as you do, for I also love you. |409

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXVIII.

AN explanation of the text, Thy heaven shall be brass and thy earth iron. AMBROSE TO ROMULUS. 1. BEING yourself in the country I am surprised at your having been led to inquire of me the reason why God should have said, And thy heaven shall be brass, and thy earth iron. For the very appearance of the country and its present fertility might teach us how great is the mildness of the air, and how genial is the climate, when God vouchsafes to give plenty, but when sterility, how all things are closed up, how dense the air, so as to seem hardened into the very substance of brass. Elsewhere also you read that in the clays of Elijah the heaven was shut up three years and six months. 2. By the heaven then being brass is signified its being shut up, and refusing its use to the earth. The earth also is iron, for it witholds its produce, and with hostile rigour excludes from its fructifying soil the seeds thrown upon it, which its wont is to cherish as in the bosom of a tender mother. For when does iron bring forth fruit, when does brass melt into showers?

3. Those impious men therefore He threatens with miserable famine, that they who know not how to shew filial piety to the common Lord and Father of all, may be deprived of the support of His paternal clemency, that the heaven may be to them as brass, and the air condensed into the substance of metal; that the earth may be to them as iron, deprived of its natural productions, and as is usually the case with poverty, a sower of strife. For they who are in want of food commit robberies, that at the expense of others they may relieve their own hunger. 4. If further the offence of the inhabitants be so great that God stirs up and brings war upon them, then their land is truly iron, bristling with crops of spears, and stripped of |410 its own fruit, fruitful as regards punishment, barren as regards nourishment. But where is abundance? Behold I will rain bread for you. saith the Lord.

Farewell; love me, for I also love you.

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXIX.

IN this Letter S. Ambrose answers a question propounded to him as to the ground of the severity of the Mosaic Law against those who disguised their sex. AMBROSE TO IRENAEUS, GREETING. 1. You have referred to me, as to a father, the inquiry which has been made of you, why the Law was so severe in pronouncing those unclean who used the garments of the other sex, whether they were men or women, for it is written, The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord. 2. Now, if you will consider it well, that which nature herself abhors must be incongruous. For why do you not wish to be thought a man, seeing that you are born such? why do you assume an appearance which is foreign to you? why do you play the woman, or you, O woman, the man? Nature clothes each sex in their proper raiment. Moreover in men and women, habits, complexion, gestures, gait, strength and voice are all different.

3. So also in the rest of the animal creation; the form, the strength, the roar of the lion and lioness, of the bull and heifer are different. Deer also differ as much in form as they do in sex, so that you may distinguish the stag from the hind even at a distance. But in the case of birds the similitude between them and men, as regards covering, is still closer; for in them Nature distinguishes their sex by their very plumage. The peacock is beautiful, but the feathers of its consort arc not variegated with equal, beauty. Pheasants also have different colours to mark the |411 difference of the sexes. And so with poultry. How sonorous is the cock's voice, night by night performing his natural office of calling us from sleep by crowing. They do not change their form; why then do we desire to change ours?

4. A Greek custom has indeed prevailed for women to wear men's tunics as being shorter. Be it allowed however that they should imitate the nature of the more worthy sex; but why should men choose to assume the appearance of the inferior? A falsehood is base even in word, much more in dress. So in the heathen temples, where there is a false faith, there also is a false nature. It is there considered holy for men to assume women's garments, and female gestures. And therefore the Law says that every man who puts on a woman's garment is an abomination unto the Lord. 5. I conceive however that it is spoken not so much of garments as of manners, and of our habits and actions, in that one kind of act becomes a man, the other a woman. Wherefore the Apostle also says, as the interpreter of

the Law, Let your women keep silence in the Churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are to be under obedience, as also saith the Law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. And to Timothy: Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection; but I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man.

6. But how unseemly is it for a man to do the works of a woman! As for those who curl their hair, like women, let them conceive also, let them bring forth. Yet the one sex wears veils, the other wages war. Let them however be excused who follow their national usages, barbarous though they be, the Persians and Goths and Armenians. Nature is superior to country. 7. And what shall we say of others who think it belongs to luxury to have in their service slaves wearing curls and ornaments of the neck? It is but just that chastity should be lost where the distinction of sexes is not preserved, a point wherein the teaching of nature is unambiguous, according to the Apostle's words; Is it comely that a woman |412 pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you that if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him: but if a woman hath long hair, it is a glory unto her: for her hair is given her for a covering. Such is the answer which you may make to those who have referred to you.

Farewell; love me as a son, for I love you as a father.

Letters 61-70 — LETTER LXX.

S. AMBROSE in this Letter considers a part of the prophecy of Micah as describing the recovery of a fallen soul. AMBROSE TO HORONTIANUS. 1. THE Prophets indeed announced the gathering together of the Gentiles, and the future establishment of the Church; but as the Church sees not only the continuous progress of strong souls, but likewise the relapse of weak ones, and their subsequent conversion, we are able to gather from the Prophetical books both how the gracious and strong soul advances without stumbling, and also how the weak soul falls, and how she repairs her falls and recovers her steps. 2. Accordingly as in the Song of Songs we read of this continuous progress of blessed souls, so let us now consider, as set forth in the prophet Micah, concerning whom we have begun to speak, the conversion of a fallen soul. For it is not without good reason that the prophet's words, But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, excited your attention. For how can that house where Christ was born be the house of wrath? Such is, indeed, what the name of the place signifies, but certain mysterious operations are declared thereby.

3. Let us first consider what Micah signifies in Latin. It means 'Who is from GodI or as we find elsewhere 'who is this man,' the son of the Morasthite, that is, the heir? Now, who is this heir, but the Son of God, Who says, All things are given unto Me of My Father; and Who, being |413 Himself the Heir, would have us His co-heirs. And well may we say 'Who is that man?' not one of the people, but chosen to receive the grace of God, in whom the Holy Spirit speaks, who began to prophesy in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah. By which order is signified the course of the vision, for the progress is from the times of evil kings to that of a good king. 4. Thus as the afflicted soul was first oppressed under evil kings, let us consider what was the progress of her conversion. Being weak she was overthrown, and all her fences were made as a way for the passers-by, or for the inroads of passion; dissolved in luxury and pleasure, she was trodden down and removed from the presence of the Lord. Her tower was decayed, that tower which, as we read in the song of Isaiah, was placed in the midst of a choice vineyard. Now this is the case with the tower, when the vine is withered, and her flock wanders; but when the verdure of the vine comes back, or the sheep returns, it grows bright again, for nothing is so decayed as iniquity, or so bright as righteousness.

5. To this tower the sheep is recalled, when the soul is recalled from her relapse, and in that sheep that reign of Christ returns, which was in the beginning, for He is the Beginning and the Ending, even the beginning of our salvation. Still the soul is first severely rebuked, in that she has grievously transgressed, and she is asked, Why hast thou learnt evil? was there no king in thee? that is, thou hadst a king to govern and protect thee, thou oughtest not to have strayed from the path of righteousness, nor to have left the ways of the Lord, Who imparted to thee sense and reason. Where were thy thoughts and counsels, whereby by innate vigour thou mightest have guarded against unrighteousness and warded off transgression? Why have pangs taken thee, as a woman in travail; that thou shouldest be in labour of iniquity, and bring forth unrighteousness? For there is no greater grief than for a man to wound his conscience with the sword of sin; nor is there any heavier burden than the weight of sin and the load of transgression. It bows down the soul, it bends it even to the earth, so that it cannot raise itself. Heavy, my son, heavy indeed is the |414 weight of sin. Thus that woman in the Gospel, who was bowed together, and thus bore the semblance of a heavy-laden soul, could be made straight by Christ alone.

6. To such a soul it is said, Be in pain and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Sion. For the pains of child-birth work tribulation, and tribulation patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed. At the same time all that is opposed to virtue is plucked up and cast forth, lest its seeds should remain behind and revive, and put out new buds and fruit. 7. Nor is it without a meaning that horns and hoofs were given to her, that she might bruise all the sheaves of the floor, like the calf of Mount Lebanon. For unless the sheaves were bruised, and the straw winnowed, the corn that is within cannot be found and separated. Wherefore let the soul that would advance in virtue first bruise and thrash out its superfluous passions, that so, when the harvest is come, it may shew forth its fruits. How many are the weeds which choke the good seed! These must first be rooted out, that they may not destroy the fertile crop of the soul.

8. Then the provident guide of the soul has regard to this, that he may circumscribe her pleasures and cut off her desires, that she may not delight herself in them. That father's corrections are profitable, who spares not the rod, that he may render his son's soul obedient to salutary precepts. For he visits with a rod, as we read, I will visit their offences with the rod. And so he who smites the soul of the Israelites with a rod on the cheek, by this Divine punishment instructs her in the discipline of patience. But no man need despair who is chastised and corrected, for he who loveth his son chastiseth him. Let no man therefore despair of a remedy. 9. Behold therefore, that house which was to thee 'the house of one seeing wrathI is become 'the house of bread;' where rage was, there is now piety; where the slaughter of the Innocents, there now the redemption of all mankind, as it is written, But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth that is Ruler in Israel. Bethlehem is the |415 house of bread; Ephratah the house of one seeing wrath. This is the interpretation of these names. In Bethlehem Christ was born of Mary, but Bethlehem is the same as Ephratah. Thus Christ was born in the house of wrath, and therefore it is no longer a house of wrath, but the house

of bread, for it received that bread which came down from heaven. But Ephratah is the house of one that was wrath, because while Herod searches there for Christ, he commands the Innocents to be slain, wherefore In Rama was there a voice heard, Rachel weeping for her children.

10. But let no man fear any longer; for that rest which David sought after is heard of at Ephrata, and found in the fields of the wood. A wood, as yet, was the assembly of the Gentiles, but after it believed in Christ it became fruitful, receiving the fruit of the blessed womb. And Rachel died in childbirth, because even then, as the patriarch's wife, she saw the wrath of Herod, which spared not the tenderest age. Or again, because in Ephratah she gave birth to that Benjamin who excelling in beauty came last in the order of the mystery, I mean Paul, who before his birth caused no small grief to his Mother, by persecuting her sons. And she died, and was buried there, that we, dying and being buried together with Christ, may rise again in His Church. Therefore according to another interpretation, Ephratah signifies 'enriched or filled with fruit.'

11. Now here, that is, in the book of the Prophet, we find the expression, thou art o)ligosto&j, that is, one of few. But in Matthew we find, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not among the few. In one the expression is house of Ephratah, in the other house of Juda; but this is a difference of words not of meaning. For inwardly Judaea saw this exhibition of wrath, outwardly she suffered it. And she is among the few, because they are few who enter the house of bread by the narrow way. But he is not among the few, that is among those that make progress, who knows not Christ. Nor is she the least, who is the house of blessing, and the receptacle of Divine grace; yet in this she is the least, for any thing which is offered to Christ seems to be offered to her. And he who seeks for the Church seeks for Christ; and He is either honoured or despised in every |416 little one, wherefore He says Himself, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.

12. Now that Bethlehem is the very same place as Ephratah we learn from the passage in Genesis, which says, And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. Holy Rachel, being a type of the Church, was buried in the way, that they who go by might say, The Lord prosper you, and they shall come again with joy. 13. Wherefore every soul which receives that bread which comes down from heaven is the house of bread, that is, the Bread of Christ, being nourished and supported and having its heart strengthened by that heavenly bread which dwells within it. Hence Paul also says, For we being many are one bread. Every faithful soul is Bethlehem, as Jerusalem also is said to be, which has the peace and tranquillity of that Jerusalem which is above, in heaven. That is the true Bread which, when broken into pieces, fed all men.

14. The fifth version has the words, 'the house of Bread.' For 'Beth' signifies a house, and 'lehem' signifies bread. From the other versions I imagine that the unbelief of the Jews, who feared to convict themselves, either led the writers to omit it or others to erase it. 15. And that Bethlehem is of the tribe of Judah we learn from that passage in the book of Judges, where the Levite took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem-judah, and his concubine was

incensed against him, and returned to her father's house in Bethlehem-judah. 16. Now Christ's goings forth were from everlasting , because our life then commenced, when He went forth to run His course, and gave to Israel the day of salvation. Until the time that that she which travaileth hath brought forth. To that soul to which Christ hath come fruitfulness or bringing forth hath come also; so it was with the Church, who has brought more than she that had children; |417 who has brought forth seven, that is, a lawful peaceful and tranquil progeny. Now that soul begins to conceive, and Christ to be formed in her, which welcomes Him on His arrival and is so fed by His plenty that she is in want of nothing, and other souls by seeing her return unto the way of salvation.

17. And there shall be peace to him, but it is by temptations that he must be tried; then, when he has shut out or repulsed vain thoughts, when he has subdued all the motions of his rising passions, when distress and persecution and hunger and peril and the sword press hard upon him, will the value of his peace and tranquillity be tested. Then, it is said, shall be peace; because in all these things we are conquerors through Him that loved us, because we trust in Him that neither death nor the power of temptations shall cast off or separate us from His love. He will send temptations, that the just may be proved. The Lord sends temptations, not that He wishes any man to be beguiled, but because the weak are for the most part vanquished by temptation, whilst the strong are proved by them. 18. Then there shall be to them dew from the Lord, and rest; then the soul of the just shall be as a young lion among the flocks of sheep. I cannot doubt but that this similitude should, after the manner of the Gospel, be referred to Christ, for He has said, Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. For his chariots shall be broken; that is to say, the senseless impulses and motions of the body shall be appeased; that condition shall cease wherein Without are fightings, within are fears, and over all, that is, within and without, tranquillity shall prevail; nor shall there be any resistance or repugnance to this good will, because the obedience of the flesh, when the middle wall of partition is broken down, and both are made one, shall abolish all discord.

19. But if any weak soul, like Israel according to the flesh have stumbled, and, shaken by persecutions, have separated herself in some degree from the love of Christ, she is checked and reproved as faithless, and ungrateful, and unbelieving, as one who, after being freed from the vanities |418 of the world, has looked behind her and so relapsed into them again; as one from whom no gifts, no sacrifice of bulls, but only to know what is good and to do justly, has been required. He hath showed thee, o man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to have mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? But since the weaker soul has not kept this commandment, the Lord says to her, Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage. And the prophet, in whom the Lord spoke, says to that soul, Woe is me, the good man is perished out of the earth. This is as though the Lord Himself spoke, in compassion for the future punishment of sin, and as weeping over our transgressions.

20. Then the soul, learning that she will gather no fruit from what she has sown; that in the loss of her harvest nothing will remain to strengthen her, that she will press her olives, but will find no oil of gladness, nor will drink the wine of pleasantness; finding also in the works of the flesh all things full of blood, full of circumvention, of fraud and deceit, hollow shows of affection, and pre-concerted guile; nay, those of her own household adverse to her; and therefore that the motions of her companion the body, which are grievous enemies of the soul, must be guarded against; turns to God, and begins to hope in Him, and knowing that the flesh is truly an enemy to her, says to it, Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall I shall arise, when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.

21. Finding moreover that she is mocked by some power which opposes her following a better path, and domineers over her, so that she has been delivered for the destruction of the flesh, to be afflicted with various evils, assigned to her either by the Lord to satisfy for her sins, or by the Evil One who is envious of her conversion, and desires to harass and regain her to himself, finding this, she says, I will bear the indignation of the Lord, Who either chastens me in my fall, or has given thee power to persecute me, because 1 leave sinned against Him, but I will endure until He plead my cause. For unless I shall confess, and pay the price |419 of my iniquities, I cannot be justified. But being justified and having paid double for my sins, He shall execute judgment for me, laying aside His wrath, since the sentence against me is satisfied. He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness and gaze on His delights. Then she that is mine enemy, that is, the malice of the devil, shall see the light of my reconciliation and shame shall cover her which saith to me, Where is the Lord thy God? She shall behold in me His pity and His love.

2.2. Wherefore let us not listen to him when we are in any of the troubles of this world, be it bodily pain, or the loss of our children, or of other necessaries, let us not listen to his words, Where is the Lord thy God? It is under severe pain that his temptations are to be feared, it is then that he seeks to turn the sick soul astray. 23. Wherefore the soul which has not listened to his allurements, seeing afterwards the wonderful works of God, seeing herself in heaven, and the devil creeping upon the earth, will congratulate herself saying, Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by transgression? Thou hast not been mindful of Thy indignation, but hast cast all our iniquities into the sea as the lead of Egypt, and hast graciously returned to have pity upon us, both forgiving and hiding our offences, as it is written, Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. For some sins Thou dost wash away in the blood of Thy Son, others Thou dost remit unto us, that by good works and confession we may cover our errors. The expression therefore that pardoneth iniquities, appertains to remission; because He takes them away altogether, so that the things which He remembers not are as though they did not exist. But the words passeth by transgression, signify that inasmuch as we confess our failings, and cover them with the fruit of our good works, they are referred to the author of our fault, and the instigator of our sin. For what else does he who confesses his fault do but prove himself to have been beguiled by the craft and malice of that spiritual wickedness which is his adversary?

21. For this therefore this soul gives thanks, that the |420 Lord both pardoneth iniquities and passeth by transgressions, and casts them into the deep of the sea. Which may also be referred to Baptism, wherein the Egyptian is drowned, the Hebrew rises again; and whereby by the depths of His wisdom, and the multitude of her good works her former sins are covered, through the riches of the mercy of our God, Who is mindful of the promise which He gave to Abraham, and suffers not that soul which is heir of Abraham to perish. 25. It is by these means that such a soul is recovered. But do you, my son, who from the first flower of boyhood have been an heir of the Church which bore and which sustains you, persevere in your purpose, mindful of the grace of God, and of the gift which you have received by the imposition of my hands, that in this degree also, as in the holy office of deacon, you may shew faith and industry, and expect a recompense from the Lord Jesus.

Farewell; love me as a son, for I also love you. [Footnotes moved to the end and numbered. Biblical references from margin and running titles omitted] 1. 'Apices' here and in § 5 undoubtedly means 'a letter.' 'Apex,' in late Latin, is used for a single letter written, and 'apices,' like 'literae,' for a continuous writing. Aulus Gellius (xiii. 30, 10, xvii, 9., 12.,) quoted in White's Dictionary, uses the phrase 'literarum apices,' and in Cod. Just. ii. 8. 6. we find 'Augusti apices' for ' the Emperor's rescripts.' 2. Theodoret, v. 24. gives a detailed account of the ways in which the special intervention of heaven was displayed in Theodosius' campaign against Eugenius. S. Aug. De Civ. Dei, v, 26. says that Theodosius 'contra robustissimum Eugenii exercitum magis orando quam feriendo pugnavit,' and, after mentioning stories told by eyewitnesses of the manifest intervention of God on his behalf, quotes the well-known lines of Claudian, O nimium dilecte Deo cui fundit ab antris Aeolus armatas hyemes, cui militat aether, Et conjurati veniunt ad classica venti.

3. The word here used is plural, Venetiarum. From this it has been argued that this letter must be of later date than S. Ambrose's time, as Venetian is the usual name for the city, which was not founded till the time of Attila. (Gibbon ch. xxxv. vol. iv. p. 212 ed. Smith.) But he certainly uses the plural form in Letter xviii. 21, which is undoubtedly his, and therefore, as Tillemont has pointed out, no argument can be founded on this against the present letter. It is possible that under the plural form he intends to include Venetia and Histria, which are reckoned together as one consular province in the civil division of the empire, (see Marquardt's Table, in Smith's Gibbon vol. ii. p. 315.) and also as one ecclesiastical province in the Exarchate of Milan, (see Bingham ix. 1, 6.) By 'finitimis Italiae partibus' he probably means Flaminia and Picenum Annonarium, which were also included in the 'Diocese' of Italy and Exarchate of Milan.

4. intentio. 5. It is to be noted that Eusebius, who died in A.D. 371, was not the last Bishop of Vercellae, but Limenius, whose name occurs aiming the Bishops who took part in the Council of Aquileia. This has also been made an argument against S. Ambrose's authorship, but, there does not seem much weight in it. Eusebius was much the more famous man of the two, and his teaching and example and the memory of his labours and martyrdom are naturally appealed to by S. Ambrose. 6. These were, it appears, followers of Jovinian. See

above, Introd. to Letter of Siricius, p. 280. 7. reprobus. 8. reprobum. 9. Nothing is known of this man, nor is even the name, certain, as there are many various readings. The Benedictines suggest that it may mean Philodemus, who is mentioned by Diog. Laert. x, 3. as a follower of Epicurus, and is also spoken of by Cicero, De fin. II,35. and by Horace, Sat. 1, 2, 121.

10. sobrii estote. Vulg. 11. Nothing is known of Demarchus, whom S. Ambrose here quotes. The Benedictines suggest that it may he a mistake for Hermarchus, who was Epicurus' successor as head of his school, and who wrote books in defence of the Epicurean philosophy. He is mentioned several times by Cicero. 12. Though the so-called Epicureans of later days perverted his theory to what is generally known as Epicureanism, Epicurus himself certainly did not mean by pleasure sensual pleasure. 'Pleasure was not with him a momentary and transitory sensation, hut he conceived it as something lasting and imperishable, consisting in pure and noble mental enjoyments. 'He was a man of pure simple and temperate habits.' Dict. of Biog. in voc. Vol. ii. p. 34, 35. 13. This must be the sense if we retain the interrogation. If it is omitted the passage would mean, 'Men then are recalled from that, in which' &c, i.e., it is plainly unfitting for men to do that, in which &c.

14. S. Ambrose, is alluding apparently to Ezra proclaiming and keeping a fast to remove God's anger against his people. Should we not read 'memoriae' for 'memoria?' Ezra did restore the Scriptures to the memory of the people, but it does not appear that he restored them from memory? 15. Sobrietatis inebrietas. Ps. xxiii. 5. Vulg. 16. Sola. 17. Mary and Miriam are really the same name, the former having come through the Greek form Mari/a. 18. laqueus 19. A reminiscence of Virgil's, Ante expectatum positis stat in agmine custris. Georg. iii, 348. 20. The reading here varies. Ben. has 'in Concilio Nicaeni tractatus,' which may mean 'the Council which made the Nicene Creed,' (for the phrase 'Nicaenus tractatus' as applied to the Creed see note 1 on Acts of Council of Aquileia.) Another reading is 'in Concilii Nicaeni tractatu,' and another 'in Concilio Nicaeno tractatus.' There is a difficulty about S. Ambrose's statement, as there is nothing on the subject in the Canons of Nicaea. The Benedictine editors, after discussing other explanations, suggest that S. Ambrose may have had an inaccurate copy of the Canons, with the one he here quotes inserted from some other Council. Some unauthentic documents professing to give Nicene regulations on the subject are quoted in Dict. of Christian Antiq. Art. Digamy.

21. impressio. 22. praescriptio. 23. The most conspicuous instance was Nectarius, See note a, on Letter xiii. 24. Eusebius and Dionysius Bishop of Milan were driven into exile by the Emperor Valens, because they refused at the third Council of Milan, A.D. 355, to subscribe the condemnation of Athanasius. There is a brief but graphic account of the circumstances in Bright's History of the Church, pages 70-73. 25. longaevi super terram. 26. The expression 'aula regalis,' applied to the Mother of our Lord, may be illustrated from De Instit. Virg. ch. xii. § 79. Ipse ergo Rex Israel transivit hanc portam, ipse Dux sedit in ea, quando verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, quasi Rex sedens in aula regali uteri virginalis. Compare also the expression in S. Ambrose's Hymn on the Nativity, Procedit e thalamo suo,

Pudoris aula regia, &c. 27. With this Letter begins what the Benedictines have called a second division of the Letters, containing those which furnish no internal evidence of their date sufficient to justify their being assigned a place in chronological order. They are arranged according to their matter, 1st, those which contain expositions of passages of Holy Scripture, (lxi-lxxv.), 2nd, those which discuss important, and mostly doctrinal subjects, (lxxvi-lxxxiii), 3rd, a few brief letters of ordinary friendly intercourse, (lxxxiv- xci.)

28. See note e on Letter xliv. 10. 29. Whether the true reading here be 'traditio' as Ben. has, or 'editio' as Rom, the reference must he to the e0kdo&seij or versions which Origen brought together in his Hexajila, of which the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh, (for there was a seventh,) were only known by their numbers. See Art, by Tregelles on 'Ancient Versions,' in Smith's Dict. of the Bible, vol. iii. p. 1623. 30. a diebus saeculi. Mic. v. 2. 31. Saeculum. Mic. v. 3. 32. i.e. the priesthood, cf. 1 Tim. iii. 13.

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXI.

S. Ambrose in this letter continues the subject of the last, and, having described in that the steps by which the fallen soul recovers herself, here considers how the faithful soul is taken in charge, taught and conducted to perfection by Christ: and shews that the stages in the progress of such a soul are typified by the journies of Christ. AMBROSE TO HORONTIANUS. 1. In my last letter I spoke of the soul that has made in its progress certain devious circuits, wavering, as Israel according to the flesh did of old, to and fro. For Israel herself also, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be come in, shall be delivered by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: the Gentile soul meanwhile, whose transgression has been lighter, having by her conversion worked her own recovery. In my present letter I will treat of the daughter of the Church; and consider how the Lord Jesus first took her |421 under His care, taught her, and, in His Gospel, led her on to perfection.

2. Now it was as she lay in misery and confusion that He first took her under His care,----for how else but miserably can that soul live, which is exiled from Paradise?----and brought her to Bethlehem. The progress then, of this soul is at once signified in that it goes up to the "house of bread ," where it can know no death or barrenness of faith. Observe, I am now speaking of souls in general, those souls by which we live and move, not of any soul in particular; for it is not of the individual or species, but of souls in general that I purpose to discourse. 3. Christ went down into Egypt, as Protector and Guide of our soul, from thence He returned into Judaea. He was in the wilderness, in Capernaum; near the borders of Zabulon; by the sea coast; He passed through the corn fields; He was in Bethphage; in Ephraim; in Bethany; then He passed over into the garden, where He gave Himself up; on Calvary, where He suffered.

4. All these are the progresses of our soul, and exercised thereby she receives the graces of a holy life . For the human race, when excluded from Paradise in Adam and Eve, and banished to the village , began to roam up and down and to wander about with careless steps: but in His own good time the Lord Jesus emptied Himself that He might receive this exile into himself, and re-form her again to her previous state of grace. And thus, when found, she retraced, as the Gospel lesson teaches us, her devious course of error, and was recalled to Paradise. 5. He led her through the cornfields that He might satisfy her hunger, first in the desert, then to Capernaum, making her abode to be not in the city but in the

field: next He brought her to the borders of Zabulon, near unto the floods of night, that is, the darker riddles of the prophets; that she might learn thereby to reach to the borders of the Gentiles, that common centre, and not to fear the storms and billows of this world. Why should she, seeing that Christ has ships of Tarshish, mystical ships I mean, which traverse the sea, and bring pious offerings for the |422 building of the Temple? In such ships as these Christ sails, and like a good pilot rests in the stern while the sea is calm; when it is disturbed He awakes, and rebukes the winds, that He may anew shew peace on His disciples. Furthermore, by passing over to the Gentiles, He delivers the soul which was bound by the chains of the Law, that she may not pass over and keep company with the heathen.

6. He came to Bethany to the "place of obedience;" therefore was the dead there raised; for when the flesh is subdued to the spirit, human nature no longer lies as if dead in the tomb, but is raised again by the grace of Christ; there also she professes to offer herself to 'suffering' for the Name of God. From the place of obedience, as John tells us, He is led to Ephraim, that is, to the "fecundity of good fruits." Hence He returns to Bethany, that is, to "obedience;" for she who has once tasted the fruit of holy obedience is for the most part ready to preserve it and to be proved thereby. 7. And now, having been proved, she comes to Jerusalem, being made worthy to become the temple of God wherein Christ may dwell. Here it is that the Lord Jesus, sitting upon the foal of an ass, is received with the joy and congratulation of the age of innocence.

8. Afterwards are taught in the garden the words of eternal life; in that place where the Lord permitted Himself to be taken, as John the Evangelist writes, signifying that our soul, or rather human nature, released from the bonds of error, is restored by Christ to that abode from whence in Adam she was cast. "Wherefore to the thief who confessed Him it is said, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. The thief had said, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. Christ answered not concerning His kingdom, but yet to the purpose, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise, that is, What has been lost must first be restored, then the increase bestowed; that thus the progress may be through Paradise to the kingdom, not through the kingdom to Paradise. |423 9. For the disciples it is reserved that they may receive an ample reward for their labours; and therefore to the thief He promised a sojourn, but deferred the kingdom. So that to him who is converted under the stroke of death, and confesses the Lord Jesus, to him let an abode in Paradise be vouchsafed, but for him who has undergone long travail, who has fought for Christ, who has won over souls and offered himself for Christ, for his wages let the kingdom of God be prepared; and let him rejoice in the fruition of this reward. To Peter it is said, I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and thus, while the convert from robbery obtains rest, on him who has been proved in the Apostolate authority is bestowed.

10. This is the Evangelical soul, the soul of the Gentiles, the daughter of the Church, far better than the soul cast out of Judaea; raising herself from her earthly course to the Lord Jesus and to higher things by good counsels and works; received by Christ upon Golgotha. Upon Golgotha was the sepulchre of Adam; that Christ by His Cross might raise him from

death. Thus where in Adam was the death of all, there in Christ was the resurrection of all. Farewell, my son; love me, for I also love you.

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXII.

In this letter S. Ambrose deals with the question of the rite of circumcision, and explains to Constantius why it was established in the Old Testament and yet done away in the New. He speaks also of the true and spiritual circumcision which belongs to Christians. AMBROSE TO CONSTANTIUS. 1. Many persons have raised an important question why circumcision should be enjoined as profitable by the authority of the Old Testament, and rejected as useless by the teaching of the New; especially since it was Abraham, who saw the day of the Lord Jesus and was glad, who first received the command to observe the rite of circumcision. |424 For it is manifest that he directed his mind not to the literal but to the spiritual sense of the Divine Law, and so in the sacrifice of the lamb saw the true passion of the Lord's Body. 2. What then shall we consider to have been the aim of our father Abraham, in first instituting that which his posterity were not to follow? or for what reason are the bodies of infants circumcised, and in their very birth subjected to dangers, and this at the Divine command, so that peril of their life ensues from a mystery of religion. What is the meaning of this? For the ground of the truth is hidden, and either something should have been signified by an intelligibe mystery, or else it should have been indicated by a mystery which was not so full of danger.

3. And why was the sign of the Divine Testament attached to that member which is considered as less comely to sight; or with what purpose did the Creator of our body Himself, in the very beginning of our race, choose that His work should be wounded and stained with blood, and a portion of it cut off, which He, Who has disposed all things in order, deemed proper to form together with the other members, as though it were necessary? For this portion of our bodies is either contrary to nature, and then no man ought to have that which is contrary to nature, or it is according to nature, and that ought not to be cut off which was created according to the perfection of nature; especially since aliens from the portion of the Lord our God are wont to make this a chief subject of ridicule. Again as it is God's purpose, as He has frequently declared, to induce as many persons ;is possible to the observance of holy religion, how much more would they be invited, were not some deterred either by the danger or reproach of this very circumcision.

4. To return therefore to my first purpose and follow the order I have proposed, it seems good to speak of the nature itself of circumcision. The defence of this ought to be twofold, for

so is the accusation, the one brought by the Gentiles, the other by those who are considered as belonging to the people of God, more vigorously on the part of the Gentiles, for they deem men marked with |425 circumcision to be worthy even of scorn and disgrace. Yet their own wisest men approve of circumcision, so as to think it right to circumcise those whom they select to know and celebrate their mysteries . 5. The Egyptians too, who apply themselves to geometry and observing the courses of the stars, consider a priest who does not bear the mark of circumcision impious. For they believe that neither the wisdom of incantation, nor geometry, nor astronomy can attain their due power without the seal of circumcision. And therefore, in order to render their operations efficacious they choose to solemnize a certain purification of their own by means of the secret rite of circumcision.

6. And we find in ancient history that not only the Egyptians but also some of the /Ethiopians Arabs and Phoenicians used circumcision. And in maintaining this custom they think that they are maintaining one still to approved, for being thus initiated by means of the first fruits of their own body and blood, they conceive that by the consecration of this small portion, the snares which demons lay for our kind will be defeated; and that those who attempt to injure the well-being of the whole man, may find their power baffled either by the law or the semblance of sacred circumcision. For I am of opinion that heretofore the Prince of devils has deemed that his arts would lose their baneful efficacy if he were to attempt to injure one whom he found initiated by the seal of sacred circumcision, or one who seemed at least in this respect to obey the Divine law.

7. Now he who diligently considers the functions of our several members will be able to judge that it was for no unmeaning purpose that as regards this little portion of this member the child was not only circumcised but circumcised also on the eighth day; when the mother of the child begins to be in pure blood, having before the eighth day been considered as sitting in unclean blood. Let so |426 much have been said in reply to those who are not joined with us in unity of faith; on which account discussion with them, as differing from us, becomes more difficult. 8. But to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we have to offer the following reply, which, when we were disputing against the opinions of Gentiles, we were unwilling to disclose. For if we were redeemed not ivith corruptible silver and gold, but ivith the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and purchased from no one but him who had purchased with money, and was owner of, the services of our now sinful race, beyond a doubt he demanded a price for releasing from his service those whom he kept in bondage. But the price of our freedom was the Blood of the Lord Jesus, which of necessity was to be paid to him to whom we were sold by our sins.

9. Until, therefore, this price should have been paid for all men which by the shedding of the Lords Blood had to be so paid for the absolution of all, the blood of every man, who, by the Law and solemn custom were to follow the precepts of holy religion, was required. But, since one Lord Christ suffered, seeing that the ransom is now paid for all, there is now no longer any need that the blood of every man one by one should be shed by circumcision, for in the Blood of Christ the circumcision of all has been solemnized, and in His Cross we

are all crucified together with Him, and buried in His sepulchre, and planted together in the likeness of His death, that henceforth we should not serve sin: for he that is dead, is free from sin. 10. But if any one, such as Marcion and Manichaeus, deem the judgment of God to be worthy of blame, either because He thought fit to give command concerning the observance of circumcision, or because He published a law directing the effusion of blood; he must needs consider the Lord Jesus also worthy of blame, Who shed not a little but much blood for the redemption of the world, and up to this hour commands us also to shed our blood for the great contest of Religion, saying, If any man will follow Me, let him, deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. But if in the case of a man offering his whole self out of piety, and cleansing himself by the effusion of much blood, |427 such an accusation is not just, how can we blame the Law, for exacting a little drop of blood, when we proclaim the command of the Lord Jesus for the shedding of much blood, and the death of the whole body?

11. Nor was the very symbol and semblance of circumcision useless, for the people of God, signed thereby as by a certain bodily seal, was distinguished from the other nations. But the name of Christ being now bestowed upon them they have no need of a bodily sign, for they have obtained the honour of a Divine appellation. But what was there absurd in somewhat of pain or labour seeming to be imposed for piety's sake, to the intent that by such contests devotion might be better tried? It is becoming also that from the very cradle of life the symbol of religion should grow with our growth, and that all of a maturer age should be ashamed to yield either to labour or pain when their tender infancy had conquered both. 12. But now Christians have no need of the light pain of circumcision, for bearing about with them the Lord's Death, they at every act engrave on their foreheads contempt of their own death, as knowing that without the cross of the Lord they can have no salvation. For who would use a needle to fight with when armed with stronger weapons?

13. And now any one may easily perceive how easily the suggestion may be refuted, that more persons might be incited to the observance of holy religion unless they were withheld by the fear of pain or the appearance of labour. For could this terrify an older person, when many infants endured it without danger? Granting however that some Jewish children unable to bear the pain of circumcision and of so keen a stroke may have died, still this did not deter those of a robuster and more advanced age, and one who thus obeyed the celestial precepts it only made more praiseworthy. 14. But if they imagine that this light pain was such an obstacle to confession, what will they say of martyrdom? For if they choose to blame the pain of circumcision, they must blame also the death of martyrs, by whom religion so far from being impaired has received its perfection. But |428 the pain of circumcision is so much removed from being hurtful to faith, that faith is approved by pain, for greater is the grace of faith if any one for religion's sake despise pain; and such a one has a greater reward than he who was only willing to endure the pain of circumcision that he might glory in the Law, and win praise of men rather than of God.

15. It was fitting therefore that this partial circumcision should take place before His advent Who was to circumcise the whole man, and that the human race should receive a partial preparation for believing in that which is perfect. But if circumcision must take place, in what region of the body ought it rather to fall than on that which seems to some less comely? And those members of the body, which rue think to be less honourable, upon those we bestow more abundant power; and our uncomely parts have abundant comeliness. For in what member ought men to be rather reminded of his blood than in that which is wont to minister to transgression? 16. And now is the fitting time to reply to those also who say, If this part of our body is according to nature it ought not to be cut off, but if contrary to nature, then it ought not to have been born together with it. Let these men, being so subtle, themselves answer me, whether the succession of the human race, which arises by generation is according to nature or contrary to nature? If according to nature, it ought never to be interrupted, and then how can we praise the chastity of men, the virginity of maids, the abstinence of widows, the continence of wives? No effort then to promote this succession should be suffered to lie idle. But the Author of nature Himself did not pay this regard to generation, for He gave us, when living in the body, His own example, and exhorted His disciples to chastity, saying, There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

17. Man being made up of body and soul, (for at present it will suffice to speak of these and not to mention the spirit,) he is not naturally the same in both, but what is according to the nature of the body is contrary to the |429 nature of the soul, and what is according to the nature of the soul is contrary to the nature of the body; so that were I to speak that which is according to nature in that which is seen, it will be contrary to nature as regards the unseen, and what is according to nature in the unseen is contrary to nature as regards the seen. It is no incongruity therefore in the man of God, if there should be things contrary to the nature of the body which are according to the nature of the soul. 18. With regard to those who say that more would have believed if circumcision had not been instituted, let them receive this answer, that more would have believed if there had been no martyrdom, but the constancy of a few is to be preferred to the remissness of a larger number. For as many kinds of washings preceded, because that one true Sacrament of Baptism with water and the Spirit, whereby the whole man is redeemed, was to follow, so also the circumcision of many was to precede, because the circumcision of the Lord's Passion, which Jesus suffered as the Lamb of God, that He might take away the sins of the world, was to follow.

19. My object in writing this has been to shew that it was fitting that circumcision, which is outward, should precede, that now after the Lord's Advent it might seem to be justly excluded. But now that circumcision is necessary which is in secret, in spirit not in the letter, seeing that there are two men in one, of whom it is said, Though our out-ward man perish according to the desires of error, yet the inward man is renewed day by day, and in another passage, For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; that is, our inward man which is made according to the image and likeness of God, our outward is that which

is formed of clay. So again in Genesis two creations of man are declared to us, and it is signified that by the second man was truly made.

20. As therefore there are two men, so also is his conversation two-fold; one of the inward the other of the outward man. And indeed many acts of the inward man reach to the outward man, in the same way that the chastity of the inward man passes into bodily chastity. He who |430 is free from adultery of the heart is free from adultery of the body, but it does not also follow that he who has not sinned in body should not have sinned even in heart, for it is written, Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart. For although he be not yet an adulterer in body, still in affection he is one. So that there is a circumcision of the inward man, for he who is circumcised has put off, like a foreskin, all the allurements of the flesh, that so he may be in the spirit, not in the flesh, and by the spirit may mortify the deeds of the flesh.

21. And this is that circumcision which is in secret, as Abraham was first in the uncircumcision and afterwards came to be in the circumcision. Thus our inward man, while it is in the flesh, is as it were in uncircumcision, but when he is now no longer in the flesh but in the spirit, he begins to be in the circumcision not in the uncircumcision. And as he who is circumcised does not put off the whole flesh but his foreskin only, where corruption more frequently lies, so he who is circumcised in secret, puts off that flesh of which it is written, All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever; and there remains the flesh which will see the salvation of God, as it is written, And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. What this flesh is cleanse your ears that you may understand.

22. Now that circumcision which is secret ought to be of such a kind as to bear no comparison with that which is outward. He therefore who is a Jew in secret, is he who excels, he who is from Judah, whose hand is in the neck of his enemies, who stooped down and couched as a lion, and as a lion's whelp, whom, his brethren praise. From this Judah the prince departs not, because his word makes princes, such as are not overcome by worldly allurements and ensnared by the pleasures of this world. And since Judah himself was born into this generation, many of those who were born afterwards are preferred, that they may enjoy a pre-eminence of virtue. Let us have therefore the circumcision which is in secret, and the Jew that is in secret, |431 that is, the spiritual: but he that is spiritual, as being a prince, judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. It was fitting therefore, that the circumcision commanded by the prescript of the Law, which was partial, should cease after His coming Who was to circumcise the whole man, and fulfil the circumcision of the Law. And who is this but He Who said I am not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it?

24. That the fulness of the Gentiles is come in is another reason, if you will attend to it carefully, why the circumcision of the foreskin ought to cease. For it was not upon the Gentiles but upon the seed of Abraham that circumcision was enjoined, for this is the first Divine promise, And God said unto Abraham, Thou shall keep My covenant therefore, thou and thy seed after in their generations. This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between

Me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised, and ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations. He that is born in thy house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed, must needs be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh, for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, shall be cut

off from the people; he hath broken My Covenant. It is affirmed indeed that the Hebrew text, as Aquila intimates, does not contain the words 'on the eighth day;' but all authority does not rest with Aquila, who being a Jew has passed it by in the letter, and not inserted, 'on the eighth day.' 25. Meanwhile you have heard that both the eighth day and circumcision were given for a sign; now a sign is an indication of a greater matter, a symbol of a future verity; and a covenant was given to Abraham and his seed, to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be. The circumcision of the Jews therefore, or of one born in his house, or bought with his money was permitted. But we cannot extend this to a foreigner or proselyte, unless they were born in the |432 house of Abraham, or bought with his money, or of his seed. Again, nothing is said of proselytes; when it is wished to speak of them they are expressly mentioned, as it is written: And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them: . . Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers which sojourn among you, that offereth a burnt-sacrifice. When therefore they are intended to be included the Law touches them; when the Divine word does not point to them, how can they seem to be bound? Again, it is written, Speak unto the sons of Aaron, when the priests are intended; and so as regards the Levites also.

26. Thus it is abundantly manifest that even according to the letter of the Law, although the Law be spiritual, yet that according to the very letter of the Law the Gentiles could not be obliged to observe circumcision, but that circumcision itself was a sign, until the fulness of the Gentiles should be come in, and so all Israel be saved by circumcision, not of a small portion of one member, but of the heart. And both the excuse on our parts is sufficient, and the continuance of circumcision among the Jews up to this day is excluded. 27. But as to its being imputed it as a cause of blame, now or in past time, by the Gentiles, I would say, first, it is not competent to them to blame or deride what others who are their fellows do. Suppose however that there were cause for their ridicule, why ought this to move us, when the very cross of the Lord is a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, but to us the power of God and the wisdom of God. And the Lord Hims,elf has said, Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me before men, of him will I also be ashamed before My Father Which is in heaven; teaching us not to be disturbed by those things which are laughed at by men, if we observe them in the service of religion. |433

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXIII.

IRENAEUS having enquired why the Law was ever given, seeing that Paul declares it to be injurious: S. Ambrose replies that it would have been useless, had we kept that natural law which is written on our hearts, and is found even in infants; but that, this being broken, the former became necessary, that it might take away all excuse by its manifestation of that sin which was afterwards removed by the grace of Christ. AMBROSE TO IRENAEUS. 1. Greatly, it would seem, have you been moved by the lesson from the Apostle, having heard read to-day, Because the Law worketh wrath; for where no law is, there is no transgression. And therefore you have thought fit to ask why the Law was promulgated, if it profited nothing, nay rather, by working wrath and bringing in transgression, was injurious. 2. And indeed, according to the tenor of your question, it is certain that the Law, which was given by Moses, was not necessary. For had men been able to keep the natural Law, which our God and Maker implanted in the breast of each, there would have been no need of the Law, which, written on tables of stone, tended rather to entangle and fetter the infirmity of human nature, than to set at large and liberate it. Now that there is a natural Law written in our hearts the Apostle also teaches us, when he writes, that for the most part the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, and, though they have not read the Law, have yet the works of the Law written in their hearts.

3. This law therefore is not written but innate; not acquired by reading, but flowing as from a natural fountain, it springs up in each breast, and men's minds drink it in. This Law we ought to have kept even from fear of a future judgment, a witness whereof we have in our conscience, which shews itself in those silent thoughts we have towards God, and whereby either our sin is reproved or our innocence justified. And thus that which has ever been |434 manifest to the Lord, will be clearly revealed in the day of judgment, when those secrets of the heart, which were thought to be concealed, will be called into account. Now the discovery of these things, these secrets, I mean, would do no harm, if the natural Law still remained in the human breast; for it is holy, free from craft or guile, the companion of justice, free from iniquity.

4. Moreover let us interrogate the age of childhood, let us consider whether any crime can be found therein, avarice, ambition, guile, rage, or insolence. It claims nothing for its own, assumes no honours to itself, never prefers itself to others, neither wishes or knows

how to avenge itself. Its pure and simple mind cannot even comprehend the meaning of insolence. 5. Adam broke this Law, seeking to assume to himself that which he had not received, that thus he might become as it were his own maker and creator, and arrogate to himself divine honour. Thus by his disobedience he incurred guilt, and through arrogance fell into transgression. Had he not thus violated his allegiance, but been obedient to the commands of heaven, he would have preserved to his posterity the prerogative of nature and the innocence which he possessed at his birth. Wherefore as by disobedience the authority of the Law of Nature was corrupted and blotted out, the written law was found necessary; in order that man, having lost all, might at least regain a part; attaining by instruction to the knowledge of that which he had received at his birth, but had subsequently lost. Moreover, since the cause of his fall was pride, and pride arose from the dignity of innocence, it was needful that some law should be passed which should subdue and subject him to God. For without the Law he was ignorant of sin, and thus his guilt was less because he knew it not. Wherefore also the Lord says, If I had not come and spoken to them they had not had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

6. The Law then was published, first to take away all excuse lest man should say, I knew not sin, because I received no rule what to avoid. And next that all the world might become guilty before God by the confession of |435 sin. For it made all subject; in that it was not only given to the Jews but also called the Gentiles; for proselytes from the Gentiles were associated with them. Nor can he seem to be excepted, who after being called was found wanting, for the Law also bound those whom she called. And thus the fault of all worked subjection, subjection humility, humility obedience. And thus as pride had drawn after it transgression, so on the other hand, transgression produced obedience. And thus the written Law, which seemed superfluous, was rendered necessary, redeeming sin by sin. 7. But again, lest anyone should be deterred, and say that an increase of sin was caused by the Law, and that the Law not only did not profit but was even injurious, he has a consolation for his solicitude, because although by the Laiv sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And now let us consider the meaning of this.

8. Sin abounded by the Law because by the Law is the knowledge of sin, and thus it began to be injurious to me to know that which through infirmity I could not avoid; it is good to foreknow in order to avoid, but if I cannot avoid, to have known was injurious. Thus the effect of the Law was changed to me into its opposite, yet by the very increase of sin it became useful to me, because I was humbled. Wherefore David also said, It is good for me that I have been humbled. For by my humiliation I have broken those bonds of that ancient transgression, whereby Adam and Eve had bound the whole line of their posterity. Hence too the Lord came in obedience that He might loose the knot of disobedience and of man's transgression. And so, as by disobedience sin entered, so by obedience sin was remitted. Wherefore the Apostle also says, For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

9. Here is one reason the Law on the one hand was superfluous and yet became necessary. It was superflous herein, that it would not have been needed could we have kept the natural Law, but as we kept it not, the law of Moses became needful for us, to the intent that it might teach us obedience and loose that knot of Adam's |436 transgression which has fettered his whole posterity. Guilt indeed was increased by the Law, but pride, the author of this guilt, was overthrown by it, and this was profitable to. me, for pride discovered the guilt, and this guilt brought grace. 10. Hear another reason. At first Moses' Law was not needed; it was introduced subsequently, and this appears to intimate that this introduction was in a sense clandestine and not of an ordinary kind, seeing that it succeeded in the place of the natural Law. Had this maintained its place, the written Law would never have entered in; but the natural Law being excluded by transgression and almost blotted out of the human breast, pride reigned, and disobedience spread itself; and then this Law succeeded, that by its written precepts it might cite us before it, and every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Now the world becomes guilty before God by the Law, in that all are made amenable to its prescripts, but no man is justified by its works. And since by the Law comes the knowledge of sin, but not the remission of guilt, the Law, which has made all sinners, would seem to have been injurious.

11. But when the Lord Jesus came, He forgave all men that sin which none could escape, and blotted out the handwriting against us by the shedding of His own Blood. This then is the Apostle's meaning; sin abounded by the Law, but grace abounded by Jesus; for after that the whole world became guilty, He took away the sin of the whole world, as John bore witness, saying: Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Wherefore let no man glory in works, for by his works no man shall be justified, for he that is just hath a free gift, for he is justified by the Bath. It is faith then which delivers by the blood of Christ, for Blessed is the man to whom sin is remitted, and, pardon granted. Farewell, my son; love me, for I also love you. |437

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXIV.

In this letter S. Ambrose explains the meaning of S. Paul's expression, that 'the Law was our schoolmaster,' and shews how, while the letter of the precepts fitted the Jews, the spiritual sense, which lay under the letter applies to Christians. AMBROSE TO IRENAEUS. 1. You have heard, my son, the lesson of to-day in the Apostle, that the Law was our schoolmaster in Christ, that we might be justified by faith. And by this one text I believe that those questions are resolved, which are wont to perplex many. For there are those who say, Since God gave the Law to Moses, what is the reason that there are many things in the Law which now seem abrogated by the Gospel?' And how can the Author of the two Testaments be one and the same, when that which was permitted in the Law, when the Gospel came, was permitted no longer? as for instance there is a circumcision of the body, which was even then only given for a sign, that the verity of spiritual circumcision might be preserved, yet why was it even given as a sign? Why was there such diversity, that then it was esteemed piety to be circumcised, but now it is judged to be impiety? Again it was ordered by the Law that the Sabbath day ought to be a holiday, so that if any one carried a bundle of sticks, he became guilty of death; but now we perceive that the same day is devoted to bearing burthens and to transacting business without any punishment. And there are many precepts of the Law which at the present time would seem to have ceased.

2. Let us consider then what is the cause of this; for it was not without a purpose that the Apostle said, the Law was our schoolmaster in Christ . To whom does a schoolmaster belong, to one of riper years or to a youth? Doubtless to a youth or boy, that is, to one of infirm age. For a paedagogus, as the word is rendered in the Latin, is the teacher of a boy; and he cannot apply perfect precepts |438 to an imperfect age, because it cannot bear them. Again, the God of the Law says by the Prophet, I gave them also statutes that were not good, that is, not perfect. But the same God has preserved more perfect things for the Gospel, as He says, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil the Law.

3. What then was the cause of this difference, but human diversity? He knew the Jews to be a stiff-necked people, prone to fall, base, inclined to unbelief, that heard with the ear but understood not, that saw with their eyes but perceived not, fickle with the instability of infancy, and heedless of commands; and therefore He applied the Law, as a Schoolmaster, to the unstable temper and impious mind of the people, and moderating the very precepts of

the Law, He chose that one thing should be read, another understood; that thus the foolish man might at least keep what he was reading, and depart not from the prescript of the letter; while the wise should understand the sentiments of the Divine mind, which the letter did not alter; that the unwise man might keep the command of the Law, the prudent might observe the mystery. The Law therefore has the severity of the sword, as the schoolmaster holds the rod, that at any rate by the denunciation of punishment it may keep in awe the weakness of the imperfect people; but the Gospel has indulgence whereby sins are forgiven.

4. Rightly therefore does Paul say that the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life. For the letter circumcises a small portion of the body; the understanding spirit keeps the circumcision of the whole soul and body; that the superfluous parts being cut off, (for nothing is so superfluous as the vices of avarice, the sins of lust, which nature had not, but sin caused,) chastity might be observed, and frugality loved. The sign therefore is bodily circumcision, but the truth is spiritual circumcision, the one cuts off the member, the other cuts off sin. Nature has created nothing imperfect in man, nor has she commanded it to be taken away as if it were superfluous, but that they who cut off a part of their body might perceive that sins were much more to be cut off, and those members which led to offences were to |439 be retrenched, even though they were joined together by a certain unity of body, as it is written, If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee,for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. To the Jews then, as to children, are enjoined not complete precepts but partial ones, and, seeing that they were unable to keep the whole of their bodies clean, they were commanded to keep clean, as it were, one portion of it.

5. They were also commanded to keep the holiday of the Sabbath one day in the week, so as to be subjected to no burthen, and I would that being thus released from earthly works they had escaped, carrying with them to that perpetual sabbath of future ages the burthen of heavy crimes. But as God knew how prone to fall the people were, He enjoined a part upon the weaker by the observance of one day, He reserved the fulness for the stronger: the Synagogue observes the day, the Church immortality. In the Law therefore is a part, in the Gospel is perfection. 6. The people of the Jews are forbidden to carry sticks, that is, such things as are consumed by fire. He keeps in the shade, who flies from the sun. But to you the Sun of Righteousness suffers not the shade to be an hindrance, but pouring forth the full light of His grace says to you, Go, and sin no more. The follower of that eternal Sun says to you, Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. Wherefore let us build upon Christ, for Christ is our foundation, that which may not be burnt but purified. Gold is purified by fire, and so is silver.

7. You hear me speak of gold and silver, you think it to be the material substance, you desire to gather it, but you are losing your labour. This gold and silver brings burthen but no fruit. The toil of him who seeks it turns to the profit of his heir. This gold is burned like wood, not

preserved; this silver will bring detriment not profit to your life in that day. Another kind of gold and silver is required |440 of you, that is, a good meaning, a word fitly spoken, of which God says that He gives vessels of gold and silver. Theses are the gifts of God. The words of the Lord are pure words; even as the silver which from the earth is tried and purified seven times in the fire. The grace of your understanding, the beauty of chaste discourse is required of you; the brightness of faith not the tinkling of silver. The one remains, the other perishes; the one has reward, and we carry it away with us, the other, which we leave behind, brings loss.

8. If any rich man thinks that the gold and silver which he has hoarded and stored up can avail him for life, let him know that he carries an empty burthen, which the fire of judgment will consume. Leave here your burthens, ye rich men, that your burthen may not add fuel to the fire which is to come. If you will bestow some of these goods, your burthen will be diminished, and what remains will be no burthen. Lay not up wealth, O miser; lest you should become in mere name only a Christian, in work a Jew, perceiving that your burthens are a punishment to you. For it has been said to you, not in the shade but in the sun, If any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward, if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss. 9. And therefore, as a perfect man, taught in the Law, confirmed in the Gospel, receive the faith of both Testaments. For Blessed is he that sows beside all ivaters, that sends forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass, as we read to-day, that is, who sows upon the people who follow the doctrine of both Testaments; this is that ox of the plough, carrying the yoke of the Law, of which the Law says, Thou shall not muzzle the ox, when he treadeth out the corn; that ox which has the horns of the Divine Scriptures. But the foal of the ass the Lord rides upon, in the Gospel, representing the people of the Gentiles.

10. But I think that since the word of God is rich in meanings, we ought also to understand that the ox has horns full of terror, the bull is fierce, the ass mild, and that this is fitly applied to our present purpose, for happy is he who observes both severity and mildness; that so by the one discipline may be maintained, while by the other innocence |441 may be cherished; for too great severity is wont by means of terror to tempt to falsehood. God prefers being loved to being feared; for the Lord exacts love, the servant fear, for terror cannot be perpetual in man, for it is written as we read to-day Behold, in your fear, they whom ye feared, shall fear. Farewell, my son; love me, for I too love you.

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXV.

This letter is a sequel to the preceding, and deals with the context o the passage of S. Paul which that letter discussed. S. Ambrose ends by maintaining that the Jews were 'heirs' only of the letter of the Old Testament promises, the Christian being the heir of the Spirit. AMBROSE TO CLEMENTIANUS . 1. I am indeed aware that nothing is more difficult than to treat properly concerning the Apostle's meaning, for even Origen's expositions of the New Testament are far inferior to his expositions of the Old. Yet since in my previous letter you think that I have not explained amiss the reason of the Law being called a Schoolmaster; in what I say to-day too I purpose to unfold to you the actual force of the Apostle's statement. 2. Now the former part of his discourse declares that no man shall be justified by the works of the Law, but by faith, For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; but Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us. The inheritance therefore is not given by the Law but by promise. Now to Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed which is Christ. Thus the Law was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and therefore all are concluded under sin, that the promise |442 by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under the Law, that is, under a schoolmaster; and this because we are all the sons of God, and are all in Christ Jesus. Now if we are all in Christ Jesus, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. And this is the conclusion at which the Apostle arrives.

3. Still however he is met with this objection, that even the Jew might say, I also, being under the Law, have an heirship, for the Law is also called the Old Testament, and where is a Testament there also is an inheritance. And although the Apostle himself told the Hebrews that a testament is of no force, until the death of the testator happen, that is to say, a testament is of no strength while the testator liveth, but is established by his death, yet as in Jeremiah the Lord, speaking of the Jews, has said, Mine heritage is unto Me as a lion, he would not deny that they were heirs. But there are heirs without possessions, there are heirs also with them; and while the testator lives those whose names are written in the will are called heirs, though without possessions. 4. Little children are also heirs, but they differ in nothing from a servant, in that they are still under tutors and governors. Even so we were in bondage under the elements of the world. But, when the fulness of the time was come, Christ also came, and now we are no longer servants but sons, if we believe

in Christ. Thus He gave them the semblance of an inheritance, but withheld from them the possession of it. Thus they have the name but not the benefit of being heirs, for like children they possess the bare name of heirship without its privileges, and have no right either to command or to use, waiting for the fulness of their age that they may be delivered from their governors.

5. As then young children, so the Jews also, are under a schoolmaster. The Law is our schoolmaster, the schoolmaster brings us to our Master; and our One Master is Christ: Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even, Christ. The schoolmaster is feared, the Master shews the way of salvation. Thus four brings us to liberty, |443 liberty to faith, faith to love; love obtains adoption, adoption the inheritance. Where then faith is there is liberty; for the servant acts from fear, the free-man by faith; the one by the letter, the other by grace; the one in slavery the other by the Spirit; but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. If then where faith is, there is liberty; where liberty there grace, where grace there inheritance; and he that is a Jew in the letter not in spirit is in bondage, he who hath not faith hath not the liberty of the spirit. Now where there is no liberty there is no grace, where no grace no adoption, where no adoption there no succession.

6. Thus, the tablets being, as it were, closed, he beholds his inheritance but possesses it not, he has no permission to read it. For how can he say 'Our Father' who denies the true Son of God, Him by Whom our adoptive sonship is obtained for us? How can he rehearse the will who denies the death of the testator? How can he obtain liberty, who denies the Blood whereby he has been redeemed? For this is the price of our liberty, as Peter says, ye were redeemed with the precious Blood, not indeed of a lamb, but of Him Who came as a lamb, in meekness and humility, and redeemed the whole world with the one offering of His Body, as He himself says, I was brought as a lamb to the slaughter. Wherefore John also says, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

7. Hence the Jew, being heir in the letter not in the spirit is as a child under tutors and governours; but the Christian, who recognizes that fulness of time wherein Christ came, made of a woman, made under the Law, that He might redeem all who were under the Law; the Christian, I say, by unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God grows up unto a perfect man: unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Farewell, my son; love me, for I also love you. |444

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXVI.

At Irenaeus' request S. Ambrose points out the scope of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Therein is proposed to us a heavenly inheritance, a seat in heavenly places together with Christ, Who has obtained freedom for us. It sets forth to us charity, whereby we are united to Christ, as the end of faith. He adds that no other Epistle contains the mention of so many blessings, and he briefly recounts these one by one. AMBROSE TO IRENAEUS, GREETING. 1. You have asked me to set forth to you the scope and substance of the Epistle to the Ephesians, an Epistle which seems somewhat obscure, unless by analyzing it we can gather what those motives are by which the Apostle would persuade us not to despair of the kingdom of God. 2. In the first place then he points out that the hope of reward and the inheritance of those heavenly promises which have been brought within our reach by the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, are wont to be a great encouragement to the good in the pursuit of virtue.

3. To this he has added that not only has a mode of return to Paradise been opened to us by Christ, but that even the honour of sitting in heavenly places has been imparted to this flesh of our body by its fellowship with the Body of Christ; so that you need no longer doubt the possibility of your own ascension, now that you know that your fellowship with the flesh of Christ subsists even in the kingdom of heaven, knowing also that by His Blood reconciliation has been made for all things, both on earth and in heaven, for He descended that He might fill all things: and, further, that by His Apostles, prophets, and priests, the whole world has been established, and the Gentiles gathered in; and that the end of our hope is the love of Him, that we may grow up into Him in all things; for He is the Head of all things, and unto Him according to the measure of His working we are all raised and built up by charity into one body.

4. We ought not therefore to despair of the members adhering to their Head; especially since from the |445 beginning we have been predestinated by Jesus Christ to adoption as children of God in Himself: which predestination He has ratified, instructing us that the prediction made from the first, that a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh, is a sacrament of Christ and the Church. If therefore the union of Adam and Eve is a great sacrament which relates to Christ and the Church, it is certain that as Eve was bone of the bones of her husband, and

flesh of his flesh, so we are members of the Body of Christ, bone of His Bones and flesh of His Flesh. 5. No other Epistle has pronounced so many blessings over the people of God as this. For herein the pregnant witness of Divine grace has declared that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenlg places, and predestinated unto the adoption of children, richly endowed also with grace in the Son of God, which things have abounded unto the knowledge of the mystery of His eternal will. Especially now, in the fulness of time, when all things are reconciled in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, have we attained an inheritance in Him, to the intent that both what is of the Law and what is of Grace might be fulfilled in us. For even according to the Law we seemed to be elected in that season of youth, by which is signified a holy life, without either the wantonness of childhood or the infirmity of age. We have been taught also how we must vigorously ivage war not only against flesh and blood, but also against spiritual wickedness in high places.

6. Wherefore as the possession of lands taken from the enemy fell to their lot, so to us has fallen the lot of grace, that we may become the heritage of God, Who possesses our reins, the seat of chastity and temperance. Do you seek to know this lot? Remember that lot which fell upon Matthias, that he might be chosen into the number of the twelve Apostles. The Prophet David also says, If ye sleep in the midst of the lots, because he who is placed in the middle, between the lot of the Old and New Testament, resting upon both, arrives at the peace of the heavenly kingdom. This lot of their paternal inheritance the daughters of Zelophehad sought for, and their petition was |446 admitted by God's judgment. But they sought for it in the shade, for Zelophehad means 'the shade of the mouth;' they sought it then in dark sayings, they spoke not what was revealed. Hence the supplication for their inheritance by the daughters of Zelophehad was couched in dark sayings, but in our case it stands in the light of the Gospel and in the revelation of grace.

7. Let us therefore be the possession of God, and let Him be our portion, for in Him are the riches of His glory and inheritance. For who is rich but God alone, Who created all things? Especially however is He rich in mercy, in that He redeemed all mankind, and, as being the author of nature, changed us, who according to our fleshly nature were the children of wrath, and exposed to trouble, that we might become the children of peace and charity. For who can change nature but He Who created nature? Wherefore He raised the dead, and those that were quickened in Christ He hath made to sit in heavenly places in the Lord Jesus.

8. Not that any man has been thought worthy of the privilege of sitting in that seat of God, for to the Son alone hath the Father said, Sit thou on my right hand; but because in that Flesh of Christ the flesh of the whole human race has been honoured, because it partakes of the same nature. For as He was subjected in our flesh by His unity therewith, and by the obedience of the body, wherein He was made obedient even unto death, so we, in His Flesh, are sat down together with Him in heavenly places. We therefore are not set down by ourselves but in the Person of Christ, Who alone, as the Son of man, sitteth at the right Hand of God; as He said Himself, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right

hand of God. To this end has His Grace and Goodness been formed upon us in Christ Jesus, that being dead according to works, redeemed through faith and saved by grace, we might receive the gift of this great deliverance. Our very nature, raised, as it were, in Him, has been made partaker of the Grace of a new creation, that being new created in Christ, we, who had before fallen away through the corruption of our guilty lineage, might walk in good works. |447

9. For the strife which before existed in the flesh being removed, an universal peace has been made in heaven; that men might be like Angels upon earth, that the Gentiles and Jews might be made one, that both the new and old man might be united, the middle wall of partition, which, as a hostile barrier, had once divided them, being broken down. For the nature of our flesh having stirred up anger discord and dissension, and the law having bound us with the chains of condemnation, Christ Jesus subdued by mortification the wantonness and intemperance of the flesh, and made void the law of commandment contained in ordinances, declaring thereby that the decrees of the spiritual Law are not to be interpreted according to the letter; putting an end to the slothful rest of the Sabbath and to the superfluous rite of outward circumcision, and opening to all access by one Spirit unto the Father. For how can there be any discord, where there is one calling, one body and one spirit?

10. For what else did the Lord Jesus effect by His descent but our deliverance from captivity into liberty, and the subjection to Himself of that captivity which the bonds of unbelief had fettered, but which is now restrained by the fetters of wisdom, every wise man putting his feet into its bonds? For it is written that when He had descended He ascended also, that He might fill all things, and that we might all receive of His fulness. 11. Wherefore He gave first Apostles in the Church, filling them with the Holy Spirit, others prophets, others evangelists, others pastors and teachers, that by their exhortations the progress of believers might be accomplished, and the work of the ministry of faith might receive increase. Every one by the growth of virtue is built up unto the measure of the inward life, which measure, being that more perfect one of a holy life, that is, of a perfect man, taking of the fulness of Christ, has received the fulness of grace.

12. But who is a perfect man, but he who, being delivered from the weakness of a childish mind, from the unstable and slippery ways of youth, and from the unbridled passions of adult age, has attained to the strength of full manhood, and has grown up unto such maturity of |448 character as not to be easily turned aside by the address of a wily disputer, nor cast, as it were, upon the rocks by the turbid violence of foolish doctrine? Who but he that betakes himself to the remedies of error, who follows truth not only in his words but also in his works, and, takes upon him the edifying of himself in love, that he may be united with others in the unity of faith and knowledge, and, as a member, not fall off from his Head, that is, from Christ, Who is the Head of all, from whom the whole body of the faithful and prudent fitted and compacted and joined together by the rational harmony of the Word (for this is the meaning of sunarmologou&menon, a(rmoni/a| tou~ Lo&gou dedme/non ,) by

that which every joint supplieth, according to the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying itself in love; that so it may rise as one temple of God in all, and one habitation of the heavenly mansion in the spirit of all.

13. Herein I conceive we are to understand that not only holy men but all believers, and all the heavenly and reasonable hosts and powers are united in faith and spirit; that by a certain concord of powers and offices one body, composed of all spirits of a reasonable nature, may adhere to Christ their Head, being so united to the framework of the building, that in no single point of juncture the several members may seem to be severed from each other. For this is the meaning of the Greek a(fh_n th~j xorhgi/aj kat' e0ne/rgeian e0n me/trw|. And to unite each one to Himself according to the due measure of his merits and faith will not be difficult: for the edifice of love closes and blocks up every crevice through which offences may enter. We ought not then to doubt that in the building up of this temple the company of the heavenly hosts will be united with us; for it is unreasonable to suppose that while the Temple of God can be so built up by human love as that we shall become an habitation of God in the Spirit, He should not dwell within the heavenly Host.

14. On this account, that the building may be raised |449 within us more rapidly, the Apostle exhorts us to open the eyes of our understanding, to lift them to things above, diligently to follow after the knowledge of God, to unravel the truth, to hide in our hearts the commandments of God, to put off deceitful lusts and hidden deeds of shame, to seek to be renewed by the graces of the Sacraments, to moderate anger, to calm all disturbance of spirit before the sun goes down, to beware lest the adversary gain the upper hand of us, that mighty spirit who entered into the heart of Judas, and broke through the gates of his soul, overpowering his resistance, to shut out theft, to eschew falsehood, to rise from the dead, to put on sobriety. He tells us likewise that wives should be subject to their husbands, as the Church is to Christ, and that husbands should offer up their own lives for their wives, as Christ gave Himself for the Church. And lastly, that, as good soldiers, we should put on the armour of God, and continually fight, not only against flesh and blood, but also against spiritual wickedness; that we may neither be corrupted by friends nor vanquished by enemies.

This summary account of the Epistle I offer you as the best which I have in my power to give. Farewell, my son; love me, for I also love you.

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXVII.

This letter dwells on the Gospel, as the true Inheritance, and on the contrast between the Jew, who by rejecting Christ made Moses in whom he believed his accuser, and the Christian, who received true liberty in Christ, while the Jew remained a slave. AMBROSE TO HORONTIANUS. 1. Not without reason have you thought fit to enquire into the nature of the Divine inheritance; and why it should be so highly esteemed that for its sake many should even offer up their lives. But if you will consider that even in human affairs the advantage of inheriting worldly goods gives an additional sanction to the laws of natural |450 affection, and that even on this account greater respect is shown to parents, for fear, namely, lest the slighted love of a father may avenge itself by disinheriting or renouncing the rebellious offspring, you will cease to wonder why men so greatly desire a Divine inheritance.

2. Now there is an inheritance offered to all Christians; for Isaiah thus speaks, There is an heritage for them that believe on the Lord, and this inheritance is hoped for by the promise, not by the Law. This the history of the Old Testament proves, in the words of Sarah, Cast out this bond-woman and her son, for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. The son of Sarah was Isaac, the son of the bond-woman was Ishmael; and these were before the Law, wherefore the promise was older than the Law. We are after Isaac sons by the promise, the Jews are the sons of the bond-woman after the flesh. We have a free mother, which bore not, but afterwards, according to the promise, brought forth and produced a child; they have Agar for their mother, gendering to bondage. He is free, to whom grace is promised, he is a slave on whom the yoke of the Law is imposed, wherefore the promise came to us before the Law came to them, and in the course of nature liberty is more ancient than bondage. Liberty therefore comes of the promise, bondage of the Law. But although the promise itself, as we have said, is before the Law, and by the promise comes liberty, and in liberty is love, still love is according to the Law, and love is greater than liberty.

3. Are we not then servants? and is it not written, praise the Lord, all ye servants, or how does the Apostle say, But as the servants of God, doing the will of God from his heart? But there is also a free and voluntary service, whereof the Apostle says, He that is called, being free. is Christ's servant. And this service is from the heart, not of necessity. Wherefore

we are the servants of our Creator; but we have a liberty which we have received through the grace of Christ, born of the promise according to faith. Wherefore, being born of the freedwoman, let us, signed in the forehead, offer the sacrifice of liberty as becomes freemen; that we may rejoice and not be confounded, being |451 signed in 'the spirit and not in the flesh. For to us it is rightly said, Standfast, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. He does not say, Be not slaves, but Be not entangled with the yoke of bondage, for the yoke of bondage is heavier than the bondage itself.

4. Isaac also says to his son Esau, when he sought his blessing, Behold thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shall thou live, and shalt serve thy brother. But the time shall come when thou shalt have the dominion and shalt break his yoke from off thy neck. How then is this to be reconciled, that although he shall break his brother's yoke from off his neck he shall still serve, unless we recognize the difference that there is in servitude? Now in what this difference consists, let the Scripture itself explain to us. Isaac signifies good, and he is good to us, for after him we are born into liberty, and he is a good father to both his sons. His love for them both he proved, in the one case by affection, in the other by blessing, for he commanded his elder son to bring him food, that he might receive his blessing; but while he makes delay and seeks for wild venison from a distance, the younger brother brings him home-food, from the sheep of the flock.

5. Good food for all is Christ, good food too is faith, sweet food is mercy, pleasant food is faith. These are the meats whereon are fed the people of holy Church. Good food too is the Spirit of God, good food is the remission of sins. But very hard food is the rigour of the Law, and the terror of punishment; and very coarse food is that observance of the letter which is preferred to the grace of pardon. The Jews again are under a curse, we included in a blessing. A ready food too is faith: The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart: the food of the Law is more tardy. For while waiting for the Law the people fell into transgression.

6. Thus it was on the son who was diligent and faithful that the father bestowed his blessing, but he reserved one, for he was a good father, for his elder son also, in that he made him servant to his brother. For he did this, not as wishing to subject his family to any unworthy bondage, |452 but because he who cannot rule and govern himself ought to serve and be subject to one more prudent; that so he may be governed by his counsel, and not fall through his own folly, nor stumble from walking rashly. It is as a blessing then that such a state of service is given. Moreover it is numbered among blessings, together with the gift of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. Having said, By thy sword thou shalt live, lest he should be harmed by the confidence arising from strength or power, he added, and thou shalt serve thy brother: that thou mayest thus obtain both the rich fruits of the flesh, and the dew of Divine grace, and mayest follow him who is able to direct and govern thee.

7. But it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have broken his yoke from off thy neck, that thou shalt have the reward of thy willing servitude, and not undergo the evils of a compulsory bondage. For that kind of bondage is dishonourable which is the result of necessity, that is honourable which is offered by piety. Hence the Apostle says, For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward, but if against my will, a dispensation is committed unto me. Better then is it to reap a reward, than to obey a dispensation. Wherefore let us not be restrained by the yoke of bondage, but let us serve in the spirit of charity, for the Apostle says, By love serve one another. The fear of the Law becomes the love of the Gospel. Again, To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but the fulness of the Law is charity. And the Law itself says, For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

8. This therefore is what we asserted, for although bondage is by the Law, liberty is by the Law also, for charity belongs to liberty, fear to bondage. There is therefore both a charity of the Law, and a service of charity, but the Law is the forerunner of charity, the charity of the Gospel is the free giver of a pious service. 9. The Law then is not superfluous; for like a schoolmaster, it attends upon the weak; and by weakness I mean weakness of character not of body; for they are infants who know not how to declare the word of God, who receive |453 not His works. For if an unspotted life is old age, a life full of stains is the time of youth. The Law then, that is, No&moj, was our schoolmaster, until faith came. We were kept, it is said, under the Law, as being weak, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. But afterwards faith came; he does not say the Gospel, but faith, for that only is faith which is in the Gospel. For although the righteousness of God is revealed therein which is from faith to faith, still this of the Law is faith indeed when it attains to the fulness thereof. Rightly therefore is this faith spoken of as single and alone; because without it the former is not faith, and in it alone it has its confirmation. Finally, when this faith came, fulness and the adoption of sons came with it, infirmity ceased, infancy was at an end, we grew into a perfect man, we put on Christ. How then can any one be weak or childish, in whom Christ is the power of God? Thus we have arrived at perfection, and have been instructed in its precepts.

10. You heard read to-day, Of Mine own Self I can do nothing, as I hear, I judge. You heard read, I accuse you not, I judge not. I accuse you not, it is Moses that accuseth you, in whom ye trust. You heard read, If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. Thus I have learnt what kind of judge, what kind of witness I ought to be. For it is not as being weak that He says, Of Mine own self I can do nothing, he rather is weak who so understands it. The Father does nothing without the Son, for between them there is a community of operation and an unity of power; but in this place He speaks as Judge, that we men may learn that, when we judge, we ought to form our sentence equitably and not according to our mere will and power.

11. When a criminal is set before him proved guilty and convicted of crime, who does not frame for himself pleas of defence, but prays for pardon, and prostrates himself at the knees

of his judge, the judge answers him, Of myself I can do nothing, it is my justice not my power which I exercise in judgment. It is not I but your own deeds that judge you, they accuse, and they condemn you. The Laws are your tribunal, and I as judge do not alter but keep the |454 Laws. Of myself I originate nothing, but the judicial sentence against you proceeds from yourself. I judge as I hear, not as I will, and my judgment is true because I consult what is agreeable to equity not to my own will. 12. Let us next consider what is the Divine rule of judgment. The Lord of heaven and earth and the Judge of all says, of Mine own self I can do nothing, as I hear I judge; and man says to his Lord, Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? But why is not the Lord able? Because, He says, My judgment is just, because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father Who hath sent Me, that is, not the will of man, whom ye see, not the will of man, whom ye only judge as man, not the will of the flesh, (for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,) but the Divine will, which is the Origin of law, and the Rule of judgment. So likewise that witness is true, who bears witness not to himself but to another, for it is written, Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth.

13. In a mystical sense it is well said to the Jews: I judge you not, that is, I, the universal Saviour, I, who am the Remission of sins, judge you not, for ye have not received Me. I judge you not, I freely pardon you. I, who by My Blood redeem sinners, judge you not. I judge you not, for I would not the death but the life of a sinner. 1 judge you not, for I condemn not but justify those who confess their sins. Moses accuses you, he in whom you trust convicts you. He can accuse you, he cannot judge you, this is reserved to his Creator. He then in whom ye trust accuses you, He in Whom ye would not trust absolves you. 14. O great folly of the Jews! Rightly are they accused of their crimes, for they have chosen one who accuses them, and have rejected a merciful Judge; and therefore they are without absolution, but not without punishment.

15. Well therefore, my son, have you begun by the Law, and been confirmed in the Gospel, from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith. Farewell; love me for I also love you. |455

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXVIII.

In this letter S. Ambrose shews, that we, like Abraham, are justified by faith, through which we are sons of the freewoman; that circumcision derived all its efficacy from Christ, and was abolished, after He had undergone it in His own person, by Him. Righteousness is therefore only to be looked for from faith, which if it be perfect, is never destitute of charity. AMBROSE TO HORONTIANUS. 1. If Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, and that which is accounted for righteousness passes from unbelief to faith, then are we justified by faith, not by the works of the Law. Now Abraham himself had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, one of the bondwoman, the other of the freewoman; and it was told him that he should cast out the bondwoman and the son of the bondwoman, for that the son of the bondwoman should not be his heir. We therefore are children not of the bondwoman but of the free woman, in that liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Hence it follows that they are specially Abraham's sons, who are so by faith, for the heirs of faith excel heirs by natural birth. The Law is our schoolmaster, faith is free; let us therefore cast away the works of bondage, let us preserve the grace of liberty, let us leave the shade, and follow the Sun, let us desert Jewish rites.

2. The circumcision of one member is of no avail. For the Apostle says, Behold I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing, not because He cannot, but because He judges those unworthy of His benefits who desert His ways. 3. And Zipporah of old had circumcised her child, and driven off the danger which hung over him; but then Christ profited while perfection was still deferred. While the people of believers were small, the Lord Jesus came, not as small, but as perfect in all things. He was circumcised first, according to the Law, that He might not |456 break the Law, afterwards by the Cross, that He might fulfil the Law. Thus that which is in part has ceased, because that which is perfect has come; for in Christ the Cross has circumscised not one member only, but the superfluous pleasures of the whole body.

4. But perhaps it may still be asked why He Who had come to declare to us perfect circumcision should choose to be circumcised in part. Concerning this however we need not deliberate long. For if He was made sin that He might expiate our sins, if He was made a curse for us that He might annul the curses of the Law, for the same reason He was also circumcised for us, that being about to bestow salvation by the Cross, He might abolish the

circumcision of the Law. 5. The Apostle therefore declares that it is from faith that our hope of righteousness in the spirit is to be derived, and that though called to liberty we are not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh. For neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. And therefore it is written, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. Now he who loves also believes, and in believing each man begins to love. Abraham believed, and so began to love, and he believed not in part, but entirely. For otherwise he would not have perfect charity, for it is written, Charity believeth all things. If it believe not all things, charity does not seem to be perfect. Perfect charity then has all faith.

6. But I would not lightly assert that all faith has immediately perfect charity, for the Apostle says, Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. A Christian man has three principal virtues, faith hope and charity, but the greatest of these is charity. 7. On the other hand I conceive the Apostle was led to say this by the tenor of his argument, for I cannot see how he who has all faith, so that he could remove mountains, can be destitute of charity; nor how such can be the case with that man who understands all mysteries and all knowledge; especially as John says, Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and the same Apostle |457 had said before, Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. Whence we infer that if he who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and he who is born of God sins not, then he who believes that Jesus is the Christ sins not. But if any man sin, he believes not, and he that believes not loves not, and he that loves not is subject to sin. So then he who sins loves not, for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. But if charity exclude the desire of sin, it excludes also fear, charity then is full of perfect faith.

8. The Apostles too, who came to be His friends, said, Increase our faith, begging the good Physician to strengthen their failing faith. Their faith must indeed still have been weak, when even to Peter it could be said, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? Thus faith as the herald of charity preoccupies the mind, and prepares the ways of coming love. Thus where is the perfection of charity there is also all faith. 9. For this reason I conceive it is said that charity believeth all things, that is, leads faith to believe them all, and that a soul of this kind possesses all faith; and hence wherever is perfect charity there is all faith. Moreover, as it believes all things so also it is said to hope all things. And it is on this account the greatest, because it includes the other two. 10. He that has this charity fears nothing, for charity casteth out fear; and fear being thus banished and thrown aside, charity beareth all things, endureth all things. He who by charity endures all things, cannot fear martyrdom; and so in another place he speaks as a conqueror at the end of his course, The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Farewell, my son; love me for I also love you. |458

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXIX.

S. Ambrose here assures Bellicius, whose recovery from sickness had occurred just at the time when he professed himself a believer in Christ, that both his sickness and recovery were to be ascribed to his so doing, and exhorts him to endeavour to keep Christ near him, and to prepare himself with all diligence for the other Sacraments. AMBROSE TO BELLICIUS, GREETING. 1. You have sent me word that while you were lying afflicted by a severe sickness you believed in the Lord Jesus, and straightway began to recover. This sickness therefore was unto salvation, bringing greater pain than danger, for you had long deferred your promise. This is the meaning of the text, I wound, and I heal. He wounded by sickness, He healed by faith. For He saw that the inward affection of your mind was not without pious desires, but that they were shaken and unsettled by delays, and so He thought fit to admonish you, in a way which while it did not injure your health, excited your devotion.

2. For how should He do an injury to health Who is wont to say, as we read in the Gospel, I will come and heal him. Being invited by your friends to visit your house He doubtless said, I will come and heal him; Although you heard Him not, He, as God, spoke to you imperceptibly, and although you saw Him not, still beyond doubt He visited you in spirit. 3. But in truth you have seen Him, for you have believed in Him, you have seen Him, for you have received Him into the dwelling of your mind, you have seen Him in the Spirit, you have seen Him with your inward eyes. Take care then not to let this new Guest depart, long expected, late received, even Him in Whom we live and move and have our being. You have tasted the first beginnings of faith, let not the word be hidden in your heart. Herein lies all grace and every gift. For no man judges of the secret recesses of a house by its entrance, since all the |459 fruit is within; nor is it the part of a wise man to look from the window into the house, and it is folly for a man to listen at the door.

4. The mysteries of the more perfect Sacraments are of one kind; for the Scripture says, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Of another kind are the things which the prophets have announced concerning future glory, unto whom it was revealed, and to whom the saints have preached the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, which things the Angels desired to look into. Of another kind again are those mysteries wherein is the redemption of the world, the remission of sins, the distribution of graces,

the participation of the Sacraments: when you receive these you will wonder that a gift so transcendent should have been bestowed on man, as to make the manna which we wonder should have been rained down from heaven on the Jews seem to you to have possessed neither so much grace nor so much efficacy towards salvation. For all who received this manna in the wilderness died, save Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb, whereas he who tastes this Sacrament shall never die.

May the Lord Jesus send you restoration. Farewell.

Letters 71-80 — LETTER LXXX.

S.Ambrose here shews that the ease of the man who was blind from his birth was the work of Divine power, and censures the question which the disciples asked about him; and dwells on some of the details of the miracle. AMBROSE TO BELLICIUS. 1. You have heard, my brother, the lesson of the Gospel, wherein it is narrated that as the Lord Jesus passed by He saw a man which was blind from his birth. Now if the Lord saw him He did not pass him by, neither ought we to pass him by whom the Lord overlooked not; especially |460 since he was blind from his birth, which is not mentioned without reason. 2. Now there is a blindness in which by the operation of illness the sight of the eyes is obscured, and this by the help of time is mitigated; there is a blindness also which is caused by the entrance of humours, and this, when the defect is removed, is cured by the aid of medicine; and this I say that you may know that it was not by skill but by Divine Power that he who was blind from his birth was healed. For the Lord gave him health as a free gift, not by any medicinal skill, for they whom the Lord Jesus healed were they whom no one could cure.

3. But how foolish was the inquiry of the Jews, Who did sin this man or his parents? ascribing bodily diseases to the score of sin. Wherefore the Lord said, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. That which nature created, the Creator, being the Author of nature, was capable of remedying. He added therefore, As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world, that is, all who are blind may see whether they need Me Who am the Light. Approach ye, and be enlightened, that ye may see. 4. In the next place why did He Who restored life at command, Who gave health by His word, saying to the dead, Come forth, and Lazarus came forth from the grave, saying also to the sick of the palsy, Arise and take up thy bed, and the sick of the palsy rose and himself began to carry his bed, whereon, when all his limbs were paralyzed, he had been wont to be carried; why, I say, did He spit on the ground and make clay, and anoint the eyes of the blind man, and say to him, Go, wash in in the pool of Siloam, which is by interpretation, Sent. He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing----What is the reason of this? Great indeed is the reason, if I mistake not, for he who is taught by Jesus comes to see more clearly.

5. Observe at the same time both His Divinity and His sanctity; as being Himself Light He touched and so communicated light to others; as being a Priest He fulfilled by the figure of

Baptism the mysteries of spiritual grace. He spat, that you might learn that the inner parts |461 of Christ are light; and clearly indeed does he see who receives cleansing thereby. His spittle cleanses, and so does His discourse, as it is written, Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. 6. But His making clay and anointing the eyes of the blind was intended to signify to us that the Same Who made man of clay, restored him to health by anointing with clay, and to signify also that this flesh of our clay must receive the light of eternal life by the Sacrament of Baptism. Do you also draw near to Siloam, that is, to Him Who was sent from the Father, as it is written, My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. Let Christ wash you that you may see. Come to Baptism, the time itself is at hand, make haste and come that you may say, I went, and washed, and I received sight; that you may also say, whereas I was blind, now I see, that you may say, as that man on whom light was poured said, the night is far spent, the day is at hand.

7. The night was blindness. It was night when Judas received the sop from Jesus, and Satan entered into him. To Judas, in whom the Devil was, it was night; to John, who lay on the breast of Christ, it was day. To Peter also it was day, when he saw the light of Christ on the mount. To others it was night, but to Peter it was day. To Peter himself however it was night when he denied Christ. But the cock crowed, and he began to weep, that he might correct his error, for now the day was at hand. 8. The Jews enquired of the blind man, How were thine eyes opened? What signal folly! They enquired concerning what they saw; they enquired into the cause, seeing the effect. 9. Then they reviled him, and said, thou art His disciple. Their curse is a blessing, for their blessing is a curse. Thou, they say, art His disciple. They confer a benefit, while they think they are doing an injury.

Farewell, my son; love me as you do, for I also love you. [Footnotes moved to end and renumbered. Marginal biblical references and running headers omitted] 1. Bethlehem. 2. institutis. 3. castellum. 4. [Hebrew] signifying affliction; [Hebrew] one humbled by affliction and so, it was inferred, brought to obedience. 5. Baehr on Herod, ii. 37, quotes with apparent approval Wesseling's opinion that in fact, though Herodotus does not expressly state it, among the Egyptians only the priests and those initiated in the mysteries received circumcision. It is to this perhaps that S. Ambrose is here alluding. See also the art. on 'Circumcision' in Smith's Dict. of the Bible. 6. confusus fuerit 7. subditus fiat. Vulg. 8. in Christo. ei0j xristo&n. 9. Why this letter, which plainly declares itself in the first section to he a sequel of the previous one, is addressed to a different name, it is difficult to say. There is a similar difficulty about Letter xxvi, and possibly the same solution may apply here as is suggested by the Ben. Edd. there. See Introd. to Lett. xxvi.

10. The phrase 'cernere hereditatem' is a well-known law-term, meaning' literally 'to decide to accept an inheritance,' and then 'to enter upon it.' But as this sense will not agree with the context, it seems necessary to take 'cernere,' as the Benedictine note does, in its common sense of 'to see.' 11. The words a(rmoni/a| tou~ Lo&gou dedeme/non seem to be a gloss on S. Paul's compound sunarmologou&menon. They are not part of his text, though S. Ambrose seems here to be quoting them as if they were.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXI.

In this letter S. Ambrose seeks to comfort some of his clergy, who were in despondency on account of their labours and difficulties, and sets before their eyes both the reward they may expect, and also the ready aid they will receive from Christ. He then presses upon them passages of Scripture applicable to their case, and exhorts them not to suffer themselves to be separated from Jesus their Saviour. AMBROSE TO CERTAIN OF THE CLERGY. 1. It is a fault which frequently besets the human mind, that, if things do not at once fall out according to their wishes, they lightly take offence, and desist from their duty. In other classes of men this is tolerable, but in those who are devoted to the Divine service it is a frequent cause of sorrow. 2. There are certain persons in the clerical function, into whose minds the Enemy, if he cannot otherwise deceive them, thus seeks to creep, that he may instil evil thoughts of the following kind; 'What does it avail me to remain among the clergy, to suffer injuries, to bear toil, as if my own farm could not support me, or, if I have no farm, as if I could not otherwise obtain support?' It is by such thoughts as these that even good dispositions are withdrawn from their duty, as if provision for his own sustenance was the only function of a cleric, and not rather to purchase for himself the Divine assistance after death. Whereas he only shall be rich after death, who on earth has had strength to contend unharmed against the wiles of his numerous adversaries.

3. It is said therefore in Ecclesiastes, Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour, For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow. Where are the two that are better than one, but where Christ is, and he whom Christ defends? For if he who is with the Lord Jesus falls, Jesus raises him up. |463 4. But in what sense is it said, for their labour? Is Christ then weary? Yes truly, for He says, I am weary of crying. He labours, but it is on us. Moreover after His toil He sat down wearied on the well; but what is the mode of His labours? The Apostle by his own humbler example has taught us in the words, Who is weak, and I am not weak? Our Lord Himself has also taught us in the words, I was sick, and ye visited Me not, naked and ye clothed Me not. He labours, in order to raise me in my falls.

5. Hence in Elisha also our Lord is prefigured, for he stretched himself upon the dead child that he might raise him to life, and in this we have a symbol that Christ died with us, that He might rise again for us. Thus Christ placed Himself on the level even of our frailty, that

He might raise us again. He did not fall, but of His own will cast Himself down, and in rising raised up His fellow. For He has taken us into fellowship with Himself, being anointed, as it is written, with the oil of gladness above His fellows. 6. Well says the Preacher, If they fall, the One, not being Himself lifted up, will lift up his fellow; for Christ needed not the assistance and aid of another to raise Him, but rose by His own power. Again, Destroy, He says, this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. But this He said of the Temple of His Body. And it is well that he who has not fallen should not be raised by another, for he who has been so raised must have fallen, and he who has fallen needs assistance that he may be raised. This is taught also by the words of Scripture which follows, Woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat. For we are dead with Christ, and therefore we also live with Him. And Christ has thus died that He might give us warmth, as He has said, I am come to send fire upon the earth.

7. I was dead, but because in Baptism I died together with Christ, I received the light of life from Christ. And he who dies in Christ, being warmed by Christ, receives the breath of life and resurrection. The boy was cold, |464 Elisha warmed him with his breath, and imparted to him the warmth of life. He slept together with him that being thus buried with him in a figure the warmth of his rest might raise him up. He is cold then who dies not in Christ; he cannot be warmed to whom no burning fire is applied; he who has not Christ with him cannot grow warm by being near another. 8. And that you may understand it to be said as a mystery and not in reference to the bare number that two are better than one, he adds a mystical saying, A threefold cord is not quickly broken. For that which is threefold and uncompounded cannot be broken. Thus the Trinity, being of an uncompounded nature, cannot be dissolved; for God is, whatever He is, one and simple and uncompounded; and what He is that He continues to be, and is not brought into subjection.

9. It is a good thing therefore to adhere closely to that other One, and to put your neck into His chain, and to bow down your shoulder and bear Him, and be not grieved with His bonds; because He went forth from the house of bondmen to assume His kingdom, that Child who is better than an older and foolish king. Wherefore they who follow Him are also bound with chains. Paul too is the prisoner of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Himself led captivity captive. He thought it not enough to destroy that captivity which the devil had imposed, so that he might not again assault those who were wandering at large. But to dwell in subjection to Christ, putting your feet into the fetters of wisdom, and becoming His captive that you may be free from the adversary, this is what He accounted perfect liberty. 10. Rightly is He called a Child, for unto us a Child is bom, and truly a good Child to Whom it has been said by God the Father, It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My Servant; wise also, as the gospel teaches us, for He increased in wisdom and stature; and properly called poor, for, though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that toe through His poverty might be rich. Wherefore in His kingdom He does not despise the poor man, but listens to him and frees him from all straits and troubles. |465

11. Let us then live in obedience to Him, that that old and foolish king may have no power over us. For he, desiring to reign and be supreme after his own will, and not to be under subjection to the Lord Jesus, grows old in sin, and falls into the deformity of folly. For what can be more foolish than for a man to relinquish heavenly and apply himself to earthly things, for him to neglect what is eternal, and to choose the frail and perishing? 12. Let no one then say, We have no portion in Jacob nor inheritance in Israel. Let no one say, I am not among the Clergy, for it is written, Give unto Levi his lots ; and again David says that he who lieth in the midst among the lots ascends to heaven with spiritual wings. Say not of your God, He is grievous to us, nor of your place, it is not for our turn, since Scripture says, Leave not thy place: For the adversary would fain deprive thee of it, he would fain drive thee away, for he envies thee thy hopes and thy function.

13. But thou that art in the lot of the Lord, His portion and possession, depart not therefrom, that thou mayest say to Him, For Thou hast possessed my reins, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb; and that He may say to thee, as to a good servant, Go, and sit down to meat. Farewell, my sons: serve the Lord, for the Lord is good.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXII.

S. Ambrose tells Marcellus that he has been appointed to decide the case in which he and his brother Laetus and their sister were concerned, and why he undertook rather to act as arbiter than as judge in it. He urges Marcellus to submit willingly to his loss, praising him at the same time for having himself offered so equitable an adjustment of the matter, and tells him why he has nevertheless made some change in the settlement, and ends by shewing how the success gained by the several parties has been without general detriment to the Church. AMBROSE TO MARCELLUS. 1. The law suit which you did not indeed institute of your own accord, but took up when begun by others, the |466 obligations of piety and a desire of approving your bounty towards the poor leading you thereto, has in the course of its adjudication devolved into my hands. I took cognisance of it by the tenor of the Imperial enactment, and both the authority committed to me by the blessed Apostle and the form and character of your own life and conduct have laid this upon me. Having myself censured the keeping alive amongst you your ancient animosity, I found myself obliged by the parties to hear their cause.

2. I blushed to refuse, I must confess, particularly since the advocates of either party recriminated on each other, asserting that my investigation would make manifest to whose side the suffrages of right and justice would incline. Why need I say more? When the days were almost concluded, and only a few hours remained, in which the Prefect was hearing other business; the advocates in the suit requested that it should be adjourned for a few days, that I might preside as judge. So much zeal was shewn by Christians to prevent the Prefect from interfering with the jurisdiction of the Bishop. They stated moreover that certain matters had been conducted in an unseemly manner, and each party, according to his own inclination, brought forward points as proper to be heard by the Bishop rather than the Prefect.

3. Overcome by these reasons, reminded also of the Apostolical precept, which reproves Christians, saying, Do not ye judge them that are within? and again, If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the Church. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you, no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with his brother, and that before unbelievers, I accepted the hearing of the cause, on condition however that

I should settle the terms of the compromise. For I saw that, if I decreed in your favour, the other party might not acquiesce; while, if the sentence were given for him, you and your holy sister would abandon your defence. And thus there would have been an unequal rule of decision. Suspicion might also have attached in their eyes to the influence which the |467 sacerdotal relation would exercise over my mind. For when does the defeated party consider the others to have greater equity than himself? And truly, the expenses of this old-standing contest would have been intolerable to both parties, had its termination been without fruit, or without, at least, the solace of munificence.

4. Since, therefore, I perceived that the issue was doubtful, the law disputed, the pleas on both sides numerous, and that petitions to the emperor of an invidious character were being prepared which contained charges of tampering with his decrees, perceiving also that in case of his being victorious he would rigorously sue for double the mesne profits, and for the costs of this protracted suit; while it was unbecoming your office to demand the expenses of the cause, and not competent for you to claim any of those profits which as possessor you had received, I preferred settling the dispute by a compromise to any aggravation of it by a decree. For there were other disputes liable to be raised, and what was still more grievous, although these disputes might be removed, hatreds would remain which are detrimental to feelings of good will. 5. Involved in these difficulties, and feeling that the office of the priest, the sex of the woman and the gravity of her widowed state, and regard for my friend appealed to me with a threefold and weighty claim, I thought that my course of conduct should be to desire no one's defeat, but the success of all. Nor was my intention baffled; you have all overcome, as regards kindred, as regards nature, as regards Scripture which says, Why do ye not rather take wrong, why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

6. But perhaps you deem yourself aggrieved by the unfavourable issue of the suit, and by your pecuniary losses. Better surely for priests are the losses than the gains of the world; For it is more blessed to give than to receive. But perhaps you will say, I ought not to have been exposed to fraud, to have suffered injury, to undergo loss. What then? Would you have inflicted these things? But although you did not do so, he would have complained of |468 suffering them. Consider therefore what the Apostle says, Wliy do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? So one may almost say that he who suffers not a wrong, inflicts it, for he who is the stronger ought to be the one to bear it. 7. But why do I treat with you as if this was my concern rather than your own? For in order to compound the quarrel you offered that for the time of her life your sister should possess part of the farm, but that after her death all the property should be ceded to your brother, and that no one should sue him either in your name or in that of the Church; but that, if he chose, he should hold it without being called on to dispense any portion to the Church. When I had declared this, and extolled the great grace of munificence which had thus been implanted in your mind, your brother replied that such an arrangement would be pleasing to him if all fear of injury to the property were removed. For how, he asked, could a woman, who was a widow besides, manage a property liable to tribute? How could it profit him, your yielding up to him your

right of possession, if he supposed that greater losses would accrue to him from the bad cultivation of the land?

8. The advocates on either side were influenced by these considerations. Wherefore, with the consent of all, it was determined that the honourable Laetus should undertake the farm, and should pay yearly to your sister a certain quantity of corn wine and oil. By this means your holy sister was relieved from anxiety, not deprived of her rights; she relinquished, not the fruits but the labour, not the revenues, but the hazard as it is often called of an uncertain return of them. If violent storms of wind should destroy the harvest, your sister will still retain undiminished the fruits of the seed-time. Laetus will ascribe to himself the unfavourable conditions of the arrangment, and should the pressure of necessity from time to time and of extraordinary imposts become severe, your sister will stand clear both of Laetus' loss and of receiving benefits from you; |469 while Laetus will console himself with the proprietorship of the estate.

9. Thus all have gained their point: Laetus, because he obtained the right over the property, which he had not before; your sister, because she will now enjoy the annual profits without dispute or strife; no one, however, will have gained so complete and glorious a victory as yourself, for together with the fulfilment of your bountiful dispositions towards your sister, you have rendered her partner of your fraternal union. For you have conceded, to your brother the property, to your sister the usufruct. But as regards the Church, nothing is lost to her which is gained to piety; for charity is no loss but a gain to Christ, charity also is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And thus the cause has been concluded according to the Apostolic model. We used to grieve that you were at strife, but your strife has been profitable, because it has led you to put on the form of the Apostolical life and discipline. Your strife was unbecoming the priesthood, but this transaction befits even the Apostolic rule.

10. And fear not that the Church should be placed out of the range of your bounty. She also partakes of your fruits, fruits even more plentiful, for she enjoys the fruit of your teaching, the service of your life, she has that fertility which you have watered by your discipline. Rich in these profits she seeks not temporal things, for she is in possession of what is eternal. But you have added not only Apostolical but also Evangelical fruits, for the Lord has said, Make to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness. You also have made to yourself friends, and, what is remarkable, from those who were at variance with you. You have made brethren return under the laws of kindred, you have assured then by this charity and this grace that they shall be received into eternal habitations. 11. Thus, under the guidance of Christ, and the directions of two priests, yourself, that is, who gave the first outline, and myself who gave the sentence, the peace which we have made will not fail; for there have been so many concurrent voices in favour of fidelity, that perfidy cannot be without punishment. |470

12. Laetus will now plough for his sister, whereas before he grudged her the services of others; Laetus will now gather the harvest for his sister, though he could not before endure the gifts of others; he will bear the fruits to the granaries of his sister, and this he shall do

gladly , in renewed accordance with the proper signification of his name. 13. You meanwhile, being conformed to the image of the Apostle of Christ, and assuming the prophetic authority, shall say unto the Lord, Thou hast possessed my reins. This possession better becomes Christ, that He may possess the virtues of His priest, that He may receive those fruits which belong to integrity and continence, and what is more, to charity and tranquillity. Farewell; love me, for I also love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXIII.

In this letter S. Ambrose praises Sisinnius for forgiving his son, who had married without his leave, and eompares him with some of the Saints of the Old Testament, and with the father in the parable of the prodigal son. AMBROSE TO SISINNIUS. 1. Your forgiving our son at my request for having married a wife without your knowledge I attribute to your natural affection rather than to your regard for me; for it is better that natural affection should have gained this from you than any one's request. Assuredly it is in the triumph of virtue that the priest's petition has its chief success, for he then obtains most when virtue is powerful, his petition must always coincide with the dictates of natural affection. And nature and your son obtained the more fully their request, in that the consideration of requests is usually a brief matter, whereas the habit of virtue is lasting and natural affection permanent.

2. It was indeed worthily done to recognize yourself to be a father, particularly since your cause for indignation was a just one; for I prefer to admit the fault, so that your fatherly indulgence may gain higher praise; for it was as |471 a father that you were offended; since you had a claim to exercise the choice of your judgment as to one to whom you were to become a father, and who was to be to you in the place of a daughter. For we obtain children either by nature or adoption; in nature it is a matter of chance; in adoption, of judgment; and we are more liable to blame in the case of our adopted than of our natural offspring; because it is ascribed to nature if our children by birth should happen to be degenerate, but that those who become ours by adoption or other such tie should prove unworthy of it is ascribed to our own mistake. You had therefore cause of displeasure against your son in this his choice of a wife to himself; you have also reason for forgiving him. For you have obtained a daughter for yourself without the danger of making a selection for yourself; if he has married well, he has obtained for you this advantage; if he has been deceived, you will make them better by receiving them into favour, but worse by disowning them.

3. It is with riper judgment that a father chooses a bride for his son, but when she is brought by the son to his father, when she enters her father-in-law's roof as the chosen of her husband, their purpose of obedience is stronger, the son fearing lest his election should be disapproved, the daughter-in-law that her attentions may not be acceptable. While the distinction of the paternal choice elevates the one, the other is humbled by the fear of giving

offence and bowed down by modesty. The son will not be able to throw blame on the wife, as if he himself were not answerable for any of those causes of offence which are wont to occur; on the contrary he will strive more diligently to obtain approbation of his judgment in regard of his wife, of his obedience in regard of himself. 4. You have therefore acted the part of a good parent and pardoned readily, but still upon supplication; before this was made, you would have been not pardoning but sanctioning. When this was done, to defer pardon any longer would have been unprofitable to them and very painful to yourself, for your paternal affection could no longer have held out. |472

5. Determined by motives of high devotion, Abraham, obeying the oracle of God, offered his son for a whole burnt sacrifice; and, as if destitute of natural affection, drew his sword, that no delay might obscure the brightness of the offering. But when he was commanded to spare his son he willingly sheathed his sword, and he who with this faithful intention was hastening to offer up his only son with still more zealous piety hastened to substitute a ram as a sacrifice. 7. Joseph also, in order to get his younger brother to him, feigned anger against his brethren on the plea, that they had concerted an act of fraud. But when Judah, one of his brethren, fell at his feet, while the others wept, he was moved and overcome by fraternal affection and was no longer able to maintain his assumed severity, but sending away all witnesses he told them they were his brethren, and he that very Joseph whom they had sold. He added that he remembered not his own wrong, making brotherly excuses for the malice of their betrayal of him, and referring what was so blameworthy to higher and deeper causes; forasmuch as by the providence of God it must needs so have been, to the end that by passing over into Egypt he might supply his kindred's need of provisions from another country, and in the time of dearth assist in supporting his father and his father's sons.

8. And what shall I say of holy David, who at the petition of one woman suffered his mind to be softened, and with paternal compassion received into his house his degenerate son, stained with his brother's blood? 9. So that father in the Gospel, when the younger son had spent all the substance he had received from his father by riotous living, yet when he returned confessing that he had sinned against him, moved by the humility of a single sentence, gave him an affectionate greeting, fell upon his neck, commanded the best robe and a ring and shoes to be brought forth, and having thus honoured him with a kiss, and loaded him with gifts, entertained him with a sumptuous banquet. 10. You have become an imitator of these by that parental affection whereby we approach nearest to the Divine |473 likeness, and therefore I have exhorted our daughter that, though it he winter, she should undertake the toil of the journey, for that she will pass the winter more commodiously not only in the mansion, hut also in the bosom of her father, now that wrath has given place to pardon. Moreover, that you may fully assimilate yourself to the likeness and pattern of the saints, you have accused those who by concocted falsehoods endeavoured to excite your mind against your son.

Farewell; love me, for I also love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXIV.

A brief letter of assent and approval. AMBROSE TO CYNEGIUS. 1. How ingenuous is the modesty with which you have commended yourself, in that you have consulted me concerning a matter which you did not approve, out of deference to your father that you might not injure piety, feeling safe that no reply could be made by me which was unbeseeming holy relationships. 2. But I have willingly taken upon me your burdens, and have reconciled, I hope, the niece to her uncle. Truly I am ignorant with what view he desired that she should become his daughter-in-law, changing his own character of uncle for that of father-in-law. I need not add more, lest this also should be a cause of confusion. Farewell my son, and love us, for we also love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXV.

S. Ambrose thanks Siricius for sending him letters by the Presbyter Syrus, whose speedy return he promises. AMBROSE TO SIRICIUS. 1. I am always pleased to receive a letter from you, but when you also send to me some of our fellow servants, as |474 you have now given our brother and co-presbyter Syrus a letter to me, my joy is doubled. I would however that this pleasure had been more lasting; for as soon as he had arrived he thought he must return, and this diminished my regret and added greatly to my estimation of him. 2. For I love those presbyters and deacons who when they have performed their mission will not allow themselves to remain absent any longer from their duties. For the prophet says, I have not been weary in following thee. And who can be weary in following Jesus, when He Himself says, Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Let us therefore never cease from following Jesus, which if we do we shall never fail, for He gives strength to them that follow Him. The more nearly you approach to the Source of power the stronger you will be.

3. Often, while we are thus following Him, the adversaries say to us, Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now. But let us not grow weary in following Him, let us not be turned aside by meeting with this crafty question. It was said to the prophet, when he was thrown into prison, when he was cast into the pit of mire, Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now. But he followed him so much the more, and therefore attained the prize, and received the crowd; for following Jesus he was not weary; for there is no weariness in Jacob, neither shall sorrow be in Israel. Farewell; love me, for I love one who loves me, and whom I regard as a father.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXVI.

S. Ambrose speaks briefly in praise of Priscus. AMBROSE TO SIRICIUS. 1. When Priscus, my friend and co-equal in age, was coming here, you gave him a letter to me, and now that |475 he is returning I give him the reply which I send both to duty and affection. By this service he has recompensed us both, for he has given me yours, and you mine, and therefore ought to reag the reward of this his service by an increase of favour. Farewell, my brother; love me, for I love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXVII.

A Letter of commendation. AMBROSE TO BISHOPS SEGATIUS AND DELPHINUS. 1. My son Polybius, on his return from Africa, where he discharged the duties of the proconsulship with credit, passed some days with us, and inspired my heart with singular affection towards him. 2. Then, when he wished to go from hence, he requested me to write to both of you. I promised to do so, and having dictated a letter delivered it to him superscribed with both your names. He asked for another; but I said that I had directed this to both of you according to our custom and usage, forasmuch as your holy minds are gratified not by the number of letters but by the association of names, and that, united as you were in feeling, you would not allow yourselves to be separated in name; farther, that to employ this compendious form of love was a prescribed part of my duty.

3. Why need I say more? He asked for another, and I gave it, but so as neither to deny him what he asked, nor to change my accustomed mode of action. Thus he has a letter to deliver to each of you, for this was all he put forward, his having nothing for one, when he had delivered his letter to the other. And this office of undivided affection I may render to you without any danger of offence, or thought of division; especially since this form of writing is Apostolical, so that either one may write to many as Paul to the Galatians, or two to one, as we read, Paul a |476 Prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon. Health to you; love me and pray for me, for I love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXVIII.

A friendly letter of commendation of Priscus. AMBROSE TO ATTICUS. 1. You entrusted my friend Priscus with a letter, which he delivered to me, and I now give mine in turn to Priscus. Continue to love Priscus, as you do, and even more than before; this I advise, because I also value my Priscus highly. For I feel towards him that ancient love, which from our childhood upwards has grown together with our years; but it is long since I saw him before, so that not only in name but from so long an interval of time he came to me as truly Priscus. Farewell: love me your lover, for I also love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER LXXXIX.

A brief acknowledgement of letters. AMBROSE TO ALYPIUS. 1. Antiochus, a man of consular rank, delivered to me your Excellency's letter; nor did I neglect to reply to it; for I sent you a letter by my own messenger, and another occasion having offered, I sent, if I mistake not, a second. But since the offices of friendship are rather, I think, to be added to than balanced; it became my duty, especially on his return who had laid upon me such a debt of obligation by your letters, to make some return in the way of my own correspondence, that so I might stand clear with both of you, and he with you, bound as he was to bring you back what he had brought from you. Farewell; love me, who love you. |477

Letters 81-91 — LETTER XC.

S. Ambrose dwells on the mutual love of himself and Antonius. AMBROSE TO ANTONIUS. 1. You never are silent in regard of me, nor ought I ever to complain of being neglected by your silence, knowing that I am not absent from your thoughts. For since you bestow that which is the most precious, how can you withhold that which many others receive, not so much from any habitual affection as from an interchange of civility. 2. And even from my own feelings I can judge in turn of yours, and these lead me to believe that I am never absent from you, nor you from me, so closely are our souls united. Nor do I feel as if we ever required each others' letters, for I daily converse with you as if present in body, turning towards you my eyes, my affections, and all my regards. 3. In such things as these I delight to cope with you; for, to speak openly with one who is inseparable from my heart, your letters make me ashamed. I beg therefore that you will cease to be always returning me thanks, for my services to you have their highest reward, if I may believe I have not been wanting in my duty towards you.

Farewell; love me, for I also love you.

Letters 81-91 — LETTER XCI.

A graceful letter of affection. AMBROSE TO HIS BROTHER CANDIDIANUS. 1. Great is the beauty of your language, but that of your love is still more apparent, for your letters manifest to me the bright colours of your mind, blessed and most dear brother. The Lord give you His Grace and Blessing, |478 for in your letters I recognize your good wishes rather than my good deserts. For what merits of mine can equal such commendations as yours? Love me, my brother, for I love you. [Footnotes moved to the end and renumbered. Marginal biblical references and running headings omitted] 1. It seems necessary to the sense here to insert 'quae' before 'obtexerent.' 2. v. c. here is an abbreviation for vir clarissimus, a title of official rank, see note in p. 101. 3. laetus

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