Commentary on the Song of Songs

Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 185–253)

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Commentary on the Song of Songs — Book One

English translation of Origen of Alexandria's Commentary on the Song of Songs (Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum), in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 410). Translated from the OCR-corrected Migne Patrologia Graeca 13 (Delarue) base text. Rufinus's translation is intrinsically incomplete, running only as far as Song of Songs 2:15. This English translation is in the public domain.

BOOK ONE

» Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. «

We must recall what we noted beforehand in the preface, namely that this little book, having the appearance of a wedding-song, is written in the manner of a drama. And we said that a drama is where fixed characters are introduced who speak, while others sometimes come on the scene, and others withdraw, or draw near, and thus the whole is carried forward through the changes of the characters. This, then, will be the character of the whole book, and according to it, so far as we are able, a historical exposition will be fitted by us. But the spiritual understanding is directed, no less according to what we indicated in the preface, either to the Church in relation to Christ under the title of bride or bridegroom, or to the union of the soul with the Word of God. Now, then, there is introduced under the form of the narrative a certain bride who has received, under the title of a betrothal and dowry, most worthy gifts from a most noble bridegroom; but since the bridegroom delays for a very long time, she is stirred by the longing of her love for him, and lies pining in her house, doing everything so that she may at some time see her bridegroom and enjoy his kisses. And since she sees that her love can neither be put off, nor that she is able to obtain what she desires, she turns herself to prayer and makes supplication to God, knowing that he is the Father of her bridegroom.

Let us consider her, then, lifting up holy hands without anger and dispute, in modest attire with reverence and sobriety, adorned with the most worthy ornaments with which it is fitting for a noble bride to be adorned, but burning with desire for the bridegroom, and agitated by the inner wound of love, pouring out, as we said, her prayer to God, and saying concerning her bridegroom: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. These are the

things that the historical explanation, composed in the manner of a drama, contains. But let us see whether the inner meaning can be fittingly adapted in this way. Let the Church be the one desiring to be united to Christ. And understand the Church as the assembly of all the saints. Let this Church, then, be as it were the single person of all, who speaks and says: I have all things, I am filled with the gifts which I received before the nuptials under the title of betrothal or dowry. For long ago, when I was being prepared for marriage to the son of the King, the firstborn of all creation, his holy angels obeyed and ministered to me, bringing to me the law in place of a betrothal gift. For the law is said to have been ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator. The prophets also ministered to me.

For they too spoke all those things by which they might not only show and point out to me concerning the Son of God — to whom they desired to betroth me by these things which are called pledges and dowry-gifts — but also, that they might kindle me into love and desire of him, they announced to me with prophetic voices concerning his coming, and, filled with the Holy Spirit, they preached to me of his innumerable powers and his immense works. His beauty too, and his fairness, and his gentleness they described, so that by all these things I was inflamed beyond endurance to love of him. But since the age is now nearly at its end, and yet his own presence is not granted to me, but I see only his ministers ascending and descending to me, for this reason I pour out my prayer to you, the Father of my bridegroom, and I beseech you that at last, taking pity on our love, you would send him; that he may now speak to me no longer through his ministers alone, the angels and the prophets, but that he himself may come in his own person, and kiss me with the kiss of his mouth — that is, may pour the words of his own mouth into my mouth, that I may hear him himself speaking, that I may see him himself teaching.

For these are the kisses of Christ which he extended to the Church, when in his coming Christ himself, set in the flesh, proclaimed to her the words of faith and charity and peace, according to what Isaiah had promised, and being sent ahead to the bride had said: ”Not a legate, nor an angel, but the Lord himself will save us.”

But in the third place of exposition let us introduce the soul, whose whole zeal is to be joined and united to the Word of God, and to enter within the mysteries of his wisdom and knowledge as into the bridal chambers of the heavenly bridegroom; and to this soul too there have been given, as gifts, the very presence of the bridegroom — under the name, that is, of a dowry. For just as the dowry of the Church was the volumes of the law and the prophets, so to this soul let there be reckoned as dowry-gifts the law of nature, and rational sense, and the freedom of the will. And having these gifts of her dowry, let there be for her the teaching of a first instruction, coming down from admonishers and teachers. But since in these things there is not for her the full and perfect fulfillment of her desire and of her love, let her pray that her mind, pure and virginal, may be illumined by the very illuminations and visitations of the Word of God. For when the mind is filled with divine perceptions and understandings through the ministry of no man or angel, then let it believe that it is

receiving the very kisses of the Word of God. For the sake, therefore, of these and suchlike kisses let the soul, praying to God, say: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.

For while she was incapable of grasping the pure and solid teaching of the Word of God himself, she received the necessary kisses, that is, perceptions, from the mouth of teachers; but when of her own accord she has now begun to discern obscure things, to unravel what is perplexed, to loose what is entangled, and to explain parables and riddles and the sayings of the wise along the fitting lines of understanding, then let her believe that she has now received the kisses of her bridegroom himself, that is, of the Word of God. And he set "kisses" in the plural, that we may understand that the illumination of each obscure meaning is a kiss of the Word of God conveyed to the perfect soul. And according to this, perhaps, the prophetic and perfect mind was saying: I opened my mouth and drew in the spirit. But by the mouth of the bridegroom we understand the power of God, by which he illumines the mind, and, as if by a certain discourse of love addressed to it — if indeed it is worthy to receive the presence of so great a power — he makes manifest whatever things are unknown and obscure to it; and this is the truer and nearer and holier kiss, which is said to be offered by the bridegroom, the Word of God, to the bride, that is, to the pure and perfect soul.

The image of this thing is that kiss which in the Church, at the time of the mysteries, we give to one another. As often, therefore, as we find in our heart, without admonishers, something that is sought concerning the divine doctrines and meanings, so often let us believe that kisses have been given to us by the bridegroom, the Word of God. But when, seeking something concerning the divine meanings, we are unable to find it, then, taking up the affection of this prayer, let us ask of God the visitation of his Word, and let us say: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. For the Father knows the capacity of each soul, and knows at what time, to which soul, he ought to offer the kisses of his Word — in understandings, that is, and perceptions.

» For your breasts are better than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments is above all spices. «

Understand first, as though in the drama of the narrative, that the bride with hands lifted up to God has poured out a prayer to the Father, and has prayed that the bridegroom might now come to her, and that he himself might pour upon her the kiss of his own mouth. And while she prays these things to the Father, in the very prayer in which she said, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," she prepares also to add other words of prayer, and to say that in this very beginning of her speech the bridegroom was present, and stood beside her as she prayed and revealed his own words, and that this same bridegroom stood anointed with wondrous ointments, and with such as it befitted a bridegroom to be fragrant with. But the bride, when she saw present the one for whom she was praying that he might be present, and that while she was still speaking there was granted to her what she was praying for, and that there were given to her by him the kisses she had begged for, being made glad on this account, and moved by the beauty of his breasts and by the odor of his fragrance, turns the discourse of the prayer she had set out upon toward the presence of

the bridegroom who was there; and when she had said, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," she adds after these words, addressing the bridegroom now present, saying: "Your breasts are better than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments is above all spices." These things for the present according to the historical understanding, which we have said is woven in the manner of a drama. But now let us inquire what the inner meaning holds.

We find that the ruling faculty of the heart is called by diverse names in the divine Scriptures, which names are wont to be fitted according to the causes and matters that are being treated. For sometimes it is called the heart, as: "Blessed are the pure in heart"; "With the heart it is believed unto righteousness. But if it be the time of a banquet, according to the manner and arrangement of those reclining, it is called either the bosom or the breast: just as John in the Gospel relates concerning a certain disciple whom Jesus loved, that he reclined in his bosom or upon his breast; he, assuredly, to whom Simon Peter, beckoning, said: "Ask, who is this of whom he speaks. And then, reclining upon the breast of Jesus, he says to him: "Lord, who is it? For in these things it is certain that John is said to have rested in the ruling faculty of the heart of Jesus and in the inner senses of his teaching, there seeking and searching out the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which were hidden in Christ Jesus. But also that the bosom of Christ should be taken in the place of holy doctrines, I think does not seem unfitting. In diverse ways, therefore, as we had begun to say, the ruling faculty of the heart is designated in the holy Scriptures, as also nonetheless in Leviticus, where, concerning the sacrifices, the little breast of separation and the arm are set apart for the priests;

and in this little breast and arm set apart and separated, surpassing other men, he wills there to be in the priests the ruling faculty of the heart and the beauty of works. Concerning which we have expounded more fully in the book of Leviticus, as the Lord deigned to grant. According to these things, therefore, also in the present passage, since the drama that is enacted appears to be one of love, let us understand in the breasts the ruling faculty of the heart, so that what is said may seem to be of this sort: "Your heart, O my bridegroom" — that is, the teachings which are within you, or the grace of doctrine — "surpasses all wine," which is wont to gladden the heart of man. For just as in those things of which it says, "For they shall see God," the heart seems fittingly to have been named, while among those reclining the bosom and the breast are set down, on account, without doubt, of the posture of those reclining and the form of the banquet; and again, as among the priests the little breast and the arm are designated by mystical utterances, so also I think in the present passage, where the posture and the conversations of lovers are described, this same ruling faculty of the heart is most agreeably called by the name of breasts. Good, therefore, are the breasts of the bridegroom, since in them are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And these breasts the bride compares to wine, but she so compares them that she prefers them. And by wine are to be understood those teachings and doctrines which, through the law and the prophets, the bride had been accustomed to receive before the coming of the bridegroom.

But now, considering this teaching which flows from the breasts of the Bridegroom, she marvels and is astonished, seeing it far more excellent than that with which she had been gladdened before the coming of the Bridegroom—as though from the spiritual wine that the holy fathers and prophets ministered, they who also planted vineyards of this kind, as Noah first, and Isaiah "on a horn, in a fruitful place," and cultivated them. Seeing, then, that there now dwells in the Bridegroom a great eminence of doctrines and of knowledge, and that a teaching far more perfect than there was among the ancients flows forth from him, she says: "Your breasts are better than wine"—better, that is, than that teaching with which I was gladdened by the ancients. For it is of this wine of the ancients that Ecclesiastes must be understood to speak, where he says: "I said in my heart: Come, and I will test you with gladness, and I will see in good. And again, speaking of the same vineyards, the same Ecclesiastes says: "I magnified my work, I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself, I made for myself gardens and paradises," and the rest. But there are also of this vineyard certain mystical ministers, who are called pourers of wine. For so the same one says: "And I made for myself male singers and female singers, and in the gladness of the sons of men, pourers of wine and pouresses of wine.

See, therefore, whether we can, both in other passages and also in this, understand the Savior mingling the new streams of his breasts with the old wine, when Mary and Joseph, seeking him, "found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, and hearing and questioning them," when also "all were marveling at his answers. But perhaps too the likeness of this figure is fulfilled there, where, going up onto the mountain, he taught the crowds, and said: "It was said to the ancients: You shall not kill; but I say to you: Everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable"; and: "It was said to the ancients: You shall not commit adultery; but I say to you: Everyone who looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Insofar, then, as this teaching of his surpasses that ancient one, in that same measure the Bride understands and declares that his breasts are better than wine.

But the fact that the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-drinker," this too has a bearing on the matter. Such, I think, was that wine also in Cana of Galilee which was being drunk at the wedding feast; and when it ran short, He made yet another wine, to which the steward of the feast bore witness that it was exceedingly good and far more excellent than the wine that had already been served, when he said: "Every man sets out the good wine first, and when they have become drunk, then that which is worse; but you have kept the good wine until now. And Solomon too, who because of the wisdom he had received from God was an object of admiration to the queen of Sheba, who had come to test him with questions in which that same queen might examine him and marvel at him — hear the Scripture recounting it: "And the queen of Sheba," it says, "saw all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built, the provision of his banquet, and the seating of his servants and the order of his ministers, and his garments, and his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings which he offered in the house of God, and she was astonished," and so on.

In these things, then, note how she who came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon marvels, among the rest, also at the food of his banquet, or at his cupbearers, and is said to have been amazed at these things. Now I do not know whether we should suppose the queen to have been so foolish that, having come for this reason from the ends of the earth — that she might hear the wisdom of Solomon — she should marvel at bodily foods, and at that common wine, and at the pourers of wine in the king's service. For what in these things would seem worthy of a queen's admiration, seeing they are common to almost all men? But it seems to me that she marveled at the foods of his teaching and the wine of the doctrines which were being proclaimed by him through divine wisdom. This was that wine also which is reported through Jeremiah concerning the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab, who at that time when the sins of the people had grown strong, and captivity was threatening on account of the iniquities of the populace, were called together to drink wine, and they said that their father Jonadab had commanded them that neither they nor their sons should drink wine forever, nor build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, but should dwell in tents all the days of their life.

And God embraces them because they had kept their father's precept and had refused to drink wine. For then, on account of the sins of the people and their iniquities, their vine was of the vine of Sodom, and their branches of Gomorrah, their grape a grape of gall, and a cluster of bitterness; the venom of asps and the fury of dragons was their wine. For this reason, therefore, the sons of Jonadab are held praiseworthy, who refused to drink and to receive such wine — that is, poisoned doctrines and doctrines foreign to the faith of God. For this reason, perhaps, God smote the vines of the Egyptians, as is written in the psalm, lest they should make such wine. Therefore, if we have understood the differences of wine, and have perceived that they consist in the diversity of doctrines, then when the bride here says, "For your breasts are good above wine," by "wine" let us of course understand good wine, not bad. For the bridegroom's doctrines are preferred as compared with good doctrines, not bad. For she had first tasted good wine in the law and the prophets; and having, as it were, been prepared beforehand by it to receive gladness of heart, and to make herself ready so that she might be able also to take in that gladness which was to come through the breasts of the bridegroom himself — the teaching more excellent and more eminent than all — she says: "Your breasts are good above wine."

And see whether we can still fit to this figure that parable of the Gospel which says: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which when a man has found, he hides it, and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. This treasure, then, is hidden not in some desert place, nor in the woods, but in a field. And it is surely possible that that field has vineyards too, which yield wine, and has also the treasure for the sake of which, when he had sold everything, the man who had found the treasure there bought that field. He, then, who bought the field can say that the treasure which is in the field is good, more than the wine that is in it. So, then, the bridegroom too and the breasts of the bridegroom, which like a treasure lie hidden in the law and the prophets, are good, more than the wine that is in them — that is, more than that teaching which is open and

gladdens the hearers. Good, therefore, are the breasts of the bridegroom. For the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him; and when these have been opened and revealed to the eyes of the bride, they will seem to her far more excellent than was before that wine of the law and of the prophetic teaching.

But if we ought also to understand a third exposition, concerning the perfect soul and the Word of God, we can say that anyone, so long as he is little and has not yet offered himself wholly to God, drinks the wine which that field yields — the field which has within itself also the hidden treasure — and drinking, he is gladdened by the wine. But when he has offered and devoted himself to God, and has become a Nazirite, and has found the hidden treasure, and has come to the very breasts and fountains of the Word of God, he will no longer drink wine and strong drink, saying to the Word of God itself concerning those treasures which are stored up in him of knowledge and wisdom: ”For your breasts are good above wine.”

Now there are certain ointments of the Bridegroom, in whose fragrance the Bride has taken delight, and she says: ”The scent of your ointments is above all aromatic spices. Aromatic spices are kinds of perfumed substances. But the Bride had a certain acquaintance with, and knowledge of, aromatic spices — that is, of the words of the Law and the prophets — by which, before the coming of the Bridegroom, she seemed to be instructed, though only in a moderate way, and trained for the worship of God, being as yet a little girl, and living under guardians and stewards and tutors; for ”the Law was our tutor unto Christ. Now all these had been aromatic spices, in which she was seen to be nourished and prepared for her Bridegroom. But when the fullness of times came, and she had grown up, and the Father sent His Only-begotten, anointed with the Holy Spirit, into this world, the Bride, having smelled the fragrance of the divine ointment, and perceiving that all those aromatic spices which she had earlier seemed to use are far inferior in comparison with the sweetness of this new and heavenly ointment, says: ”The scent of your ointments is above all aromatic spices. Since the same Christ is called both Bridegroom and high priest — high priest indeed according to this, that He is the mediator of God and men and of every creature, for which He also became a propitiation, offering Himself a victim for the sin of the world;

but Bridegroom according to this, that He is joined to the Church, which has no spot or wrinkle or any such thing — consider whether perhaps that priestly ointment which in Exodus is commanded to be compounded by the art of the perfumer holds the meaning of this ointment which the Bride now, having smelled it, admires; and you will see that those aromatic spices of which the ointment seemed to be compounded, with which Aaron was anointed, since they were earthly and of bodily matter, but this ointment, with which she now saw the Bridegroom anointed, is spiritual and heavenly — therefore she says: ”Because the scent of your ointments is above all aromatic spices. Let us then see how that ointment was compounded: ”And the Lord spoke,” it says, ”to Moses, saying: Take for yourself the flower of choice myrrh, five hundred shekels, and sweet cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels, and sweet cane, two hundred and fifty shekels, and of cassia five hundred shekels according to the holy shekel, and oil from olives, a hin, and you shall make of it the oil of

holy anointing, an ointment by the art of the perfumer. Now these things the Bride had heard reported in the Law, but she now discerns their meaning and truth.

See then that these four kinds of that ointment held the pattern of the incarnation of the Word of God, which took a body compacted of four elements — in which body the myrrh preserves the tokens of His death, which He undertook either as high priest for the people or as Bridegroom for the Bride. But that it is written not simply ”myrrh,” but ”the flower of myrrh,” and ”of choice myrrh,” indicated not only His death, but also that He would be the firstborn from the dead, and that those who had been planted together in the likeness of His death would be not only called, but chosen. But the cinnamon is called immaculate, doubtless on account of the Church, which, purified by the washing of water, He made immaculate, having no spot or wrinkle or anything of this kind. But the cane too is taken up, because ”His tongue is the pen of a scribe writing swiftly,” designating by the perfumes of sweetness the grace of doctrine. Cassia also is employed, a kind said to be most hot and most burning: in which is shown either the fervor of the Holy Spirit, or the pattern of the coming judgment by fire. And the number of five hundred, or of two hundred and fifty shekels, either holds the mystery of the five senses in Him made perfect a hundredfold, or the number of fifty, being the number of pardon, set down fivefold, signifies the remission of sins given through Him.

But all these are gathered together with pure oil, through which is shown either that it was for the sake of mercy alone that He who was in the form of God took the form of a servant, or that those things which had been assumed from material substance in Christ were, through the Holy Spirit, reduced into one, and made into one form, which is the person of the mediator. That material oil, then, could in no way be called the oil of gladness. But this oil — that is, the ointment of the Holy Spirit, with which Christ was anointed, and of which the Bride, now perceiving its scent, has marveled — is rightly called the oil of gladness, because ”the fruit of the Spirit is joy”: with which God anointed Him who ”loved justice and hated iniquity. For therefore it is said: ”The Lord your God anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows. And therefore the scent of His ointments is above all aromatic spices. But we use a similar exposition even if this discourse is transferred to each individual soul set in the love and desire of the Word of God, one who has run through all the branches of teaching in order, in which, before the knowledge of the Word of God, she is seen to have been exercised and educated, whether descending from the moral schools or from the natural.

For all those were to her certain aromatic spices, inasmuch as in these a commendable instruction and a correction of morals is acquired, in these the vanity of the world is detected, and the false wonders of perishable things are rejected. All these, then, were to her as aromatic spices and certain fragrant perfumes of the soul. But when it came to the knowledge of the mysteries and the science of the divine doctrines, when access was gained to the very gates of wisdom — and wisdom not of this world, nor of the princes of this world who are brought to nothing, but to that very wisdom of God which is discoursed among the perfect,

and when the mystery which was not known to former generations was revealed to the sons of men — when, I say, the soul has ascended to the knowledge of so great a secret, she rightly says: "The scent of your ointments" — namely the spiritual and mystical understanding — "is above all aromatic spices" of moral and natural philosophy. But let it not escape us that in certain copies, in place of what we read, "Because your breasts are good above wine," we find written, "Because your utterances are good above wine";

which, although they may seem to have signified more evidently those very things which we have discoursed by spiritual interpretation, nevertheless we in all things keep to the writings of the Seventy Translators, being certain that the Holy Spirit willed that the forms of the mysteries lie hidden within the divine Scriptures, and not be held openly and in plain view.

» Your name is an ointment poured out. Therefore the maidens have loved you and have drawn you after them. In the fragrance of your ointments we will run. «

The historical exposition here is indeed the same as in the preceding passages, and it runs on through the present place too until some change of persons occurs, since this is what is demanded by the order of the drama that we have adopted in this exposition. Yet there may well be seen in these words a certain prophecy uttered from the person of the bride concerning Christ — that at the coming of our Lord and Savior it would come to pass that his name should be so diffused throughout the whole earth and through the entire world that it would become a fragrance of sweetness in every place, just as the Apostle too said: "For we are the good fragrance of Christ in every place; to some indeed a fragrance from death unto death, but to others a fragrance from life unto life. For if to all he had been a fragrance from life unto life, she would surely have said here too: "All have loved you and drawn you. But she says that now, when your name has become an ointment poured out, they have loved you — not those aged souls, souls clothed with the old man, having wrinkles and spots, but the maidens, that is, souls set in the growth of youth and beauty, souls that are ever being made new and are renewed from day to day, putting on the new man who has been created according to God.

Therefore for the sake of these maidens, souls set amid advances and increases of life, he who was in the form of God emptied himself, that his name might become an ointment poured out; that he might no longer dwell only in the unapproachable light and remain in the form of God, but that the Word might be made flesh, whereby these maidens, these souls set amid advances of progress, might not only love him but also draw him to themselves. For each soul draws and takes to itself the Word of God according to the measure of its capacity and its faith. And when the souls have drawn the Word of God to themselves and have grafted him into their senses and understandings, and have felt his sweetness and the pleasantness of his fragrance, when they have taken in the perfume of his ointments — that is, when they have come to know the reasons for his coming, the causes of his redemption and his passion, and the love wherewith for the salvation of all he, the immortal one, went even to the death of the cross — then the maidens, invited by all these as by the fragrances of a certain divine

and unspeakable ointment, that is, souls made full of vigor and eagerness, run after him, and hasten to the fragrance of his sweetness not with a slow step nor with tardy paces, but with rapid course and all speed, even as did he who said: "So I run that I may lay hold."

But as to what she says: "Your name is an ointment poured out, therefore the maidens have loved you, and have drawn you after them; in the fragrance of your ointments we will run" — the maidens draw Christ to themselves, if indeed it be understood of the Churches, which is one when it is perfect. But the maidens are many, while they are still being instructed and are making progress. These, then, draw Christ to themselves through faith, because Christ, when he shall have seen two or three gathered together in the faith of his name, goes thither, and is in the midst of them, drawn by their faith and summoned by their unanimity. But if, by the third exposition, these things ought to be understood of the soul that follows the Word of God, then whatever soul has first been schooled in moral matters and secondly has also been exercised in natural matters, through all those things which we have shown above to be taught in these disciplines, that very correction of morals, and the erudition in things, and the uprightness of learning draws the Word of God to itself, and he is willingly drawn; for he comes most gladly to erudite souls, and indulgently allows himself to be drawn by them, and graciously grants it. But I truly ask:

if his name alone, because it has become an ointment poured out, has wrought so great a work, and has so roused up the maidens that first they drew him to themselves, and, having him with them, took in the fragrance of his ointments, and straightway ran after him — if all these things, I say, have been effected by his name alone, what do you suppose his very substance will do? What of virtue, what of vigor will these maidens receive from it, if in some way they should ever be able to attain to that very incomprehensible and unspeakable substance of his? For my part I think that, if they should ever attain to this, they will no longer walk nor run, but, bound by certain bonds of his love, will cleave to him, so that no place for any further movement may remain in them any more, but they may be with him one spirit, and there may be fulfilled in them that which is written: "As you, Father, in me, and I in you are one, so may these also be one in us."

But now, for the moment, as it seems, the bride, having joined to herself many maidens — of whom it is said in what follows that there is no number — being seized by one sense alone, that is, by smell only, records that she runs into the fragrance of the ointments of the bridegroom; whether because she herself still has need of running and of progress, or because she indeed is perfect, but on behalf of these maidens who still have need of running and of progress she too confesses that she runs; just as that man also, when he himself was not under the law, nevertheless became under the law, that he might gain those who are under the law; and again, though he is under the law of Christ, yet to those who are without law he too became without law, that he might save those who are without law. And this comes to pass, as we have said, while as yet only her sense of smell has received him. What do you suppose they will do when the Word of God has occupied their hearing also, and their sight and touch and taste, and has furnished to each several sense the powers

proper to it, according to their nature and capacity? — so that the eye, if it has been able to see his glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, may no longer wish to see anything beyond, nor the hearing to hear anything other than the Word of life and salvation.

But also the one whose hand has handled of the Word of life will handle nothing further that is material, nothing fragile and perishable; nor, when the taste has tasted the good Word of God, and his flesh, and the bread which came down from heaven, will it endure to taste anything else after these. For in comparison with his sweetness and pleasantness every remaining savor will seem to it rough and bitter, and therefore it will feed on this alone. For whatever sweetness it may desire, it will find in this; for he renders himself apt and suited to all things. In short, to those who are regenerated from incorruptible seed he becomes rational and guileless milk; but to those who are weak in anything he offers himself as vegetables, for the friendship and grace of hospitality. But to those who, according to their capacity of receiving, have senses exercised to the discernment of good and evil, he offers himself as solid food. But if there are any who have gone out of Egypt, and, having followed the pillar of fire and cloud, have come into the wilderness, he descends to them from heaven, furnishing them a minute and subtle food, like to that of the angels, so that man eats the bread of angels. He has also in himself many other and innumerable differences of foods, which meanwhile one clothed with skin, with flesh and bones and sinews, cannot receive.

But whoever has been worthy to return and to be with Christ, and whoever, being found faithful in a little, shall be set over many things, he will taste and receive the delight of the Lord, being brought to a certain place which, on account of this abundance and variety of foods, is named the place of delights. For which reason it is also said to be situated in Eden, which signifies delights. For there it will be said to him: ”Delight yourself in the Lord. And he will delight not in the one sense of eating and tasting only, but he will also delight in hearing and in sight and in touch and in smell. For he will run into the fragrance of his ointment. And thus he who has come to the summit of perfection and of blessedness will delight with all his senses in the Word of God. Wherefore we too, being set in these passages, entreat the hearers of these things that they mortify their carnal senses, lest they take up anything of what is said according to the motions of the body, but that they present those more divine senses of the inner man for the receiving of these things; even as Solomon also teaches us, saying: ”But you shall find the divine sense. And as Paul too writes to the Hebrews concerning the perfect, as we mentioned above, that they have senses exercised to the discernment of good or evil;

showing that there are in man, besides these bodily senses, five others no less, which are sought by exercise, and are called exercised, namely when they examine the understanding of things with a keener sharpness. For not perfunctorily and carelessly is that to be heard which the Apostle says concerning the perfect, that they have senses exercised to the discernment of good or evil.

That this may shine forth more clearly, let us take, if it seems good, an example from these bodily senses, and so at last we shall presently come to those divine senses of the inner man

which Scripture names. For if the bodily eye have the exercise of sight, with no obstacle hindering it, it will apprehend either the colors of bodies, or their magnitudes and qualities, wholly and without any falsity. But if the sight be hindered either by a mist, or by some other weakness, and it think the red to be white, and the green to be black, or that something is straight when it is crooked and twisted, without doubt the judgment of the mind will be thrown into confusion, and one thing will be taken for another. So, then, the inner sight also, unless it be trained by instruction and diligence, whereby through much experience it may have discernment of good and evil, but ignorance and inexperience fall upon its eyes like a mist, or even the languor of some malice come upon it as upon bleary eyes, can in no way behold the distinction of good or evil: and thence it comes to pass that it does evil things as though they were good, and spurns good things as though they were evil.

And according to this pattern which we have treated concerning the sight of the body and of the soul, consequently also concerning hearing, and taste, and smell, and touch, by referring the several powers of each kind of the bodily senses to the senses of the soul, you will clearly recognize what exercises ought to be applied in each, and what amendment ought to be prepared. But we have pursued these things with a somewhat broad digression, wishing to show that the smelling of the bride and of the maidens, whereby they smelled the odor of the bridegroom's ointments, is spoken not of the sense of the body, but of that divine and inner odor of him who is called the inner man. This sense of smelling, therefore, insofar as it is sound and whole, having received the odor of Christ, leads from life unto life. But if it be not sound, having received this odor, it casts down from death into death, according to him who said: "For we are the good odor of Christ, to some indeed of life unto life, but to others an odor of death unto death. Finally, those too who have understanding of herbs and skill in spices report that there are certain spices, of which, if certain animals catch the odor, they straightway perish; but others are refreshed by the same odor, and receive life.

And now, therefore, in these very expositions and discourses which we have in hand, there seems to be for some life out of life, but for others death out of death. For if the man who is called animal, who cannot perceive and understand the things that are of the Spirit of God, hear these things expounded in this way, without doubt he will mock, and will pronounce these things to be foolish and empty, saying that dreams are being treated rather than the causes of things and divine doctrines. For these men, therefore, this odor of the Song of Songs becomes death unto death, that is, from the death of unbelief unto the death of judgment and condemnation. But to those who follow the spiritual and subtle sense, and who understand that there is greater truth in the things that are not seen than in the things that are seen, and that the invisible and spiritual things are held to be truer with God than the visible and bodily ones, this kind of understanding will without doubt seem worthy to be embraced and followed. For they recognize that such is the path of the truth to be understood by which one comes to God. But if he who judges these things foolish and to be mocked be a stranger to the faith, it is no wonder.

But if there be any one of those who seem to believe, and to receive the authority of the Scriptures, and yet does not receive this form of spiritual exposition, but mocks and disparages it, let us try from other places of the Scriptures to instruct and persuade him. And if perhaps he can thus come to his senses, let us say some such things as these to him: it is written, ”The commandment of the Lord is bright, enlightening the eyes. Let him tell us, then, what are the eyes that are enlightened by the light of the commandment. And again: ”He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. What are these ears, which he who has them, he alone is said to hear the words of Christ? And again: ”For we are the good odor of Christ unto God”; and in another place: ”Taste and see that the Lord is sweet. And what does another say: ”Our hands have handled of the word of life. Do you think that in all these things he will not be moved to observe that all these things are spoken not of the bodily senses, but of those which we have taught to be present in each one according to the inner man? — unless he who is of this sort be driven by the vice of contentiousness and boasting.

Since by these vices both that inner sight is blinded, and the sense of smell is stopped up, and the hearing is hardened, deservedly he can neither see the things that are spiritual, nor hear, but neither can he catch that odor of Christ, whereby, now that it has been received, the maidens themselves, in whom this sense was well sound and vigorous, run after him into the odor of his ointments, and running they do not fail, nor grow weary, because, refreshed by the sweetness of that odor which is from life unto life, they continually grow strong.

What he says can also still be understood in this way: ”Your name is ointment poured out. Therefore the maidens have loved you.” The only-begotten Son of God, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself and took the form of a servant. But he emptied himself, without doubt, of the fullness in which he was. Those, therefore, who say that ”of his fullness we have all received,” they themselves are the maidens who, receiving of that fullness out of which he emptied himself — and his name became an ointment poured out — say, ”After you we will run in the odor of your ointments.” For unless he had poured out the ointment, that is, the fullness of the divine Spirit, and humbled himself even to the form of a servant, no one could have grasped him in that fullness of divinity — except perhaps the bride alone, inasmuch as she seems to indicate that this ointment was poured out and gave the cause of love not to herself, but to the maidens. For thus she says: ”Your name is ointment poured out; therefore the maidens have loved you.” As if she were to say: The maidens indeed have loved you for this reason, because you emptied yourself of the form of God, and your name became an ointment poured out. But I have loved you not for the ointment poured out, but for the very fullness of the ointments. For this is what she indicates in that place where she says, ”The odor of your ointments is above all spices.” But as to the fact that she too says that, together with the maidens, she will run after him, I say this is the reason: that all who are perfect become all things to all, that they may gain all, as we have already explained above.

» The king has brought me into his chamber. Let us exult and rejoice in you. «

When the bride had made known to her bridegroom that the young maidens, captivated by his fragrance, were running after him, and that she too would run with them so as to offer them a pattern in all things, now, as though having already won the prize of her labor because she outran those who were running, she says that she has been brought in by the bridegroom king into his chamber, that there she might behold all the royal riches. In this, assuredly, she rightly rejoices and exults, inasmuch as she has now looked upon the secret and hidden things of the king. This is, according to the sequence of the drama proposed, as it were the historical sense. But since she whose case is here treated is the Church coming to Christ, or the soul cleaving to the Word of God, what other chamber of Christ and storehouse of God are we to believe there to be, into which he brings either the Church or the soul that cleaves to him, save that very hidden and recondite meaning of his, of which Paul too was speaking: ”But we have the mind of Christ, that we may know the things that are given to us by God. These are those things ”which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have they entered into the heart of man, which God has prepared for those who love him.

When therefore Christ leads the soul into the understanding of his own meaning, she is said to be brought into the chamber of the king, in which are ”the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge hidden. Now it seems not without significance that, whereas she could have said, ”My bridegroom has brought me in,” or ”my brother,” or something of this kind, as is her custom, now, because she was about to speak of a chamber, she has said the chamber of the king, and has set down no other name, in which perhaps someone even middling might be understood. But I think that in these words the king is named for this reason: that through this name the chamber might be shown to be exceedingly rich, being royal indeed and filled with many and immense riches. Wholly near to this man there seems to me to have been also that one who said that he had been caught up to the third heaven, and from there into paradise, and had heard ”unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. For what do you think those words were which he heard? Did he not hear them from the king? And did he not hear them being set in the chamber, and near the chamber? And those words were, I believe, some such as these:

that they exhorted him to greater progress, and promised him that if he should persevere unto the end, he too might be able to enter the chamber, according to that which is also promised through the prophet: ”I will give you dark treasures, hidden, invisible. I will open to you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God who have called your name Israel. The young maidens therefore run after him, and into his fragrance, yet each according to her strength — one indeed more swiftly, another a little more slowly, another even lower than the rest and in the last place, another in the first place. Nevertheless all of them run, but one is perfect, who runs in such a way as to arrive and alone receive the prize. For she alone it is who says: ”The king has brought me into his chamber,” whereas before she had said, not of herself alone, but of many: ”After you, into the fragrance of your ointments, we will run. She is therefore brought into the chamber of the king, and is made a queen, and it is she of whom it is said: ”The queen stood at your right hand in a gilded garment, girded about with variety. But concerning those young maidens who had been running after her,

and had remained far behind her in the very courses of their running, it is said: ”Virgins shall be brought to the king after her, her companions shall be brought to you:

they shall be brought in gladness and exultation, they shall be led into the temple of the king. But this too we ought to note in this passage, that just as the king has a certain chamber into which he brings his queen or his bride, so also the bride has her own chamber, into which she is admonished by the Word of God, when she has entered, to close the door, and so, with all those riches of hers shut up within that chamber, to pray to him who sees in secret, and looks upon how great the wealth — that is, the virtues of the soul — which the bride has stored within her chamber, so that, seeing her riches, he may grant her petitions. For ”to everyone who has it shall be given.”

But as for what she says, ”Let us exult and rejoice in you,” this seems to be spoken in the person of the young maidens, who desire and beg of the bridegroom that, just as the bride has attained what is perfect and exults, so they too may now deserve to complete their course and to arrive at the king’s chamber, so that, having beheld and gazed upon all those things of which she boasts, they too may exult as she does, and rejoice in him. Or else it may be seen to be said to the bride by the young maidens who congratulate her and make promises and petitions, that they may become sharers in her exultation and gladness. » We will love your breasts above wine. «

The bride indeed, after she had earned kisses from the very mouth of the bridegroom, and to receive and enjoy his breasts, says to him: ”Good are your breasts above wine. But the maidens, who had not yet come to that degree of blessedness, nor received the summit of perfection, nor by practice and works fulfilled the fruit of perfect charity, so that they might, as it were from experience, declare of his breasts that they are good — yet seeing the bride delighted and refreshed by the breasts of the bridegroom, namely from the fountains of wisdom and knowledge that flow from his breasts, and taking up cups of heavenly doctrine as imitators of his perfection and desiring to walk in the same footsteps — they promise, and say: ”We will love your breasts above wine,” that is: We indeed have not yet ascended to that perfection, that we should now love your breasts more than wine, or at least your breasts which are above wine (for the sense will appear to stand in either way); yet we hold hope, being maidens, of advancing to that age wherein we may be able not only to be fed and nourished from the breasts of the Word of God, but also to love the one who nourishes.

Now these maidens are, as we have often already said, the souls who seem to have been imbued with the first and initial instructions that are strong at the beginning, and gladdened as it were by a certain wine, only by the training of tutors and guardians and the pedagogue, being as it were little ones, who would indeed have it in their powers to love wine, but would not yet have it in their age, that they could be moved or stirred by the love of the bridegroom’s breasts. But when the fullness of times comes, and Christ has advanced in them in age and wisdom, and they have now begun to perceive what the breasts of the bridegroom are, and what perfection of the Word of God is designated in them, and what fullness of spiritual doctrine, then they also promise that more than the wine which they

now drink as little ones, they will love the breasts of the bridegroom; that is, they will be more inclined toward the perfect and, in all fullness, the established teachings of Christ than they were before seen to be, whether in common studies, or in the instructions of the Law and the prophets.

» Equity has loved you. «

This also the maidens seem to me to declare, as if making satisfaction for the fact that they had promised they would love the breasts of the bridegroom above wine, and do not yet love them in the present, nor show the entire force of charity. This voice, then, is as of those accusing themselves: as those who have not yet, having cast off all iniquity, arrived at equity, so that they might now be able to love above wine the breasts of the bridegroom, knowing it to be unfitting that anything of iniquity should still remain in one who has arrived at the perfection of spiritual or mystical doctrine. Since, therefore, the summit of perfection consists in charity, and charity admits nothing of iniquity, and where there is nothing of iniquity, there without doubt is equity, rightly then is she said to be equity who loves the bridegroom. And see whether it is not on this account that that saying too seems to have been spoken by the Savior in the Gospel: ”If you love me, keep my commandments. If, therefore, he who loves Christ keeps his commandments, there is no iniquity in him, but equity remains in him; it is equity, therefore, which keeps his commandments and loves Christ. And again: If he who keeps the commandments himself loves Christ, and the commandments are kept in equity, then it is equity which loves Christ; he who does anything iniquitous neither keeps the commandments nor loves Christ.

It will therefore be that, as much iniquity as is in us, so far are we from the love of Christ, and so much transgression of his commandments is held to be in us. And therefore let us set down equity to be a certain straight rule, so that if there is anything of iniquity in us, applying and drawing over it this straightedge of the commandments of God, whatever in us is crooked, whatever is twisted, may be cut off from the line of this rule, so that it may be said also of us: ”Equity has loved you. But we can also take it in this way, so that what she said, ”Equity has loved you,” may seem to be similar as if she had said: Justice has loved you, and truth, and wisdom, and chastity, and each single virtue. Nor be surprised indeed if we say that it is the virtues which love Christ, since in other places we are accustomed to take Christ to be the very substance of the virtues themselves. And this too you will frequently find applied in the divine Scriptures according to places and occasions. For we find that he himself is called both justice, and peace, and truth. And again it is written in the Psalms: ”Justice and peace have kissed”; and: ”Truth has arisen from the earth, and justice has looked down from heaven. All of which, indeed, he himself is said to be, and again are said to embrace him.

But he is likewise called the bridegroom, and the same is also named the bride, as it is written in the prophecy: ”As on a bridegroom he has placed a mitre on me, and as a bride he has adorned me with an ornament.”

Commentary on the Song of Songs — Book Two

English translation of Origen of Alexandria's Commentary on the Song of Songs (Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum), in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 410). Translated from the OCR-corrected Migne Patrologia Graeca 13 (Delarue) base text. Rufinus's translation is intrinsically incomplete, running only as far as Song of Songs 2:15. This English translation is in the public domain.

BOOK TWO

» I am dark and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the skins of Solomon. «

In other copies we read: "I am black and beautiful. Here again the person of the bride is introduced as speaking; but she speaks not to those young maidens who are accustomed to run with her, but to the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she seems to make reply as to those who have disparaged her unsightliness, and to say: I am indeed dark, or black, so far as concerns color, O daughters of Jerusalem; but I am beautiful, if one looks upon the inner lineaments of my members. For the tents of Kedar too, she says — Kedar being a great nation — are black, and the very nation of Kedar is interpreted as blackness or darkness. But the skins of Solomon also are black, and yet on that account the blackness of the skins did not appear unseemly to so great a king in all his glory. Do not therefore, O daughters of Jerusalem, reproach me with the fault of my color, since there is no lack of beauty in my body, whether natural or acquired by exercise. This is what the historical drama contains, and the outward form of the tale set before us. But let us return to the mystical order. This bride who speaks holds the person of the Church gathered out of the nations. But the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom her discourse is addressed, are those souls who, on account of the election of the fathers, are indeed called most beloved, but enemies on account of the Gospel.

These are the daughters of the earthly city Jerusalem, who, seeing the Church out of the nations — ignoble, as they suppose, in that she cannot ascribe to herself the nobility of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, yet forgetting her own people and her father's house, coming even to Christ — despise her and cast a shadow upon her for the ignobility of her race. And the bride, perceiving that the daughters of the former people impute this to her, and that

on this account she is even called black, as one who has not the brightness of her fathers' learning, replies to these things and says: I am indeed black, O daughters of Jerusalem, in that I do not descend from the stock of illustrious men, nor have I received the illumination of the law of Moses; yet I have my own beauty with me. For there is in me first that which was made in me according to the image of God; and now, coming to the Word of God, I have received back my own comeliness. For although, on account of the darkness of my color, you compare me to the tents of Kedar and to the skins of Solomon, yet Kedar too descends from Ishmael. For in the second place there was born of Ishmael this Kedar; and Ishmael was not without a share in the divine blessing. But you also compare me to the skins of Solomon, which are none other than the skins of the tabernacle of God;

and yet I marvel at you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you would reproach me with the blackness of my color. How do you not remember what is written in the law — what Miriam suffered, who disparaged Moses because he had taken to wife a black Ethiopian woman? How are you ignorant that the shadow of that image is now being fulfilled in me in truth? I am that Ethiopian woman; I am black indeed for the ignobility of my race, but beautiful because of repentance and faith. For I have received into myself the Son of God, I have received the Word made flesh. I have come to him who is the image of God, the firstborn of all creation, and who is the brightness of glory and the radiance of his substance, and I have become beautiful. Why then do you reproach one who is being converted from sin — a thing which the law forbids to be done? And how do you glory in the law, while you transgress the law? But since we are at those places where the Church that comes from the nations says that she is black and beautiful, although it may seem long and laborious to gather from the divine Scriptures in what places, or in what manner, the form of this mystery went before, nevertheless it does not seem to me a thing to be altogether omitted, but rather to be recalled as briefly as may be.

First, then, in the book of Numbers it is thus written concerning the Ethiopian woman: "And Miriam spoke to Aaron, and they disparaged Moses on account of the Ethiopian woman whom he had taken to wife, and they said: Has the Lord spoken to Moses alone? Has he not spoken also to us? And again in the third book of Kings it is written concerning the queen of Sheba, that she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, in this manner: "The queen of Sheba heard the name of Solomon, and the name of the Lord, and she came to test him with riddles; and she came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue: and camels bearing spices, and much gold, and precious stone; and she came in to Solomon, and spoke to him all the words that were in her heart, and Solomon declared to her all her words, and there was no word which the king omitted, and which the king did not declare to her. And the queen of Sheba saw all the prudence of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the food of Solomon, and the seat of his servants, and the order of his ministers, and his garments, and his cup-bearers, and his burnt offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord, and she was astounded, and said to king Solomon:

The word is true which I heard in my land concerning your word and your prudence, and I did not believe those who spoke to me until I came, and my eyes saw, and behold, not even the half is of what was told me. For you have added good things beyond all the report which I heard in my land. Blessed are your women, blessed are these your servants who stand in your presence always, and hear all your prudence. Let the Lord your God be blessed, who has given you the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel, and willed him to abide forever, he set you as king over them, that you might do judgment with justice, and judge them. And she gave to Solomon a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and very many spices, and precious stone. Never had such spices come, nor in such abundance, as the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. Now this history we have wished to repeat somewhat more at length, and to insert into this our exposition, knowing that these things so greatly befit the person of the Church which comes from the nations to Christ, that the Lord himself in the Gospels made mention of this queen, saying that she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And he calls her the queen of the South, in that Ethiopia lies in the parts of the South, and is set as it were at the utmost, at the ends of the earth. We find, moreover, that Josephus too makes mention of this same queen in his history, adding this also, that after she had returned, he says, from Solomon, king Cambyses, marveling at her wisdom — which without doubt she had received from the wisdom of Solomon — named her, he says, by the name Meroë. And he relates that she held the kingdom not only of Ethiopia, but also of Egypt. We shall add still further those things which in the sixty-seventh psalm are contained concerning this same form. It says there, then: ”Scatter the nations that desire wars, and let ambassadors come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand to God before the rest. Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing psalms to the Lord. There is yet, in the fourth place, in Zephaniah the prophet, written concerning this same figure in this manner: ”Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, in the day of my resurrection, in my testimony,” that is, in my witness, ”because my judgment is unto the gathering of the nations, that I may receive kings, and pour out upon them the wrath of my indignation. In the fire of my zeal shall all the earth be consumed.

For then will I turn among the peoples a tongue into its generation, that all may call upon the name of the Lord, and serve him under one yoke. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia I will receive those who are scattered, and they shall bring sacrifice to me. In that day you shall not be confounded, O Sheba, for all your devices in which you have acted impiously against me. But in Jeremiah also it is written, that certain princes of the people of Israel cast Jeremiah into the pit of Melchiah the king’s son, which was in the house of the prison, and they let him down with ropes, and in the pit there was no water, but mire, and he was in the mire. But Abdemelech, an Ethiopian man, a eunuch, who was in the king’s house, hearing that they had cast Jeremiah into the pit, spoke to the king, and said: My lord king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, in that they have cast him into the pit, and he will die there from the face of famine, since there are now no more loaves in the city. And the king commanded this Abdemelech the Ethiopian,

saying: Take from here thirty men, and lead him up out of the pit, that he die not there. And what more? It was Abdemelech the Ethiopian who led Jeremiah up out of the pit. And a little after: The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying:

Go, and say to Abdemelech the Ethiopian, saying: Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing my words upon this city for evil, and not for good, and I will save you in that day, and I will not give you into the hands of the men whom you fear. Saving I will save you from before their face, and by the sword you shall not fall, but your soul shall be for salvation, because you have trusted in me, says the Lord. These things, for the present, could occur to us from the holy Scriptures, by which it seems to me that the mystery of the little verse set before us from the Song of Songs is confirmed, in which she says: ”I am dark (or black) and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tent of Kedar, and like the skins of Solomon. Moses, then, is found in Numbers to take a dark, or black, Ethiopian woman to wife, on whose account Miriam and Aaron disparage him, and, indignant, say: ”Has the Lord spoken to Moses alone? Has he not spoken also to us? In which, if you consider it carefully, the historical narrative is not even found to have coherence. For what will seem to fit the matter, that, being indignant on account of the Ethiopian woman, they should say: ”Has the Lord spoken to Moses alone? Has he not spoken also to us? For it were fitting, if this were the cause, that they should say:

You ought not, O Moses, to have taken an Ethiopian woman to wife, and of the seed of Ham, but one of your own race, and of the house of Levi. None of these things do they say, but they declare: ”Has God spoken to Moses alone? Has he not spoken also to us? In which it seems to me too that, according to the mystery, they understood rather what was being done, and saw that Moses — that is, the spiritual law — was now passing over into the nuptials and wedlock of the Church gathered from the nations; and that Miriam, who held the form of the forsaken Synagogue, and Aaron, who held the image of the carnal priesthood, seeing that the kingdom was taken away from themselves, and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits, said: ”Has God spoken to Moses alone? Has he not spoken also to us? Finally, though such and so magnificent works of faith and patience of Moses are related, never was he exalted by God with such praises as now, when he took the Ethiopian woman to wife. Now it is said of him, that ”Moses was a man exceedingly meek above all men who are upon the earth. Now the Lord also says of him this: ”If there be a prophet among you, I will speak to him in visions, or in dreams, not so with my servant Moses, who is faithful in all my house.

Mouth to mouth will I speak to him, in his own form, and not in a riddle, and he saw the glory of the Lord. And why were you not afraid to detract from my servant Moses? All these things, on account of his marriage with the Ethiopian woman, did Moses deserve to hear from the Lord. But of these things we have treated more fully in the book of Numbers; and if anyone judges it worthy to know them, let him seek them out there. But now let it suffice to prove from these things that she herself is the black one, and beautiful, and the Ethiopian woman, whom Moses — that is, the spiritual law, which without doubt is the Word of God

and Christ — takes into his own wedlock, though the daughters of Jerusalem, namely this common people with their priests, detract and disparage. But let us also look at those things which we brought forward from the third book of Kings concerning the queen of Sheba — she likewise being no less an Ethiopian woman, to whom the Lord bears witness in the Gospels, that in the day of judgment she comes with the men of the unbelieving generation, and condemns them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and he adds, that "a greater than Solomon is here," teaching by this that the truth is greater than the figures of the truth.

She came then, this queen — nay rather, according to her figure, the Church came from the nations to hear the wisdom of the true Solomon and the true peaceable one, our Lord Jesus Christ. And she came, first indeed testing him by riddles and questions, which before seemed to her insoluble, and by him she is set free concerning the knowledge of the true God and concerning the creatures of the world, or concerning the immortality of the soul and the judgment to come — which with her and with her teachers, the gentile philosophers at least, always remained uncertain and doubtful. She came, then, into Jerusalem — that is, into the vision of peace — with a multitude and much power; for she came not with one nation only, as the Synagogue before had the Hebrews alone, but with the nations of the whole world; bringing also gifts worthy of Christ: the sweetnesses of spices, that is, good works, which ascend to God through the odor of sweetness. But she came also filled with gold — that is, without doubt, with meanings and rational teachings, which before faith she had already gathered from this common and scholarly learning. She brought also precious stone, by which we may understand the ornaments of morals. With this equipment, then, she enters in to the peaceable king Christ, and opens to him her heart — that is, in the confession and repentance of her preceding faults — and she spoke to him all that was in her heart;

wherefore Christ also, who is our peace, declared to her all her words, and there is no word which the king omitted and did not declare to her. Finally, when now the time of his passion drew near, thus he speaks to her — that is, to his chosen disciples: "Now I will not call you servants, but friends, because the servant knows not what his master does. But I have made known to you all things whatsoever I have heard from my Father. Thus, then, is fulfilled what he said, that there was no word which the peaceable Lord did not declare to the queen of Sheba — that is, to the Church gathered from the nations. But if you look upon the state of the Church and consider her dispensations and orderings, then you will perceive how the queen marveled at all the prudence of Solomon. At the same time inquire also why she did not say "all the wisdom," but "all the prudence" of Solomon; since indeed learned men will have prudence to be understood of human affairs, wisdom of divine. For this reason perhaps the Church too, now for the present, marvels at the prudence of Christ, while she is on earth and dwells among men. But when that which is perfect shall have come, and she shall have been translated from the earth to heaven, then she will see all his wisdom, when now not through an appearance, not through riddles, but face to face she will look upon each single thing.

She saw also the house which he built — without doubt the mysteries of his incarnation. For this is the house which wisdom built for herself. She saw the food of Solomon. Those, I think, of which he said: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, that I may accomplish his work. She saw also the seat of his servants. He means, I think, the ecclesiastical order, which is held in the seats of the episcopate or the presbytery. She saw the orderings, or stations, of his ministers. He mentions, as it seems to me, the order of deacons who stand by the divine ministry. But she saw also his garments. Those, I believe, with which he clothes them, of whom it is said: "As many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. But his cup-bearers too — I reckon these are called the teachers, who mix the Word of God and doctrine for the peoples like wine, that it may gladden the hearts of the hearers. She saw also his burnt offerings — without doubt the mysteries of prayers and supplications. When, then, she had seen all these things in the house of the peaceable king — nay, of Christ — this black and beautiful one was astounded, and said to him: "The word is true which I heard in my land concerning your word and your prudence. For because of your word, which I have recognized to be a true word, I have come to you.

For all the words which were spoken to me, and which I heard, when I was in my land — namely, from the teachers of the world and the philosophers — were not true. This alone is the true word, which is in you. But perhaps it may seem needful to inquire how the queen says this to the king, that "I did not believe those things which were told me concerning you," since surely she would not have come to Christ, had she not believed. But see whether we can solve in this way what is set down. "I did not," she says, "believe those who spoke to me. For I did not direct my faith toward those who spoke of you, but toward you — that is, I believed not men, but you, God. And through them indeed I heard, but to you I came, and I believed; with whom my eyes have seen far more things than were announced to me. For truly, when this black and beautiful one shall have come into the heavenly Jerusalem, and shall have entered into the vision of peace, she will look upon far more and more magnificent things than are now announced to her. For now it is as in a mirror and a riddle, but then she will see face to face, when she shall obtain those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have they ascended into the heart of man.

And then she will see that not even the half is of those things which she heard while set in this her land. Blessed, then, are the women of Solomon — without doubt the souls which become partakers of the Word of God and of his peace. Blessed are his servants who stand in his presence always. Not those who sometimes stand by, and sometimes do not stand by, but who always, and without intermission, stand by the Word of God — these are truly blessed. Such was also that Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard him, to whom the Lord himself also gave testimony, saying to Martha: "Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken from her. Still further this black and beautiful one says: "Blessed is he who willed to give you upon the throne of Israel. For truly, because the Lord loved Israel, and willed that it should stand forever, he set you as king over it. Whom? The peaceable one, without doubt. For Christ is our peace, who made both one, and dissolved the middle wall of the partition. And after all these things, she gave, it says, a hundred and twenty talents

of gold to king Solomon, did the queen of Sheba. This number, a hundred and twenty, is consecrated to the life of those men who were in the days of Noah, to whom this span of life is granted in which they are invited to repentance.

And this same number was also that of the years of the life of Moses. The Church therefore offers to Christ, in the appearance and weight of gold, not only the multitude of her meanings and understandings, but she shows her meanings to be consecrated to the law of God by this number which contains the years of the life of Moses. She offers also the sweetnesses of spices, such and so many as had never come. Understand by this either prayers, or works of mercy. For never had she either prayed so rightly as now, when she came to Christ, or worked so piously, as when she knew that her righteousness was not to be done before men, but before the Father who sees in secret, and will reward openly. But it is much, in places not their own, to pursue all together these things which seem to be taken up for the sake of testimony. Let these things suffice from the third book of Kings. Let us look at some of those things which we brought forward from the sixty-seventh psalm, where it says: "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand to God before the rest.

For if you consider how out of the fault of Israel there is salvation for the nations, and how their fall gave the nations a way to enter in, you will perceive how the hand of Ethiopia — that is, the people of the nations — anticipates and goes before those to whom first the oracles of God were given, in coming to God; and how in this is fulfilled: "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand to God before the rest"; and this black one becomes beautiful, even though the daughters of Jerusalem be unwilling, even though they envy and detract. But the testimony of the prophet also, which we have set down, where the Lord received even those who come from the places which are beyond the rivers of the Ethiopians, and bring victims to God, is, I think, to be perceived in a like sense. For it seems to me that he is said to be beyond the rivers of Ethiopia who is darkened with excessive and superabundant sins, and, infected with the black dye of malice, is rendered black and shadowy; and yet not even these does the Lord reject, but all who offer to God the sacrifices of a contrite spirit and a humbled heart — namely, those converted to him under the title of confession and repentance — are not rejected by him. For thus the peaceable one, our Lord, says: "Him that comes to me I will not reject.

But it may also seem to be said of those who, set beyond the rivers of the Ethiopians, shall come, they too, to God, bringing victims — who, after the whole fullness of the nations, which is compared to the rivers of the Ethiopians, has entered in, shall come, they too, and then all Israel shall be saved; and on this account they are called "beyond the rivers of the Ethiopians," as being further off and later than these spaces, in which the salvation of the nations runs and overflows. And so perhaps this seems to be fulfilled which he says, that "in that day you shall not be confounded" — all Israel — "for all your devices, in which you have acted impiously against me," against Christ. It remains that that testimony which we took up from Jeremiah be explained, where Abdemelech — no less an Ethiopian man, a eunuch — when he had heard that Jeremiah was cast into the pit by the princes of the people, leads

him out thence. And I think it does not seem unfitting if we say that him whom the princes of Israel condemned, and cast into the pit of death, this foreigner and man of an obscure and degenerate nation — that is, the people of the nations — leads out of the pit of death, believing, namely, his resurrection from the dead, and by his faith this one, whom they had delivered over to death, recalls and leads back from the lower regions.

But this eunuch too is said to be an Ethiopian; I believe because he castrated himself for the kingdom of God, or also because he does not have the seed of malice in himself. He is also a servant of the king, because a wise servant rules over foolish masters. And Abdemelech is interpreted "servant of kings. And therefore the Lord, forsaking the people of Israel on account of their sins, directs his words to the Ethiopian, and sends the prophet to him, and to him says: "Behold, I am bringing my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and I will save you in that day, and I will not give you into the hands of men, but saving I will save you. And the cause of salvation to him is this, that he led the prophet out of the pit — that is, that by his faith, by which he believes that Christ rose from the dead, he is seen to have led him out of the pit. This dark, or black, and beautiful one has therefore very many testimonies, in which she may act freely, and with confidence say to the daughters of Jerusalem, that "I am indeed dark, or black, like the tents of Kedar, but beautiful like the skins of Solomon. Concerning the skins of Solomon I do not recall anything written expressly. But I think it can be referred to his glory, of which the Savior says: that "not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these.

Yet we find the very name of skins frequently mentioned in the tabernacle of testimony, as when it says: "And you shall make skins of goats' hair for a covering over the tabernacle of testimony; eleven skins you shall make, the length of one skin thirty cubits, and the breadth four cubits. The same measure also shall be for the eleven skins; and you shall join five skins together, and the other six together, and you shall fold back the sixth skin at the front of the tabernacle; and you shall make fifty loops along the edge of one skin, and fifty loops along the edge of the other skin, by which they may be joined one to another; and you shall make fifty bronze rings, and you shall join the skins by them, and it shall be one whole; and you shall fold back what remains over of the skins, the half of one skin, at the front of the tabernacle, and of the other half what remains over you shall veil the hinder parts of the tabernacle, a cubit on this side and a cubit on that, of that which abounds in the length of the skins, and the tabernacle shall be covered by it on this side and on that. I think, then, that mention is made of these in the Song of Songs, and that this is of that Solomon who is taken as the peaceable one. His, therefore, is the tabernacle, and the things which pertain to the tabernacle;

and especially if we consider that tabernacle which is called the true tabernacle, which God fixed and not man, and of which he says: "For Jesus entered not into the holy places made by hand, the copies of the true. If, therefore, the bride compares her beauty to the skins of Solomon, she speaks without doubt of the glory and beauty of those skins which cover that tabernacle which God fixed and not man. But if she has compared her blackness, which

seemed to be reproached by the daughters of Jerusalem, to the skins of Solomon, then the skins of this tabernacle — which is called the copy of the true tabernacle — are to be understood; as being those which are indeed themselves black, inasmuch as they are woven of goats' hair, and yet furnish use and ornament to the divine tabernacle. But that, although she who speaks seems to be one person, she compared herself in blackness to several things, whether to the tents of Kedar or to the skins of Solomon, is thus to be taken: that though she seems one person, she is the Church — of whom there are, however, innumerable congregations, spread through the world, and immense assemblies and multitudes of peoples; just as the kingdom of heaven too is said to be one, and yet many mansions are recorded to be with the Father.

But it can also be said of each single soul which, after very many sins, is converted to repentance, that she is black for her sins, but beautiful because of repentance and the fruits of repentance. Finally, of this very one who now says: "I am black and beautiful" — because she did not remain unto the end in that blackness — after these things the daughters of Jerusalem say concerning this same one: "Who is this that ascends made white, leaning upon her kinsman?"

» Do not look upon me, because I am darkened, for the sun has despised me. «

Darkened, or blackened: if the exposition seems fittingly suited to us which in the foregoing we wove either concerning the Ethiopian woman whom Moses took to wife, or concerning the queen of Sheba who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, then rightly does this woman who is dusky or black and yet beautiful now seem to make satisfaction for her blackness or darkening, and to render the causes of it to those reproaching her, as one who is not such by nature, nor so created by her Maker, but has suffered this from accidental things. "From this," she says, "that the sun has despised me. In which she shows that the discourse is not about the blackness of the body, which indeed the sun is wont to darken and blacken when it looks upon a thing rather than when it despises it. So, in fine, they report even of that whole nation of the Ethiopians, in whom by now a certain blackness is inborn by the succession of the carnal seed, that in those regions the sun burns with keener rays, and that bodies once scorched and darkened remain so by the succession of an inbred defect. But the blackness of the soul is of a contrary order. For it is scorched not by the sun's regard but by its disregard, nor is it acquired by being born but by being negligent; and therefore, just as it is taken on through sloth, so too it is repelled and driven off through diligence.

Finally, as I said above, this very woman who is now said to be black is recorded, toward the end of this Song, to ascend whitened, leaning upon her kinsman. She was made black, therefore, because she came down; but if she begins to ascend and to lean upon her kinsman, and to cleave to him, and by no means to be separated from him, she will be whitened and shining white; and, every blackness cast off, she will shine, bathed round with the light of the true light. She says now, therefore, to the daughters of Jerusalem, making satisfaction for her blackness: Do not suppose, O daughters of Jerusalem, that this blackness which you see in my face is natural; but know that it was made by the sun's disregard. For the Sun of

justice, because he did not find me standing upright, did not himself direct the straight rays of his light into me. For I am the people of the nations, who formerly did not look toward the Sun of justice, nor stood before the Lord; and therefore neither did he look upon me, but disregarded me, nor did he stand by me, but passed me over. And that this is so, even you who are called Israel will now, having experienced it in fact, come to know it and say: For just as, when I once did not believe, you were taken up and obtained mercy, and the Sun of justice regarded you, but disregarded and spurned me as one disobedient and unbelieving;

so now, because you have become unbelieving and disobedient, I hope to be regarded by the Sun of justice and to obtain mercy. And that this disregard of the sun is mutual between us — that I first, for my disobedience, was disregarded, but you regarded; while now to you also has befallen not only the sun's disregard but even a certain blindness, though in part — I will bring forward for you a magnificent witness, and one privy to the heavenly secret, Paul, who speaks thus: For as you (speaking, without doubt, of the nations) once did not believe God, but now have obtained mercy through their unbelief; so also these have not believed in your mercy, that they too may obtain mercy. And again in another place he says: Because blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the nations should enter in. Hence, therefore, is in me this blackness which you reproach, because the sun has disregarded me on account of my unbelief and disobedience. But when I shall stand upright before him, and shall not be crooked in anything, nor turn aside to the right hand or to the left, but shall make straight paths for my feet, walking toward the Sun of justice in all his justifications without blame; then he too will look upon me uprightly, and there will be no crookedness, nor any cause of disregard, and then my light and my splendor will be restored to me;

and this blackness which you now reproach will be so far driven away from me that I shall even deserve to be called the light of the world. So, therefore, this visible sun scorches and burns those bodies over which it has settled from the highest point of its balance; but those which are far off and set farther from that poising of it, it preserves in their fairness, and does not burn them at all, but illumines them. But the spiritual Sun, who is the Sun of justice, in whose wings health is said to be, on the contrary illumines those whom he finds of an upright heart and standing at the balance of his splendor, and surrounds them with all radiance; whereas those who walk crookedly with him, he too, of necessity, not so much regards as disregards crookedly, their own inconstancy and instability bringing this upon them. For how can those who are perverse receive that which is straight? Just as if you were to apply the straightest ruler to a crooked piece of wood, the depravity of the material would indeed seem to be shown up by the ruler, yet it is not the ruler that imposed on the wood the cause of its crookedness. And therefore one must hasten to the straight ways, and stand in the paths of the virtues, lest perhaps the Sun of justice, walking uprightly, if he find us standing crooked and perverse, should disregard us and we be made blackened.

For insofar as we are incapable of his light, so far shall we give place to darkness and blackness. For this is that very Sun who is also the true Light, illumining every man coming

into this world, and who was in this world, and the world was made through him. For it was not through that visible light that the world was made, since that too is a portion of the world, but through that true Light; from which Light, if we walk perversely, we are said to be disregarded. For it too walks perversely toward us when we walk perversely, as it is written in the maledictions of Leviticus: ”And if,” he says, ”you walk with me perversely, and refuse to obey me, I will add to you seven plagues. And after a little: ”And if,” he says, ”you are not corrected, but walk with me perversely, I too will walk with you perversely”; or, as we read in other copies: ”If you walk with me crookedly, I too will walk with you crookedly. And after some space he again says at the last: ”And because they walked crookedly in my sight, I too will walk with them crookedly in fury. Now these things we have taken up in order to prove from them in what manner the sun is said to ”despise,” that is, to look crookedly. And it has been made plainly evident that he disregards those, and walks crookedly and perversely with those, who walk crookedly with him.

But let us not leave undiscussed this too which the present passage has suggested, that the sun seems to be of a twofold power: one by which it illumines, another by which it burns; but according to the things or materials lying beneath it, either it illumines something with light, or it darkens and hardens something with heat. According to these things, therefore, God is perhaps said also to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh, namely because the material of his heart was such that it received the presence of the Sun of justice not on that side by which it illumines, but on that by which it burns and hardens: on this account, without doubt, that he too was afflicting the life of the Hebrews in hard works, and was making them work with clay and brick. And his heart, according to the things he pondered, was indeed clayey and muddy. And as this visible sun binds fast and hardens the material of clay, so the Sun of justice, by these same rays with which he was illumining the people of Israel, was hardening the heart of Pharaoh, in which were clayey thoughts, according to the very qualities of its own motions. And that these things are so, and that the servant of God writes through the Holy Spirit not a common history, as it seems to men, is shown also from this:

that where he reports that the children of Israel groaned, he does not say that they groaned from the clay, nor from the brick, nor from the straw, but ”from their works,” he says. And again: ”And their cry,” he says, ”went up to God. He did not say from the clay and brick, but again, ”from their works. Wherefore he also adds: ”Because the Lord heard their groaning” — since indeed he does not hear the groaning of those who do not cry to the Lord out of their works. These things, although they may seem to be said by way of digression, nevertheless, admonished by the opportuneness of the passages, we have by no means judged should be omitted, especially since they have some likeness to this which she says — that she was darkened because the sun disregarded her — which indeed is shown to happen there where the cause of sins goes before; and there someone is darkened or scorched by the sun, where the material of sin subsists. But where there is no sin, the sun is said neither to scorch nor to darken, as is reported of the just man in the Psalms: ”By day the sun shall not burn you,

nor the moon by night. You see, therefore, that the sun never scorches the saints, in whom there is no cause of sins. For, as we have said, the sun is of a twofold power:

the just indeed it illumines, but sinners it does not illumine, but scorches, since they too hate the light, because they do evil. Finally, on this account our God also is said to be a consuming fire, and none the less a light in which there are no shadows. Light, without doubt, to the just, and fire he becomes to sinners, that he may consume in them everything that he finds of corruptibility or frailty in their soul. And that in many places of Scripture both the sun and the fire are said to be, not this visible one, but that invisible and spiritual one, you too, if you review them, will find in abundance.

» The sons of my mother fought against me, they set me as keeper in the vineyards; my own vineyard I have not kept. «

Still she herself — who is indeed dark on account of her former sins, but beautiful on account of her faith and manner of life — says this too, affirming that the sons of her mother fought, not against her, but in her; and after this war which they waged in her, they appointed her keeper of the vineyards, not of one vineyard, but of many. She further establishes this same point: that besides those vineyards over which she was set as keeper by the sons of her mother, she had another vineyard of her own, which she did not keep. This is the plot of the drama proposed. But now let us inquire who is the mother of this bride whom she alleges, who also are her sons who fought in her, and, the war being finished, handed over to her the vineyards for her to keep — as though she could not have preserved them unless there had first been fighting by those men; but that she, having undertaken the keeping of the other vineyards, was unwilling or unable to preserve her own vineyard. Paul, writing to the Galatians, says: ”Tell me, you who wish to be under the law, have you not heard the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one from the bondwoman and one from the free woman. But he who was from the bondwoman was born according to the flesh; but he who was from the free woman, according to the promise: which things are allegorical.

For these are the two testaments, one indeed from Mount Sinai, bearing children into bondage, which is Hagar. For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, which is compared to this present Jerusalem, and is in bondage with her sons. But the Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. This heavenly Jerusalem, then, Paul says is the mother of us all who believe. Finally he adds in what follows and says: ”Wherefore, brethren, we are not the sons of the bondwoman, but of the free, by which liberty Christ has set us free. Plainly, therefore, Paul declares that everyone who through faith obtains liberty in Christ is a son of the free woman; and this free woman he says is the Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all. Of this mother, then, this very bride too is understood to be a daughter, in those who fought in her and appointed her keeper of the vineyards. Whence these men who had such great power — that they both waged war in her and set her in order as keeper of the vineyards — seem not to have been of any humble or contemptible station. We may, therefore, take the apostles of Christ as the sons of the bride’s mother, that is, as sons of the heavenly Jerusalem, who fought first in her who is gathered from the Gentiles.

And they fought in order to conquer in her those whom she formerly held — the disposition of unbelief and disobedience, and every haughtiness exalting itself against the knowledge of Christ, as Paul says: "Destroying the reasonings, and every height that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ. They fought, therefore, not against her, but in her, that is, in her thoughts and heart, so that they might destroy and drive out all unbelief, every vice, and all the doctrines which, planted among the Gentiles, had grown into her by the false assertions of the sophists. There was, then, for the apostles of Christ a great war, until they should undermine out of her all the towers of falsehood and the walls of perverse doctrine, until they should overthrow the arguments of iniquity, and vanquish the demons who worked these things and kindled them in her heart. When, therefore, they had put to flight from her all the dispositions of the old unbelief, they do not leave her idle, lest perhaps through idleness the old things creep back again, and those things which were driven out return; but they give her a work to do, and consign to her the keeping of the vineyards. Let us take the vineyards as each and every one of the volumes of the law and the prophets. For each of them was like a full field which the Lord has blessed. These, then, these strong men, after the victory of the war, consign to her to be preserved and kept.

For they do not, as we said, leave her idle. But we can likewise take as vineyards the writings of the evangelists and the letters of the apostles themselves, which they handed over to be kept and cultivated by her who is gathered from the Gentiles, for whom also they fought. But in that she says that she did not keep her own vineyard, we may say that this is that learning in which each one was trained before the faith; which, without doubt, believing in Christ, she leaves and forsakes, and those things which seemed to her gains she counts as losses for the sake of Christ. Just as Paul too glories that the observances of the law, and all the glory of the Jewish institution, were to him only as dung, that he might be found in Christ not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God. As Paul, therefore, having received the faith of Christ, did not keep his own vineyard — namely, the observances of the Jewish tradition; and perhaps he did not keep it because, when the true vine had been planted by God, it was turned into the bitterness of a strange vine, and their vineyard was already the vine of Sodom, and their branch from Gomorrah, and the cluster of bitterness in them, and their wine the fury of dragons, and the incurable fury of asps.

So too among the Gentiles there were very many teachings of this kind, which, after those wars in which the teachers fought for the faith and the acknowledgment of Christ, she says were overcome. I think it should be reckoned altogether in the place of a crime if anyone should keep vineyards of this sort, and cultivate a field further planted with poisonous and harmful disciplines. And do not wonder if by these faults she who is gathered from the dispersion of the nations, and is now prepared as a bride for Christ, may sometime seem to have been liable. Recall how the first woman was seduced and made a transgressor: who is said to be saved in no other way than through the bearing of children — of those, at least, who remain in faith and charity with holiness. This, then, which is written of Adam and Eve, the Apostle thus affirms: "It is a great mystery in Christ and in the Church"; who so

loved her that he gave himself up for her, while she herself was still ungodly, as he himself said: ”For while we were still according to the time ungodly, Christ died for us. And again: ”For while we were still unbelieving, Christ died for us.

It is no wonder, therefore, if she who was seduced and made a transgressor, who was according to the time ungodly and a sinner, is said to have cultivated such a vineyard at that time, when she was still ungodly — a vineyard which she ought to leave, and by no means keep at all. But if it please to pursue also a third place of explanation, let us refer these things to each individual soul, which, being turned to God and coming to the faith, undoubtedly suffers the battles of thoughts and the struggles of demons striving to recall her to the allurements of her former life, or to the error of unbelief. But lest this happen, and lest again so much be permitted to the demons against her, divine Providence has provided that to all the little ones, and to those who cannot fight for themselves the battles against the wiles of the devil and of the demons — being as yet infants and sucklings in Christ — it should give protecting and defending angels: who are established as guardians and stewards by God over those who, placed in a weak age, cannot (as we said) fight for themselves. And that they may do this with greater confidence, it is granted to them always to see the face of the Father who is in heaven:

and these I think are the little ones whom he commanded to come to Christ, and permitted them, whom he said were not to be hindered, and who, he said, always see the face of the Father. Nor let it seem contrary to you, if this soul which tends toward God calls them the sons of her mother. For if the mother of souls is the heavenly Jerusalem, and the angels are nonetheless named heavenly, nothing will seem discordant if those who are heavenly in like manner as she is are called by her the sons of her mother. Above all these things, moreover, it will seem fitting and suitable that those whose one Father is God should have also one mother, Jerusalem. But in that she says, ”My own vineyard I have not kept,” she seems to indicate that those institutions and habits and purpose in which she was trained while living according to the old man were laudably not kept by her. But from the moment when, by the aid of the angels, she fought, conquered, and utterly put to flight from herself the old man with his deeds, she was established by them as keeper of the vineyards — namely, of the divine senses and doctrines, from which she might drink the wine that gladdens her heart.

» Tell me, you whom my soul has loved, where you pasture, where you have your resting-place at noon, lest perhaps I become like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions. «

The bride is still speaking these words as well, but to the bridegroom, and no longer to the daughters of Jerusalem. Therefore, from the beginning where she says: ”Let him kiss me,” down to this place: ”Beside the flocks of your companions,” all that has been said are the words of the bride. But first her speech was directed to God, secondly to the bridegroom, thirdly to the young maidens; and, standing as it were midway between them and the bridegroom, and, as the dramatic form of the piece requires, having become like a leader of the

middle chorus, she directs her words now to those maidens, now to him, and now also in answer to the daughters of Jerusalem. These last words, then, she now addresses to the bridegroom, asking of him where he pastures at noon and where he settles his flock, fearing lest, while she seeks him, she should stumble into those places where the companions keep their flocks stationed through the noontide. And she shows by these words that this bridegroom is also a shepherd: from the earlier passages we had learned that he is also a king—undoubtedly for the reason that he rules men; but a shepherd, for the reason that he pastures sheep; and a bridegroom, for the reason that he has a bride who reigns with him, according to what is written: "The queen stood at your right hand in a gilded robe. This, then, for the present, is the sense of the drama itself, which is, as it were, its historical sense.

But now let us seek the mystical understanding: and, so as to anticipate a little those things which are to be treated of in what follows, in order that it may be made clear what disposition she has toward the companions, let us recall what is written—that the queens are sixty, but that out of all there is one dove, and one perfect one, and as it were the mother of the kingdom; while the rest, now inferior, are those who are called the eighty concubines; and the young maidens, of whom there is no number, are placed after the order of the concubines. Now all these are the souls of those who, believing in Christ, are joined to him by diverse affections; so that, to speak by way of example, the Apostle calls the whole Church, under a certain figure, the body of Christ; and in that body he declares there to be diverse members, and that some are eyes, and others hands, and others also feet, and that each is fitted into this body according to the merits of their works and pursuits. According to this figure, then, these things also are to be understood; and we must think that in this nuptial drama some, joined to the bridegroom by a more excellent and more illustrious affection, are held with him in the place and affection of queens; that others, whose honor in their advancements is undoubtedly lower, are reckoned in the place of concubines;

and others in that of the young maidens, who seem to be placed indeed outside the court, yet not outside the royal city; while the later ones, and after all those mentioned above, are those who are called sheep. But if we look more attentively, perhaps we shall even find others inferior to all of these, and last of all: namely, those who are counted among the flocks of his companions. For the companions too are said to have certain flocks, into which the bride does not wish to stumble, and on this account she asks of the bridegroom that he tell her where he pastures, where he takes his noonday rest, lest, she says, I become like one veiled beside the flocks of your companions. It is asked, then, concerning these companions who are said to have certain flocks, whether they do this while giving their service to the bridegroom, and acting under him as under the chief of shepherds—since they are named his companions; or whether they have something of their own, and set apart, and that is not in accord with the bridegroom's mind—since the bride shrinks back, and fears lest she should perhaps stumble into the flocks of the companions while she seeks her bridegroom. But as to what she said:

”Lest perhaps I become,” not ”veiled,” but ”like one veiled,” consider whether by this she may not be hinting that there is some one, or some ones, of the companions, having as it were brides who themselves too have the nuptial habit, and are veiled and, as the Apostle says, have a covering and a sign of authority upon their head. And that a clearer explanation of this passage may be made, let us again follow out what is said in the order, as it were, of the drama. The bride demands of her bridegroom himself that he show her the place of his secret retreat and of his rest: since, impatient of love, she desires even at noon to hear the bridegroom, and that especially at the time when the light is brighter and the splendor of the day is perfect and pure, so that she may stand beside him as he pastures or refreshes his sheep; and she earnestly wishes to learn the way by which she ought to go to him, lest perhaps, if she be not taught the windings of this journey, she stumble into the flocks of the companions, and seem to be like one of those women who come veiled to his companions, and bear no modesty, nor fear to run about everywhere and to appear to many.

But I, she says, who wish to be seen by no other but you alone, desire to know by what road I may come to you, so that it may be secret, so that there may be no one in the middle, so that no stranger or foreign onlooker may meet me. And perhaps on this account she seeks out those places in which the bridegroom knows his own sheep, and shows him her modesty, for the sake of which she does not wish to stumble into the flocks of the companions, so that he may usefully set apart his sheep from the companions, and pasture them by themselves; so that not only may the bride not be seen by others, but that she may also more secretly enjoy the hidden and ineffable mysteries of the bridegroom. Now, then, let us look at the matter point by point; and first indeed see whether we can say that the Lord, whose portion was Jacob and Israel the cord of his inheritance, is to be understood as the bridegroom, while his companions are those angels among whose number, when the Most High divided the nations and dispersed the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number, as it says, of the angels of God; and that these are perhaps the flocks of the bridegroom’s companions—namely, all the nations, which have been set as cattle under the angels as shepherds; but that the flock of the bridegroom are those of whom he himself said in the Gospel:

”My sheep hear my voice. For see, and mark attentively, that he said: ”My sheep,” as though there were also other sheep which are not his, just as he himself also said in another place: ”For you are not of my sheep. All of which particulars will be seen to fit suitably with this hidden mystery. And if these things are so, the bride fittingly wished the flock of each of the companions to be understood as his bride, whom she named as veiled. But since she was certain that she herself was above all those, she does not wish to seem like any one of them, inasmuch as she knew that she ought to excel those brides of the companions—whom the bride names as veiled—by as much as her bridegroom had of eminence over the companions. But even on this account she will further be seen to have had reasons for inquiring, since she knows it to be the concern of the good shepherd to seek out the best pastures for his sheep, and to find whatever groves are green and shady for rest from the noonday heat. This indeed the companions know not how to do as the bridegroom does, nor do they possess, in

choosing pastures, either so much knowledge or so much solitude: and on this account she says: ”Tell me where you pasture, where you have your resting-place at noon”;

desiring, namely, that time in which light is more abundantly poured upon the world, in which the day is more pure and the light purer and more full of bloom. Then, she says, tell me—you whom my soul has loved—where you pasture, where you have your resting-place at noon, lest perhaps I become like one veiled beside the flocks of your companions. The bride has now called the bridegroom by a new name. For knowing that he is the Son of charity, nay rather that he is himself the charity that is from God, she set upon him, as it were, this appellation: ”Whom my soul has loved. And yet she did not say, ”whom I have loved,” but ”whom my soul has loved”; knowing that the bridegroom’s love is to be held not with any love whatsoever, but out of the whole soul, and out of all one’s strength, and out of the whole heart. ”Where you pasture,” she says, ”and where you have your resting-place. And I think that the prophet also, concerning this place which the bride now desires to learn from the bridegroom himself, and to hear of, being himself too placed under the same shepherd, says: ”The Lord rules me,” or as we read elsewhere: ”The Lord pastures me, and nothing shall be lacking to me. And since he knew that other shepherds, through slothfulness or through inexperience, place their flocks in more arid spots, concerning this best shepherd, the Lord, he said: ”In a green place, there he has settled me.

”He has brought me up beside the water of refreshment,” showing that this shepherd provides and looks to give his sheep not only abundant waters, but also wholesome and pure ones, and such as refresh in every way. But since from this state, in which he had lived as a sheep under the shepherd, he was turned toward things rational and higher and advanced, and attained this through conversion, he adds and says: ”He has converted my soul. He has led me out upon the paths of justice for his name’s sake. From this point, indeed, since he had advanced so far as to walk the ways of justice—and justice undoubtedly has injustice assailing it, and it is necessary that he who walks the road of justice should have battles with adversaries—being converted in faith and hope, he says of them: ”For even if I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will not fear evils, for you are with me. And after these things, as though rendering thanks to him who had imbued him with the shepherd’s disciplines: ”Your rod,” he says, ”and your staff, by which I seem to have been instructed for the office of shepherd, these have consoled me. From here, indeed, when he sees himself transferred from the shepherd’s pastures to rational foods and mystical secrets, he adds and subjoins: ”You have prepared a table in my sight against those who trouble me. You have made fat my head with oil, and how excellent is your inebriating cup!

And your mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days. That first, then—that is, the pastoral instruction—was at the beginning of these things, that, being settled in a green place, he might be brought up beside the water of refreshment. But these things which follow are required concerning the advancements toward perfection. And since we have set forth about pastures and greenness, it seems fitting also to confirm from the Gospels the things we have said. I have found there

too this good shepherd discoursing about the pastures of the sheep, where, in addition to his professing himself the shepherd, he also mentions that he is the door, and says: ”I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved, and shall go in, and go out, and shall find pastures. Him too the bride now questions, that she may hear from him and learn in what pastures he drives the sheep, or in what pleasant places he provides for the noonday heats; calling ”noon” those secret places of the heart, namely, by which the soul obtains from the Word of God a brighter light of knowledge. For this is the time in which the sun holds the loftier summit of its circuit. Whenever, then, Christ the Sun of justice manifests to his Church the lofty and difficult secrets of his virtues, he will be seen to teach the pleasant pastures and the noonday resting-places.

For when she still has the beginnings of learning, and receives from him, so to speak, the first rudiments of knowledge, then the Prophet says: ”And he will help her in the morning, at daybreak. Now therefore, because she already seeks more perfect things, and desires loftier things, she demands the noonday light of knowledge. Hence too, I think, of Abraham, after the many instructions with which God, appearing to him, imbued him concerning each matter and taught him, it is afterward related that God was seen by him as he sat at the oak of Mamre by the door of his tent at noon. ”And looking up,” it says, ”with his eyes, he saw, and behold three men were standing over him. But if we believe these things to have been written through the Holy Spirit, I do not think it pleased the divine Spirit in vain that even the time and hour of the vision should be committed to the pages of Scripture, unless the reckoning of this hour and time conferred something toward knowledge for the sons of Abraham, by whom, indeed, just as the works of Abraham are to be done, so also these visitations are to be hoped for. For he who can say: ”The night has gone before, but the day has drawn near;

let us walk honorably as in the day, not in revelings and drunkenness, not in chamberings and wantonness, not in strife and rivalry”—and when he has passed through all these, he will be seen to have gone beyond this time in which the night has advanced and the day has drawn near, and to hasten not toward the beginning of the day, but toward noon, that he too may arrive at the grace of Abraham. For if the light which is in him, the light of the mind and the purity of the heart, shall be clear and splendid, this man will be seen to have the noonday time in himself; and through this purity of heart, as though placed at noon, he will see God, sitting at the oak of Mamre, which is interpreted ”at the vision. He, then, who calls to the seeing of God sits at the vision at noon. Hence, finally, he is said to sit not within the tent, but outside at the door of the tent. For his mind is outside, placed outside the body—the mind of him who is far from bodily thoughts, far from carnal desires—and therefore God visits him, placed outside all these. Of the same mystery is it, too, that Joseph, when he had received his brothers in Egypt, pastures them at noon, and at noon they adore him with gifts.

For this reason, finally, I think that concerning the things which the Jews committed against the Savior, none of the evangelists wished to write that these were done at noon—although

the sixth hour indeed shows nothing other than the noonday time, yet none named noon. But Matthew said thus: ”From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And Luke: ”It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour, the sun failing. And Mark too: ”But when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. From which it appears that in the visitation of Abraham, indeed, and in the banquet of the patriarchs at Joseph’s, there was no need that this time should be signified under the name of the sixth number, but that it should be called noon. For the bride, who even then was being foreshadowed in those figures, wished to learn where the bridegroom pastured, and where he had his resting-place, and therefore she names noon.

But the evangelists, in the things which they narrated, did not require the noonday time, but the number of the sixth hour—namely, to set forth the sacrifice of his victim, which was offered on the day of the Passover for the redemption of man, who was formed by God on the sixth day, after the earth had brought forth the living soul according to its kind, the quadrupeds, and the creeping things, and the beasts of the earth. On this account, therefore, in the present passage the bride desires to be illuminated with the full light of knowledge, lest, straying through inexperience, she become in any respect like those schools of teachers which are exercised not through the very wisdom of God, but through that of the philosophers and princes of this world. For this too the Apostle seems to say where he says that ”we speak the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery, which none of the princes of this world knew. And again he signifies these same things when he says: ”For we have not received the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things that have been given to us by God. On this account, then, the bride of Christ seeks the noonday resting-places, and demands from God the fullness of knowledge, lest she seem to be like one of the schools of the philosophers, which is named ”veiled,” for the reason that among them the fullness of the truth is covered and veiled.

But the bride of Christ says: ”But we, with unveiled face, behold the glory of God.”

» Unless you know yourself, O good (or beautiful) among women, go out yourself in the footsteps of the flocks, and pasture your kids in the tents of the shepherds. «

Among the many other remarkable sayings, this one is reported to belong to Chilon alone—one of the seven whom fame among the Greeks celebrates as having been singular in wisdom—in which he says: ”Know yourself,” or ”Come to know yourself. Yet Solomon, whom in our preface we showed to have preceded all of these in time and in wisdom and in the knowledge of things, says this to the soul—as though to a woman—speaking under a certain threat: Unless you know yourself, O beautiful among women, and recognize that the causes of your beauty descend from this, that you were made to the image of God, whereby there is in you the greatest measure of natural comeliness, and unless you come to know how beautiful you were from the beginning—although even now you already surpass the other women, and are called the only beautiful one among them—yet unless you know yourself, who you are (for I do not wish your beauty to seem good by comparison with lesser

things, but that you should answer to yourself and to your own comeliness, weighed and made equal to it). And unless you do this, I command you to go out, and to be placed in the lowest footsteps of the flocks, and now to pasture not sheep nor lambs, but kids—those, that is, who for their depravity and wantonness are to stand at the left of the king who presides in judgment.

And when I have shown to you, brought into the royal chamber, what are the highest goods, if you do not know yourself, I will also show you what are the uttermost evils, so that from both you may profit, as much by the fear of evils as by the desire of goods. For if you do not know yourself, and live in ignorance of yourself, and have pursued no zeal for knowledge, without doubt you will have no tent of your own, but you will run about through the tents of shepherds, and now in the tents of one shepherd will pasture kids—a restless and wandering animal, and one assigned to sins. And these things you will suffer until by the very facts and by experience you understand how great an evil it is for the soul not to know itself, nor its own beauty, through which it excels the others—not virgins, but women, those namely who have suffered corruption and have not remained in the integrity of virginity. These are the things which the Bridegroom, after all those things which the Bride had spoken, says in the order of the drama set forth, rousing the Bride's spirits by a certain stern threat to the care of self-knowledge. But now, consequently, as with the rest, let us refer these things to Christ and to the Church, who, speaking to His Bride—that is, to the souls of believers—places the summit of salvation and blessedness in the knowledge of oneself.

How, then, the soul may know itself, I think can be explained neither easily nor briefly; yet according to our strength we shall attempt to open up a few things out of many. It seems to me, therefore, that the soul ought to grasp the knowledge of itself in a twofold manner: what it is in itself, and how it is moved—that is, what it has in substance, and what in its affections. For instance, that it may understand whether it be of good affection or not good, of upright and right purpose or not right; and indeed if right, whether it holds the same tenor toward all the virtues, both in understanding and in acting, or only toward things necessary and near at hand. And whether it is in a condition to receive advances, so as to be increased in the understanding of things and in the increase of virtues, or whether it stands still and settles in that, and in what it was able to attain; and whether it is at leisure only for cultivating itself, or whether it strives to be of profit to others and to confer some usefulness, whether in the word of teaching or in the examples of its deeds.

But if it recognizes itself not to be of good affection, nor of right purpose, in this very thing—that it may understand whether it is wholly lacking and far from the way of the virtues, or whether it is already set upon the road itself and already endeavors to advance, desiring to lay hold of the things that are before and to forget the things that are behind, but has not yet drawn near; or whether it is indeed close, yet has not yet come to perfection. But there also seems to be a work of the soul that knows itself, to know whether it is these same things, when it works evils, that it works out of affection and zeal, or out of a certain frailty and, as he says, doing as it were what it does not will and doing what it hates; and again,

whether it appears to carry out the things that are good out of affections and right purpose. For example, whether it restrains anger in the presence of some persons but gives vent to it in the presence of others, or whether it always restrains it and gives it vent before no one at all. Likewise also sadness—whether in some affairs it casts it off but in others admits it, or whether in all affairs whatsoever it does not admit it. So too fear, and other things likewise which seem to be contrary to the virtues. Further, this also is a work of the soul that knows itself:

whether it is much desirous of glory, or little, or not at all. Which it gathers from this: whether it delights much, or moderately, or not at all in praises; and whether in reproaches it is grieved a great deal, or little, or not at all. But also in giving and in receiving there are certain indications of the soul that knows itself: whether what it bestows and offers it does so with an affection so ready to share, and as though it be pleased that fairness be maintained among human beings; or whether, as he says, out of sadness or out of necessity, or certainly seeking favor either from those who receive or from those who hear. But also in receiving, the soul that knows itself will observe whether it holds indifferently the things it receives, or whether it rejoices as over some good. But such a soul will also weigh itself by the understanding, so as to know whether the hearing of any plausibility easily moves it, and whether it is filched away by the artifice or sweetness or cunning of speeches, or whether it rarely suffers this, or never at all. But let these things suffice as said by us concerning this kind of self-knowledge. For it is possible for anyone who wishes to gather other, innumerable things of like sort, by which the soul may be proved to know itself, and to contemplate its own beauty—which it received in its creation to the image of God—if it has been able to repair and restore it.

This, then, is what the present discourse teaches the soul, under the figure of a woman, that it should recognize itself, and it says: Unless you know yourself; that is, unless you have led your senses through each of the things we have mentioned above, and have held the discernment of each—what things are to be done, what to be shunned, what is lacking to you and what abounds, what is to be amended and what to be kept: but if you have willed to act indifferently among the other souls of the common life of human beings, which here it calls women, among whom you are beautiful—inasmuch as you have already received the kisses of the Word of God and have looked into the secrets of His chamber; if, I say, you do not know yourself, but have willed to act indifferently like the common crowd, go out in the footsteps of the flocks, that is, be in the remaining flock; if after all these things that have been bestowed upon you, you do nothing excellent, and, not knowing yourself, have not set yourself apart from the herd-like manner of life. And you will be not only in the flock, but in the footsteps of the flocks. For he becomes last and lowest who has not understood his own primacy.

And on this account, where he has neglected knowledge, it is necessary that he be carried about by every wind of doctrine unto the deception of errors, so that at one time he pitches his tent with that shepherd, that is, that teacher of the word, but now with another; and thus

he is carried about everywhere, pasturing not sheep—which is a simple animal—but kids, that is, wanton and restless senses assigned to sin, cultivating them for this very purpose with diverse teachers sought out to that end: and this will be the penalty of the fault of that soul which has not been zealous to recognize itself, and to follow that Shepherd alone who laid down His own soul for His sheep. This is the one species by which the soul ought to understand itself in its affections and acts. But that other part is deeper and more difficult, by which the soul—which nonetheless is already beautiful among women—is commanded to recognize itself. And if it is able to obtain this, let it hope for itself all good things; if not, let it know that it must go out after the footsteps of the flocks, and pasture kids in the tents of shepherds foreign to it. Let us therefore look, and let us begin according to our strength to discuss the knowledge of this part also. The divine word says through the prophet: ”Kindle for yourselves the light of knowledge.

But also, among the spiritual gifts, one gift indeed is the greatest, which is ministered through the Holy Spirit—the word of knowledge; of which knowledge that is the chief work which in the Gospel according to Matthew it says thus: ”No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son shall have willed to reveal Him. But in Luke it says thus: ”No one knows what the Son is except the Father; and no one knows what the Father is except the Son, and he to whom the Son shall have willed to reveal Him. According to John, however, it is written thus: ”As the Father knows me, and I know the Father. But in the forty-fifth psalm it says: ”Be at leisure, and know that I am God. Therefore the chief office of knowledge is to know the Trinity; but in the second place, to know His creature, according to him who said: ”For He gave me the true knowledge of the things that are, the substance of the world, and the power of the elements, the beginning, and the end, and the midst of the times,” and the rest. Among these things, therefore, there will be also a certain self-knowledge of the soul, through which it ought to know what its substance is, whether corporeal or incorporeal, and whether simple, or composed of two or three, or indeed of more.

But also, according to the questions of some, whether it was made, or altogether made by no one; and if it was made, how it was made; whether, as some think, its substance also is contained in the bodily seed, and its origin is transmitted together with the origin of the body; or whether, coming perfect from without, it clothes itself with a body already prepared and formed within the female inward parts. And if it is so, whether it comes newly created, and then first made when the body appears to be formed, so that the cause of its making may be believed to have arisen from the necessity of animating the body; or whether, made before and of old, it is thought for some cause to come to the taking up of a body; and if it is believed to be led into this for some cause, what that cause may be, so that it can be recognized, is a work of knowledge. But this also is inquired: whether it is clothed with a body only once, and afterward, having laid it aside, seeks it no more, or whether, when it has laid aside what it once took up, it takes it up again; and if it should always have what it took up a second time, or whether it sometime casts it off again.

And if indeed, according to the authority of the Scriptures, the consummation of the world is imminent, and this corruptible state will be changed into incorruptible, it does not seem doubtful that in the state of the present life it can come into a body a second or a third time. For if this is admitted, it necessarily follows that, with such successions following one upon another, the world would not know an end. And further, let the soul inquire into knowledge of itself: whether there is some order, or whether there are some spirits of the same substance as itself, but others not of the same, but different from it—that is, whether there are also other spirits rational as it is, and others lacking reason; and whether its substance is the same as that of the angels also, since a rational being is believed to differ in no way from a rational being. Or whether it is not indeed such by substance, but will be such by grace, if it has deserved it; or whether it can by no means be made like to the angels, unless the quality or likeness of its nature has received this. For it will seem possible that what has been lost may be restored, yet not that that be conferred which the Creator did not give from the beginning. But this too let the soul inquire into, toward knowing itself: whether the virtue of its soul can increase and decrease; or whether it is immutable, or, once acquired, no more flows away.

But what need is there to mention more instances from what causes the soul may know itself, lest perchance, if it neglects to know itself perfectly, it be commanded to go out in the footsteps of the flocks, and to pasture kids, and not in its own tent but in the tents of shepherds—since it is ready at hand for anyone willing to pursue these matters to take the very longest occasions from the things we have mentioned above, in which he may exercise himself in the word of knowledge according to his strength? But let these things be said by the Word of God also to the soul which is indeed set in advances, yet has not yet ascended to the summit of perfection. Which, indeed, for the reason that it makes progress, is called beautiful; but that it may be able to arrive at perfection, let the necessary threat be made to it—that unless through each of those things which we have said above it knows itself, and vigilantly exercises itself in the word of God and in the divine law, it will befall it to gather the opinions of divers persons about each of these matters, and to follow people who have spoken nothing excellent, nothing from the Holy Spirit. For this is to go out in the footsteps of the flocks, and to follow the teaching of those who have themselves also remained sinners, and could provide no remedy to those who sin.

And whoever follows these will be seen to pasture kids—which surely hold the token of sinners—going about the tents of shepherds, that is, the diverse sects of the philosophers. Consider, therefore, more fully how terrible is that which is shadowed forth under this figure. ”Go out,” it says, ”you, in the footsteps of the flocks. It speaks as though to a soul that is already within, and set within the mysteries; yet for the reason that it neglects to know itself and to inquire what it is, and what or how it ought to act, or what it ought not, it is said to it: ”Go out, you”—as though one who, on account of this fault of sloth, is sent outside by Him who presides. So great is the peril of the soul to neglect the knowledge and recognition of itself. But perhaps, because we have given a twofold exposition of the soul’s knowledge of itself, it will seem to someone that, according to that in which it neglects to

examine concerning its own morals and acts, and to inquire concerning its advances, or to search out concerning its vices, it is deservedly said to it, "Go out," whereby it seems to be as it were driven outside from the interior places. But if according to the other version, in which we said that it ought to recognize its own nature and substance, and its state either in which it has been or in which it shall be, this will be thought grievous.

For where will such a soul easily be found, so perfect, so powerful, to whom the reasoning and understanding of all these things lies open? To this we shall reply that the discourse which is in hand is not made to all souls, nor to the young maidens to whom here the Bridegroom speaks, nor to the outer women, nor to the eighty concubines, nor to the sixty queens, but to her who alone among all women is called beautiful and perfect. Whence it appears that these things are said to certain beloved souls, to whom, though much grace of perceiving and understanding has been given by God, nevertheless neglect the parts of knowledge, and apply no zeal to knowing themselves. To these, therefore, the divine word issues its threat, because from those to whom much is given, much is required. And the lowly one indeed will be worthy of this pardon and mercy, but the powerful shall be tormented powerfully. If therefore you also, O soul, who are more beautiful and more eminent among the rest, for example in doctrines, neglect yourself and remain in ignorance of yourself, how will either those who desire to be edified be instructed, or those who contradict be convinced and refuted? Deservedly, therefore, with a certain threat it is said to it: Go out, you, in the footsteps of the flocks, and pasture your kids in the tents of the shepherds. To this can also be drawn that which Moses writes: "That if any Israelite woman commit adultery, let her be stoned;

but if she be a priest's daughter, let her be burned with fire. Thus, then, the threat will seem to be just against those who are able to be capable of self-knowledge and knowledge, but through sloth neglect it; against whom the Bridegroom's indignation is most just, because He knows that the negligence of one turns to the harm of many. For a soul of this kind will seem like either to him who hid the received denarius in the earth, lest the master of the money should acquire any gain from it; or to him whom God is said to have slain because he was malignant—Onan, that is, or Er—who, envying posterity, poured out upon the earth the received seeds of natural knowledge. The shepherds too, as we have already said before, if indeed this discourse of threat is made to the Church, are to be taken as the princes of this world, or those angels under whose care the remaining nations are held, whether allotted to this by lot, or led to it by certain more secret causes. But if this threat is referred to each individual soul that neglects to recognize itself, the wise men and masters of this age are to be understood, teaching the wisdom of this world:

so that in sum this may be understood, that it is necessary for the soul—especially that which is good and beautiful, watchful in its senses and its wit—to know itself, and to give diligence to the knowledge of itself through the exercises of teaching and divine studies, and through this to be led by the Spirit of God and by the spirit of adoption. Or, if such a soul neglects itself and turns aside from divine studies, it is necessary that it give diligence to

worldly studies and to the wisdom of the age, and be led by the spirit of this world again in fear. This the Apostle designates when he says: ”But we have not received the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God. And again: ”For you have not received again the spirit of bondage in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption, in which we cry: Abba, Father. These things, in the meantime, we have been able to bring forward concerning the present passage; now let us turn to what follows.

» I have compared you, my beloved, to my cavalry among the chariots of Pharaoh. «

The historical sense, indeed, seems to show this. As, he says, then in Egypt, when Pharaoh in pursuit of the people of Israel advanced with chariots and cavalry, my cavalry — that is, the cavalry of my Lord the bridegroom — far surpassed the chariots of Pharaoh, and was more excellent, seeing that it overcame them and sank them in the sea; so also you, my beloved bride, surpass all women, having been made like to my cavalry, which, being compared to the chariots of Pharaoh, is assuredly more powerful and more magnificent. This, for the meantime, seems to me to be the order of the words themselves and the arrangement of the sentences. But let us consider whether perchance, according to the mystical understanding, he calls those souls which are under that spiritual Pharaoh, and are set under the spiritual wickednesses, the chariots of Pharaoh and his four-horse teams, which he himself drives and leads to pursue the people of God, and to oppress Israel. For it is certain that the temptations and tribulations which the demons stir up against the saints, they stir up through certain souls fitted and suited for this very thing. Mounting upon these as upon chariots, they harass and assail either the Church of God, or each single one of the faithful.

But concerning the cavalry of the Lord, what this cavalry of his is — in Exodus, indeed, where the chariots of Pharaoh are overcome and sunk in the sea, we read nothing written, except only that the Lord cast the chariots of Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. Yet we find in the fourth book of Kingdoms that Elisha, when his servant was terrified at the coming of the enemies who had come with cavalry and chariots, says to him: ”Fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them. ”And Elisha prayed,” he says, ”and said: Lord, open the eyes of this boy that he may see. And the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horsemen, and chariots of fire round about Elisha, which had come down to him. But also in the prophet Habakkuk we read plainly and evidently concerning the cavalry of the Lord, and that he mounts his horses. These, then, are the words of the Scripture: ”Wilt thou be angry with the rivers, O Lord, or is thy fury against the rivers, or thine onset against the Red Sea? Thou that mountest thy horses, and thy cavalry is salvation. There are, then, horses of the Lord, upon which he mounts, and his cavalry.

These I think to be none other than those souls which receive the bridle of his discipline, and bear the yoke of his sweetness, and which are led by the Spirit of God, and in this is salvation for them. In the Revelation of John we read that a horse appeared to him, and one sitting upon it faithful and true, and judging with justice, whose name is the Word of God. He says therefore: ”And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat

upon it was called faithful and true, and judging with justice and making war; and his eyes were as a flame of fire, and upon his head many diadems having a name written, which no one knows but he himself, and he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood, and his name was called the Word of God. And his army was in heaven, and they followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen white and pure. But there is need of the grace of God, which may open to us the understanding of the words, whereby we may be able to perceive what these visions signify, what the white horse is, and who he is that sits upon it, whose name is the Word of God. And perhaps someone will say that the white horse is the body which the Lord assumed, and with which he who in the beginning was God the Word with God was either clothed or carried.

But another will say it is the soul, which the firstborn of all creation assumed, and concerning which he said: ”I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. But another will think that it is both together, body and soul, as though, where there has been no sin, the horse is called white. Yet another, in the fourth place, will say that the Church, which is also named his body, is seen to be the white horse, as not having spot or wrinkle, which he himself sanctified for himself by the washing of water. And according to each of these particulars he will also take those things which follow — the soldiery of heaven, and the army of the Word of God, and how each single one of them, following the Word of God, sits upon white horses and is clothed in fine linen white and clean. To this white horse, then, upon which he himself is carried who is called the Word of God, or to this heavenly cavalry which follows him upon white horses no less, Christ compares and makes like his Church. But ”among the chariots of Pharaoh” we may also take thus: that as much as here the cavalry of the Lord conquers and surpasses the cavalry and chariots of Pharaoh, so much do you, who are fair among women, surpass and conquer all the remaining souls which still bear the yoke of Pharaoh and endure him as their rider;

or else, assuredly, that this cavalry of mine, which, cleansed by the washing of water, has been made pure and shining white, and has been counted worthy to have the Word of God as its rider, has been taken from the chariots of Pharaoh. For from thence come all who believe, because Christ came into this world to save sinners. In this way, then, the sense of this little verse may be explained: to my cavalry, which was formerly among the chariots of Pharaoh, and now follows me upon white horses, having been purified in the washing of water, I judge you like, my beloved. Blessed, therefore, are those souls which have bowed their back to receive the Word of God as rider upon themselves, and endure his bridle, that wherever he wills he may turn them, and drive them with the reins of his precepts: because now they walk no longer by their own will, but are led and led back to all things by the will of their rider.

And perhaps it will seem, according to this — that the Church has been gathered out of many souls, and has received the example of life from Christ — that it received this not so much from the deity itself of the Word of God, which assuredly transcends those acts or affections which ought to be given to men as an example, but that that soul which was

assumed by him, in which was the highest perfection, is the one set forth as an example, and that this itself is here called "my beloved"; whose likeness the Church too ought to have, which is gathered out of many souls — namely those which had formerly been under the yoke and chariots of Pharaoh, and are called the cavalry of the Lord. But which of the two expositions may seem to accord better with the proposed verse, you too who read shall judge.

» How beautiful your cheeks have become, like a turtledove's, your neck like little necklaces. «

The sequence of the drama seems to have this consequence: that after the bridegroom had employed a rather severe threat toward the bride, warning her that unless she came to know herself she would go forth in the tracks of the flocks and would pasture not sheep but kids, she blushed over the severity of the command; and the redness of shame, spreading over her face, made her cheeks beautiful, and much more lovely than they had been. And not only her cheeks, but her neck too was rendered so comely, as though adorned with the little chains of necklaces. The beauty of the cheeks, then, is compared to turtledoves, because by birds of this sort both the seemliness of the face and its liveliness are indicated at once. This is the explanation of the dramatic narrative. But let us come to the matter itself. The apostle Paul, writing to the Church of the Corinthians, speaks thus: "But the body is not one member, but many. And if the foot should say, 'Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body,' it is not on that account not of the body; and if the ear should say, 'Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body,' it is not on that account not of the body. If the whole body is an eye, where is the hearing? If the whole is hearing, where is the smelling? But now God has placed each single member in the body as He willed.

And when he had discussed many things about this, at the last he says: "But you are the body of Christ, and members in part. And again, writing to the Ephesians, he says: "Subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord: for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the Church, He Himself the Savior of the body. But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let wives be subject to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved His Church and delivered Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her by the washing of water in the word, that He Himself might prepare for Himself a glorious Church having no spot or wrinkle or anything of this kind, but that she might be holy and immaculate. And a little after: "For no one," he says, "ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ also does the Church, because we are members of His body," and the rest. By these things, therefore, we are taught how the bride of Christ, which is the Church, is also His body and members. If, then, you hear the members of the bridegroom named, understand that the members of the Church are meant.

Among these, just as there are some who are called eyes, doubtless for the light of understanding and knowledge, and others ears for hearing the word of teaching, others hands for good works and religious ministries, so there are also others who may be called His cheeks. Now the cheeks are said to be the parts of the face in which the seemliness and modesty of

the soul are recognized: by which, without doubt, those among the members of the Church are indicated who cultivate the seemliness of chastity and modesty. For these, therefore, it is said to the whole body of the bride: ”How beautiful your cheeks have become! And observe that He did not say, ”How beautiful your cheeks are,” but ”How beautiful they have become”; so as to show that they were not indeed so beautiful before, but that after she received the kisses of the bridegroom, and He who spoke through the prophets was first present, and cleansed His Church for Himself by the washing of water, and made her to have no spot or wrinkle, and granted her the knowledge of Himself, then her cheeks became beautiful. For then chastity and modesty and virginity, which before had not existed, was diffused with beautiful comeliness over the cheeks of the Church. Yet this comeliness of the cheeks, that is, of modesty and chastity, is compared to turtledoves.

They say that the nature of turtledoves is of this sort, that neither does the male approach any female besides one, nor does the female endure more than one male; so that if it happen, one being taken away, that the other survives, together with its mate the love of intercourse is extinguished in it. Fittingly, therefore, is the likeness of the turtledove applied to the Church, either because after Christ she knows no marriage with another husband, or because in her there flits about, as it were, a multitude of turtledoves, of continence and modesty. According to this understanding let us also take the neck of the bride. By this, without doubt, ought to be understood those souls who take up the yoke of Christ, who says: ”Take up My yoke upon you, for My yoke is sweet. Her obedience, therefore, is called her neck. Her neck, then, has become beautiful like little necklaces, and rightly so. For what the disobedience of transgression had before made unsightly, now the obedience of faith has made beautiful and lovely. ”Your neck, therefore, has become beautiful like little necklaces. For to both is understood the phrase ”has become beautiful. By ”little necklaces” here He means the fastenings or clasps of necklaces which are wont to sit upon the neck, from which is drawn down, and descends over the whole neck, the rest of the ornament. To this very ornament, then, which is wont to be placed upon the neck and throat, He compared the neck of the bride.

And we understand what is said in this way. We said that the neck is called subjection and obedience, because she takes up as it were the yoke of Christ for His sake, and offers the obedience of faith to Him. The ornament, therefore, of her neck is obedience, which is Christ. For He Himself was first made obedient even unto death; and just as through the disobedience of one, namely Adam, many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one, namely Christ, many are made righteous. The ornament, therefore, and necklace of the neck of the Church, is the obedience of Christ. But the neck of the Church too, that is, her obedience, has been made like to the obedience of Christ, which is the necklace of the neck. Great, therefore, is the praise of the bride in this, great the glory of the Church, where the imitation of her obedience follows after the obedience of Christ, which the Church imitates. This same appearance of a necklace is also mentioned in Genesis, given by the patriarch Judah to Tamar his daughter-in-law, when he lay with her as with a harlot. This mystery is not open to all. By this it is understood that Christ gave to the Church, which He

had gathered out of the prostitution of many teachings, these pledges of future perfection, and placed this necklace of obedience upon her neck.

» We will make you likenesses of gold with markings of silver, until the king be in his repose. «

We said above that this little book, arranged in the manner of a drama, is woven together by a change of speakers; and so now these words seem to be spoken to the bride by the friends or companions of the bridegroom, who, according to the mystical understanding — and, as we have already said above — can be understood either as angels, or even as the prophets, or as the patriarchs. For it was not only when the Lord, after the baptism of John, was tempted by the devil in the wilderness that the angels departed and ministered to him, but they always ministered to her before the coming of his bodily presence. For the law also is said to have been ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. And the Apostle, writing to the Hebrews, says: ”For if the word spoken through angels was made firm. They therefore were, as it were, the managers and stewards set over the little bride together with the law as tutor, until the fullness of the times should come, and God should send his Son, born of a woman, made under the law, and should lead her out from under the managers and stewards and the tutor which is the law, so that she might receive the kisses of the very Word of God — that is, his teaching and his words.

Before, therefore, the time of these things was present to man, the bride was cultivated in many ways by the ministry of angels, who then appeared to men and spoke those things which the matter and the occasion required. For do not suppose that the bride, or the Church, is spoken of only from the coming of the Savior in the flesh, but from the beginning of the human race, and from the very foundation of the world — nay rather, that with Paul as my guide I may trace the origin of this mystery yet higher, even before the foundation of the world. For thus he says: ”Even as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him, predestinating us unto the adoption of sons. But also in the Psalms it is written: ”Remember your congregation, O Lord, which you gathered from the beginning. For the first foundations of the congregation were laid straightway from the beginning, whence also the Apostle says that the Church is built not only upon the foundation of the apostles, but also of the prophets; and among the prophets is numbered also Adam, because he prophesied a great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, saying: ”For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh. For evidently concerning these his words the Apostle says that ”this is a great mystery.

But I speak concerning Christ and the Church. But the same Apostle also, when he says: ”For if Christ loved the Church, so that he delivered himself up for her, sanctifying her with the washing of water,” by no means shows that she did not exist before — for how could he have loved her who did not exist? — but without doubt he loved her who did exist. And she existed in all the saints who had been made from the beginning of the age. Loving her, therefore, he came to her. And just as her children shared in flesh and blood, so likewise

he himself was made a partaker of the same, and delivered himself up for them. For they themselves were the Church which he loved, that he might either increase her in number, or cultivate her in virtues, or by the charity of perfection transfer her from the earth to heaven. From the beginning, therefore, the prophets ministered to her, and the angels also ministered. For what else was taking place then, when three men appeared to Abraham as he sat by the oak of Mamre? — although that manifestation showed something more than the ministry of angels, for there the mystery of the Trinity was being made known. This was also the case in Exodus, where the angel of the Lord is said to have appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in the bush.

But immediately in what follows the Lord and God is written to speak in the angel, and he himself is designated the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Reading which, certain of the heretics have said that the God of the law and the prophets is far inferior to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; and they have stretched out their impiety to such a point that they place fullness indeed in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, but imperfection and weakness in the God of the law. But these things elsewhere. Now, however, our purpose is to show how the holy angels who before the coming of Christ managed the guardianship of the bride while she was as yet a little child, are themselves the friends and companions of the bridegroom who seem to say to her: "We will make you likenesses of gold with markings of silver, until the king be in his repose. They indicate, therefore, that they themselves make for the bride not gold (for neither did they have such gold as was worthy to be offered to the bride), but they promise that they will make for her, in place of gold, likenesses of gold — and not one likeness, but many. So too they speak concerning silver, but as though having a small quantity of silver material, they promise to make for her not likenesses, but markings of silver;

inasmuch as there did not abound in them so great a quantity of silver material that they could produce from it any connected and solid work, but only markings, and certain small signs like points, which they might interweave into that work which they made for her out of the likeness of gold. These ornaments, therefore, the friends of the bridegroom — those of whom we spoke above — make for the bride. But what secret is contained in these things, and what the very novelty of the expression brings to birth, let us pray to the Father of the almighty Word and bridegroom, that he himself may open to us the barred doors of this mystery, whereby we may be illumined not only to understand these things, but also to set them forth, and, according to the measure of those who are going to read, to receive them with the moderation of spiritual speech. We have often shown in many places that the appearance of gold holds the figure of the invisible and incorporeal nature; but silver, the power of the word and of reason; according to which the Lord says through the prophet: "I gave you silver and gold; but you made silver and golden things for Baal" — showing through these and saying, that "I gave you sense and reason, whereby you might be able both to perceive me as God and to worship me; but you have transferred both the sense and the reason which is in you to the worshiping of demons.

But also the oracles of the Lord, ”the chaste oracles,” are called ”silver tried by fire. And likewise in another place the tongue of the just man is spoken of as ”kindled silver. But the cherubim are called golden, since indeed they are interpreted as ”the fullness of the knowledge of God. But also the candlestick in the tabernacle of the testimony was commanded to be set up golden and solid; which seems to me to hold the form of the natural law, in which the law of knowledge is held. But what need is there to heap up many testimonies, when it is at hand for those willing to know that in many places of Scripture this is indicated — that gold is to be referred to the sense and the mind, but silver is to be referred to the word and to oracles? Now therefore let us hasten to contemplate how, according to those things which we have set forth, the friends of the bridegroom say that they make for the bride likenesses of gold with markings of silver. It seems to me, therefore, that the law which was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator, inasmuch as it has ”a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things,” and ”whatever befell those who are recounted in the law befell them in a figure and not in truth” — all these things were likenesses of gold, not true gold.

Namely, that true gold is understood in those things which are incorporeal and invisible and spiritual; but the likeness of gold, in which is not the truth itself but the shadow of the truth, is to be taken as these corporeal and visible things. For example, a likeness of gold was that tabernacle made by hand, concerning which the Apostle says: ”For Jesus did not enter into the holy places made by hand, the copies of the true, but into heaven itself. Therefore the things which are in the heavens, invisible and incorporeal, those are the true; but these which are on the earth, visible and corporeal, are said to be copies of the true, not the true. These, therefore, are what are called likenesses of gold; among which are also the ark of the covenant, and the mercy-seat, and the cherubim, and the altar of incense, and the table of the shewbread, and the loaves, but also the veil, and the columns and bars, and the altar of holocausts, and the temple itself, and all the things that are written in the law. All these were likenesses of gold. But even the visible gold itself, in that it was visible, was not true gold, but was a likeness of that true invisible gold. These likenesses of gold, therefore, the friends of the bridegroom — namely the angels and the prophets — made for the bride, the Church, they who ministered in the law and in the other mysteries. This, I think, Paul also understood when he said:

”In the religion of angels, in the things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the sense of his flesh. All Jewish worship and religion, therefore, are likenesses of gold. But when anyone has been converted to the Lord, and the veil has been taken away from him, then he will see the true gold; likenesses of which gold, before it was present and offered itself to be known, its friends made for the bride, that admonished and provoked by those likenesses she might conceive a desire of the true gold. For this Paul indicates was done, when he says: ”But these things befell them in a figure. And they were written for our sake, upon whom the end of the ages has come. But the ”end” of which Paul speaks, do not understand as the bodily one. For the bodily end will find many for whom these things were not written; for neither will such men receive an understanding concerning them. But understand the

end of the ages as the perfection of things, which surely is said to have come to Paul and to those like him, and for their sakes these things are said to have been written.

But these things we have said in a digression, wishing to show how the friends of the bridegroom say to the bride that they make for her likenesses of gold with markings of silver — namely through those things which in the law and the prophets they handed down in writing by means of figures and images and likenesses and parables. Yet there are among these also certain small markings of silver — that is, indications of the spiritual sense of the word and of the reasonable interpretation, though very rare and scanty. For before the coming of the Lord scarcely anywhere did any of the prophets disclose a little of the hidden discourse; for example, as Isaiah when he says: "The vineyard of the Lord of Sabaoth is the house of Israel, and the house of Judah is his beloved new planting. And again elsewhere: "The many waters are many peoples. And Ezekiel, naming two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, distinguishes the one to be Samaria and the other Judaea; and wherever such things are disclosed with the prophets themselves interpreting, these are called markings of silver.

But when the Savior and our Lord Jesus Christ came, making all things known by the word of his power, in his passion an indication was given that the things which were held in secret places and were hidden should be brought forth into the light and come to manifestation — through this, that the veil of the temple, by which the Holy of Holies and the secret things were veiled, was rent from the top of it to the bottom, announcing that it would be made plain to all what within was seen to be covered. So therefore that which was ministered through the angels and the prophets was a likeness of gold, with the small and scanty markings of silver. But these things which were handed down through our Lord Jesus Christ himself are placed in true gold and in solid silver. For this which was made through the friends of the bridegroom, the likeness of gold with markings of silver, is not promised to abide forever; but a time is set for it by those very ones who say: "Until the king be in his repose.

For when reclining he shall have slept "as a lion, and as a lion's whelp," and after this the Father shall have raised him up, and he shall have risen from the dead, if there be any who are conformed to his resurrection, they will no longer abide in the likeness of gold — that is, not in the worship of corporeal things — but they will receive the true gold from him, believing and hoping not in the things that are seen but in those that are not seen, nor in those that are on earth but in those that are in the heavens, "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God," and they will say that "even if we have known Christ at one time according to the flesh, yet now we no longer know him so. No longer, therefore, will they use the small markings of silver, but silver spread out in breadth. For they will hear that in that likeness of gold the rock which is said to follow and to furnish drink to the people is Christ, and the sea is baptism, and the cloud is the Holy Spirit, and the manna is the Word of God, and the paschal lamb is the Savior, and the blood of the lamb is the passion of Christ, and the veil which is in the Holy of Holies by which those divine and secret things were covered is his flesh;

and other things beyond number will be made plain from his resurrection, no longer small, as before, but disclosed by a most ample exposition. But further, that what he says — "Until the king be in his repose" — may become clearer, we will also bring forward from the second prophecy of Balaam, which contains this concerning Christ: "There shall arise," he says, "a star out of Jacob, and a man shall come forth from his seed, and shall have dominion over many nations. His kingdom shall be exalted above Gog, and his kingdom shall grow. God shall lead him out of Egypt, as the glory of the unicorn, and he shall devour the nations of his enemies, and shall suck out the marrow of their fatness, and shall shoot them with his darts. Reclining he shall rest as a lion, and as a lion's whelp. Who shall raise him up? Consider therefore from these things more carefully, and see how every likeness of gold is recorded to stand until the last time — that is, until the repose of the king. After these things, therefore, his kingdom shall be exalted above Gog — that is, above the housetops — namely when it shall have been transferred from the earth to the heavenly things above the housetops. But concerning these things we have treated more fully, as the Lord granted, in the book of Numbers.

Let us indeed inquire whether also to the holy fathers themselves and to the prophets who ministered the word before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of this perfection and of the true gold was given; or whether they only understood these future things and foresaw in the spirit the things to come; and whether for this reason alone the Lord said concerning Abraham that "he desired to see his day, and saw it, and rejoiced" — namely that in the spirit he foresaw the future things. And perhaps that saying too confirms more that this is so, which says: "Many just men desired to see the things which you see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which you hear, and heard them not. Although neither could there have been lacking to them the perfection that comes from faith. For the things which we believe to have been done, these they believed with a greater expectation as things to come. As therefore the faith of things past brought to the summit of perfection those who believe from the coming of Christ, so also did the faith of things to come bring those others.

But if the exposition be referred to each individual soul, it will be seen that, so long as the soul is as yet little and imperfect, and placed under tutors and stewards — whether the teachers of the Church, or the angels who are said to be the guardians of the little ones and always to see the face of the Father who is in heaven — likenesses of gold are made for it, since it is not nourished with the solid and strong foods of the Word of God, but is imbued with likenesses; as, if we may so say, it is taught with parables and examples, for the sake of which Christ himself also is said "to grow in age and in wisdom and in grace with God and men. In those likenesses, therefore, it is imbued, and there come to be for it small markings of silver. For to those who are being imbued there are sometimes opened certain small and rare things of the more secret mysteries, that they may conceive a desire of greater ones. For neither can anything be desired if it be utterly unknown. And therefore to those beginning and set in the first stages of instruction, just as not all things are to be laid open suddenly, so neither are the spiritual mysteries to be utterly hidden;

but, as the divine discourse says, markings of silver are to be made, and certain sparks of spiritual understanding are to be introduced into their souls, that they may in a manner take a taste of the sweetness that is to be desired, and not — as we have said — if it be utterly unknown, be in no way desired. But that we name the soul "little," let no one so take it as though it were called little according to substance; but if to anyone instruction is lacking, and in whom the understanding is scanty and the skill very small, this soul we call little. Therefore it is fitting that these things be done until the king be in his repose — that is, until such a soul make progress unto this, that it may receive the king, and have him reclining within itself. For thus this king says, that "I will dwell in them and walk in them" — assuredly those who furnish to the Word of God so great a breadth of their heart, that he is even said to walk about in them, namely in the ampler spaces of understanding and of a more widely diffused knowledge. So therefore he is also said to recline in that soul, without doubt, concerning which the Lord himself says through the prophet: "Upon whom shall I rest, save upon the humble and quiet, and him that trembles at my words?

This king, therefore, who is the word of God, has in that soul which has now come to perfection his repose; provided, however, that there be in it no vice, but that it be full of holiness, full of piety, faith, charity, peace, and all virtues. For then it delights the king to recline and to have his repose. For to this soul the Lord was saying, that "I and my Father will come, and will sup with him, and will make our abode with him. Where, therefore, Christ sups with it, and where he makes his abode, why should he not recline? Blessed is that breadth of the soul, blessed the couch of that mind, where the Father and the Son — as I do not doubt — together with the Holy Spirit reclines, sups, and makes his abode. With what riches, do you think, with what abundance are such guests fed? Peace there is the first food; humility is set on at the same time, and patience, meekness also and kindness, and — that which is of the highest sweetness to it — purity of heart. But charity holds the chief place in this banquet. In such a manner, therefore, even by a third exposition it will be seen able to be referred to each individual soul, that which he says: "We will make you likenesses of gold with markings of silver, until the king be in his repose."

» My nard gave forth its odor (or, his odor). «

In the manner of a drama, this appears to be shown: that after these words the bride entered in to the bridegroom and anointed him with her ointments, and, in some wondrous fashion, as though the nard which before had given no odor while it was with the bride, then gave forth its odor when it touched the body of the bridegroom—so that he seems not so much to have taken odor from the nard as the nard to have taken it from him. But if we read according to that variant which is found in other copies, "My nard gave forth his odor," something still more divine is discovered: namely, that this ointment of nard with which the bridegroom was anointed took not only its own odor, which is naturally wont to be in nard, but the very odor of the bridegroom himself, and the nard carried back his odor to the bride—so that in that with which she anointed him, it received the odor of the bridegroom through the office of the ointment itself. And this is what she seems to say: "My

nard, with which I anointed the bridegroom, returning to me brought back to me the odor of the bridegroom, and, as though its own natural odor were overcome by the fragrance of the bridegroom, brought to me his sweetness. This is what the exposition of the historical drama holds; but let us now come to the spiritual understanding.

Let us here set the bride, the Church, in the person of Mary, who fittingly indeed is said to bring a pound of ointment of precious spikenard, and to anoint the feet of Jesus and wipe them with her hair, and in a certain manner to receive and recover unto herself, through the hair of her head, the ointment tinctured by the quality and power of his body; and drawing to herself the odor not so much of nard through the ointment as of the very Word of God, through the hairs with which she wiped his feet, and putting upon her own head not so much the fragrance of nard as of Christ; and to say that "my nard, applied to the body of Christ, gave back his odor. Consider, then, how these very things are reported. "Mary," it says, "brought a pound of ointment of precious spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. And the house," it says, "was wholly filled with the odor of the ointment. This surely indicates that the odor of the teaching which proceeds from Christ, and the fragrance of the Holy Spirit, filled the whole house of this world and the house of the whole Church.

Or certainly it filled the whole house of that soul which received a share of the odor of Christ, offering first the gift of its faith, as it were the ointment of nard, and receiving from this the grace of the Holy Spirit and the fragrance of spiritual teaching. What difference, then, does it make whether in the Song of Songs the bride anoints the bridegroom with ointment, or in the Gospel the disciple anoints the master and Mary anoints Christ, hoping, as we have said, that from this ointment there should return to her the odor of the word and the fragrance of Christ—so that on this very account she may say: "We are the good odor of Christ unto God"? And since that ointment was full of faith and of precious affection, on this account Jesus too bore witness to her, saying: "She has wrought a good work upon me. So then, again, in the Song of Songs, after some passages, he embraces the emissions of the bride, just as here the work of Mary; for he says: "Thy emissions are a paradise with the fruit of apple-trees. Cyprus with nards. Nard and saffron. He embraces, therefore, in these also the sendings-forth and the gifts of the bride. We have indeed observed that in those things which we have just now mentioned, he set nard first in the plural, afterward in the singular;

which I think was said according to that principle, because the merchant of the kingdom of heaven first trades in many pearls, until he arrives at one precious one. And perhaps in that he said, "Thy emissions are a paradise with the fruit of apple-trees," he indicates those fruits together with the many nards, which we bring from the instructions and the prophetic teaching. But from the teaching of our very Lord Jesus Christ our emissions and gifts have not many nards, but one. But now let us return to her who says, "My nard gave forth its odor"; and see whether we can understand this also here in the present passage: that, if ever we have been able wholly and fittingly to expound the deity of Christ, and to

set forth his power and majesty with worthy assertions, then perhaps she will deservedly say—whether that Church, or the soul which has been able thus manifestly to expound his glory: ”My nard gave forth its odor. Nor ought it to seem a wonder if Christ, just as he is a fountain and rivers of living water proceed from him, and just as he is bread and gives life, so also is nard and gives back odor, and is an ointment, by which those who have been anointed become anointed ones (christs), as he says in the Psalm: ”Touch not my anointed ones.

And perhaps according to that which the Apostle says of those who have their senses exercised to the discernment of good or evil, Christ is made each several thing to each several sense of the soul. For on this account he is called the true light, that the eyes of the soul may have wherewith to be illumined; on this account also the word, that the ears may have what they hear; on this account also the bread of life, that the taste of the soul may have what it may taste. On this account, therefore, he is called also an ointment or nard, that the smell of the soul may have the fragrance of the word. On this account too he is called palpable and to be handled with the hand, and the word made flesh, that the hand of the inner soul may be able to touch of the word of life. But all these are one and the same Word of God, which, here changed severally to the affections of the discourse, leaves no sense of the soul without experience of its grace.

» A bundle of a drop is my kinsman to me; he will abide (or dwell) in the midst of my breasts. «

These, as it seems, are still the words of the bride speaking to the young maidens. Earlier she had said that her nard had given its fragrance to the bridegroom, and that through the ointment with which she had anointed him she had received back the fragrance of its scent; but now she says: My kinsman is fragrant to me with a drop, and this drop not diffused nor scattered at random, but bound together and compressed, so that, namely, the odor of its very sweetness may be rendered thicker and stronger. And this one, she says, though he be of such a kind, tarries and abides in the midst of my breasts, and makes his rest and his dwelling in the place of my bosom. But since the bride has now for the first time called him her kinsman, and frequently uses the designation of this name through nearly the whole text of the little book, I think it worthwhile that we first inquire into the cause of this appellation, and expound what he is called a kinsman, or from what. A ”kinsman” (fraternus) is the term for a brother’s son. Let us first inquire who is the bride’s brother, whose son this one is held to be. See whether we can say that the bride is indeed the Church from the Gentiles, but her brother the former people, and a brother, as the matter indicates, who is the elder.

Since therefore Christ according to the flesh is born from that people, on this account he is called by the Church of the Gentiles the son of her brother. So then, when she says: My kinsman is to me a bundle of a drop, she indicates the sacrament of his bodily nativity. For in a certain way the body seems to be a binding and a kind of bond of the soul, which as a bundle of the drop is bound fast to Christ by the divine power and sweetness. But if

the things that have been said are referred to each individual soul, the binding of the drop is understood as the compacting of the doctrines of continence and the knottedness of the divine sentences. For the reasons of the faith are interwoven with one another and bound fast by the bonds of truth. Finally, he says too that every vessel that is bound is clean, but that unclean which shall have been loosed and not tied. Of this thing this was the figure, that Christ, in whom there was never any uncleanness of sin, is called a bundle of a drop. And therefore the soul ought not to touch anything loosened, and which is not supported by reason and bound fast by the truth of doctrines, lest it become unclean. For whoever shall touch what is unclean will be unclean according to the law. For an irrational sense, alien from the wisdom of God, will touch him and will make him unclean.

But see whether perhaps we can take the Son of God in the flesh to be called a drop, and named as something short and small, just as Daniel says of him: A little stone cut from the mountain without hands, and made after these things a great mountain. Or as in the little book of the twelve prophets it is likewise said that there shall be a drop which shall gather the people together. For it is thus written in the prophets: And it shall be, out of a drop of this people Jacob shall be gathered and gathered together. For it was fitting that he who was coming to gather together not only Jacob but also all the nations — which, as the prophet says, are reckoned as a drop from a bucket — emptying himself of the form of divinity, should himself become as it were a drop, and thus come to gather together the drop of the nations, the drop likewise of the remnants of Jacob. But also in the forty-fourth psalm it is said to the beloved, to whom also the psalm itself is ascribed: Myrrh and drop and cassia from thy garments. From the garments therefore of the Word of God, which is the teaching of wisdom, there proceeds myrrh, the token, that is, of the death undertaken for the human race. The drop, as we said above, is the divesting of the form of divinity, the condescension of the servile form assumed.

Cassia too, since that kind of herb is said to be nourished and to grow together by unceasing waters, indicates the redemption of the human race given through the waters of baptism. Thus therefore the bride, speaking as it were in a nuptial drama, says that her kinsman as a binding of the drop tarries in the midst of her breasts: by the breasts, as we have already said above, understand the principal part of the heart, in which the Church holds Christ, or the soul holds the Word of God, bound and fastened by the bonds of her desire. For if anyone binds fast the Word of God in his heart with all his affection and with all his love, he alone will be able to receive the odor of its fragrance and sweetness.

» A cluster of henna, my kinsman, is to me in the vineyards of Engedi. «

As far as concerns the explanation of the letter itself, there is something ambiguous in what it says: ”A cluster of henna is to me as a kinsman”; for a flowering vine is also called henna, since it too bears a certain flowering fruit put forth in the manner of a blossoming grape. But the words seem to refer rather to the fruit of the vine, since mention has been made of the vineyards of Engedi. Now Engedi is a district of the land of Judaea, flourishing not so much in vineyards as in balsams. This, then, will be the historical sense of the bride speaking

to the maidens, so that she is understood to be saying, first indeed: "My nard renders to me the fragrance of my bridegroom. Second: "My kinsman has become to me a bundle of myrrh lingering between my breasts. Third: "A cluster of henna from the vineyards of Engedi, surpassing everything that there is among fragrances and flowers of sweetness"; namely, that the maidens hearing these things may be roused more and more toward love and affection for the bridegroom. And she names them one by one and in order — first her nard, then the myrrh, and after these also the cluster of henna — so that through these she may teach certain steps and advances of love. But let us now see what the spiritual understanding holds.

For if this which is called a cluster is to be referred to the fruit of the vine — just as we receive the Word of God as wisdom and power and the treasure of knowledge, and many other things, so also is he called the true vine. As therefore in those in whom wisdom and knowledge are brought about, not suddenly, but through certain advances and steps, according to the zeal and intention and faith of those who share in him whether in wisdom, or in knowledge, or in virtue, he renders them wise and knowing and vigorous in virtues; so also in those in whom the true vine is brought about, he does not suddenly produce for them ripe and sweet clusters, nor is there suddenly made for them the wine that is sweet and gladdens the heart of man, but first he produces for them only the sweetness of fragrance in the blossom. This cluster is recorded to be flowering in the vineyards of Engedi, so that the grace of its fragrance may be sent into the beginnings of the soul, that after these things it may be able to endure the bitterness of tribulations and temptations which are stirred up for those who believe on account of the Word of God;

and so at last he offers the sweetness of its ripeness, until he leads them to the winepresses where the blood of the grape is poured out, the blood of the new testament which is drunk on the feast day in the upper rooms, where the great couch is prepared. So then, through these individual advances of steps must they proceed who, initiated through the sacrament of the vine and the cluster of henna, are borne toward perfection, and strive to drink the cup of the new testament received from Jesus. But if the henna is to be taken as a tree of its own kind, whose fruit — indeed its flower — is said to possess not so much the sweetness of fragrance as also the power of warming and cherishing: without doubt there is taken that virtue of the bridegroom by which souls grow warm toward faith in him and love, which was touching those who said: "Was not our heart burning within us, while he opened to us the Scriptures?

Or certainly, since this cluster is said to be flowering from the vineyards of Engedi — and Engedi is interpreted as "the eye of my temptation" — if there is anyone who is able to have understanding of how the life of man upon earth is a temptation, and understands how one is snatched away from temptation in God, and who recognizes the character of his own temptation, so that it may be said of him that in all these things he did not sin with his lips before God: to such a one the Word of God becomes a cluster of henna from the vineyards of Engedi. It must be observed, however, that the words of the bride are so reported that both

the nard and the bundle of myrrh and the cluster of henna are for herself alone, inasmuch as she has now ascended into these advances. For the soul alone that is perfect is the one that has so pure and purified a fragrance of itself that it can grasp the fragrance of the nard, and of the myrrh, and of the henna proceeding from the Word of God, and can draw in the grace of the divine fragrance.

Commentary on the Song of Songs — Book Three

English translation of Origen of Alexandria's Commentary on the Song of Songs (Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum), in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 410). Translated from the OCR-corrected Migne Patrologia Graeca 13 (Delarue) base text. Rufinus's translation is intrinsically incomplete, running only as far as Song of Songs 2:15. This English translation is in the public domain.

BOOK THREE

» Behold, you are beautiful, my neighbor; and behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves' «

Now for the second time the bridegroom joins with the bride in word and conversation. And in his first discourse he invited her to this, that she should come to know herself, telling her that she was indeed good among women, but that unless she came to know herself, she would suffer certain things. And, as one who has swiftly run to the recognition of herself by sense and understanding, he compares her to his horses, or to the cavalry, with which he overthrew the chariots of Pharaoh. At the same time he also compares her cheeks, on account of their remarkable modesty and the swiftness of her manner of life, to turtledoves, and her neck to the fillets of ornaments. But now he already professes her to be beautiful, and beautiful not as before merely among women, but as one who is near to himself; and he raises the title of her praise still higher, and affirms that she is beautiful not only when she is near to him, but also that, if it should happen to her to be absent, even so she is beautiful. For this is indicated in that, when he had said, "Behold, you are beautiful, my neighbor," he adds after this, absolutely and without any qualification, "Behold, you are beautiful. But in what went before he had not praised her sight, I believe because her spiritual understanding had not yet advanced to contemplation; now therefore he says, "Your eyes are doves'.

Her great progress in this is shown, that she who before was called only beautiful among women is now called beautiful as one near to him, receiving without doubt the splendor of her comeliness from the bridegroom himself, so that, having once taken her beauty from him, even if it should befall her to suffer a little the bridegroom's absence, she nonetheless remains beautiful. But that her eyes are compared to doves — this surely comes about

because she now understands the divine Scriptures not according to the letter but according to the spirit, and beholds in them the spiritual mysteries. For the dove is a token of the Holy Spirit. To understand the law and the prophets in a spiritual sense, then, this is to have the eyes of a dove. And here indeed her eyes are called doves' eyes, whereas in the Psalms a soul of this kind desires that the wings of a dove be given to her, so that she may be able to fly into the understanding of spiritual mysteries and to rest in the courts of wisdom. But also, if anyone can sleep — that is, be settled and rest in the midst of the lots, and understand the reason, and know the cause of the divine judgment — not only are the wings of a dove, by which she may fly amid spiritual understandings, promised to her, but wings covered with silver, that is, with the ornaments of word and reason.

Her shoulder-blades too are said to become like gold, where the constancy of faith and the stability of the doctrines of the perfect is indicated. Therefore, if Christ is said to be the head, I think nothing seems absurd if the eyes also of those who according to the inner man understand spiritually and judge spiritually are said to be the Holy Spirit. And on this account perhaps in the law, just as a lamb was appointed, by whose sacrifice the people might be purified at the Pascha, so also doves were appointed, by which a man is purified upon entering this world. But to speak now of this too, and to discuss the qualities of the sacrifices, seems too long a digression, and by no means suited to the work proposed. Let it suffice, however, to have recalled these things, for what the present discourse contains: "Your eyes are doves'. As if he were saying: your eyes are spiritual, seeing spiritually, understanding spiritually. It can perhaps still be understood by a deeper mystery, that what he said, "Behold, you are beautiful, my neighbor," is understood to be said of the present age, because the Church is beautiful even here, when she is near to Christ and when she imitates Christ. But that he said again, "Behold, you are beautiful," can pertain to the age to come, where now she is fair and beautiful not only by imitation but by her very own perfection;

so that there he says her eyes are doves, that by the name of the two eyes the two doves may be understood to be the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. And do not wonder if they are called doves together, since each of them is likewise called an advocate, as John the evangelist declares, calling the Holy Spirit indeed the Paraclete, which is "advocate"; and of Jesus Christ he says nonetheless in his Epistle that he himself is an advocate with the Father for our sins. But also in Zechariah the prophet the two olive trees placed at the right and at the left of the lampstand are believed nonetheless to designate the Only-begotten and the Holy Spirit.

» Behold, you are good, my kinsman, and indeed comely; our couch is shady «

Now for the first time the bride seems to have looked more attentively upon the beauty of her bridegroom, and to have considered, with those eyes which were said to be a dove's, the splendor and comeliness of the Word of God. For in truth one cannot first perceive or recognize how great is the magnificence in the Word, unless one first receives eyes like a dove's, that is, spiritual understanding. But by the couch which she says she has in common with the bridegroom, there seems to me to be indicated this body of the soul, in which, while

still set there, she has been held worthy to be taken up into fellowship with the Word of God. And she calls it shady, inasmuch as it is not dry but fruitful, and, as it were, wooded with the denseness of good work. But these things the bride says—the soul, that is, which already has a dove's eyes. Those, however, who merely believe the bridegroom, yet have not been able to perceive how great is the beauty in the Word of God, say: "And we saw him, and he had no comeliness nor beauty, but his form was unsightly and wanting beyond the sons of men. But she who has profited well and has surpassed the rank of the maidens and the eighty concubines and the sixty queens, that soul can say: "Behold, you are comely, my kinsman, and indeed beautiful.

But also, if, while still set in the body, I understand the denseness of the spiritual senses and the understanding of the divine Scriptures woven together with such frequent shade that the more scorching heat—which is wont to burn up and dry the fruits of many—cannot nevertheless darken me, nor can any force of temptations dry up the seed of faith in me, then I can say that "our couch is shady. But when she says "our couch," indicating, as it were, that the place of her own body is common to her with the bridegroom, understand it to be said after that likeness by which Paul also said that "our bodies are members of Christ. For when he says "our bodies," he shows the body to be, as it were, the bride's. But when he mentions "the members of Christ," he indicates that these same bodies are also the bridegroom's body. If, then, these bodies are shady, as we said above, filled, that is, with good works and heaped with the denseness of spiritual senses, of such as these it can be said: "By day the sun shall not burn you, nor the moon by night. For the sun of temptation does not scorch the just man who rests under the shade of the Word of God. For that sun which scorches the just man is not damnable; but rather that one which transfigures itself into an angel of light. Good, therefore, and comely is the kinsman called;

and the more he can be gazed upon with spiritual eyes, so much the more beautiful and fair is he found; because not only will his own comeliness and beauty appear wondrous, but also to the one gazing and looking upon him there will arise a great splendor and a new and wondrous beauty of form, according to that which the Apostle, gazing upon the beauty of the Word of God, says: "For though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. Rightly, therefore, does such a soul have its body as a couch in common with the Word. For the divine power reaches even to the grace of the body, when it places in it either the gift of chastity, or of continence, and the grace of the other good works. Consider indeed whether perhaps that body also which Jesus assumed can be named a couch common to him with the bride, since indeed through it the Church seems to be joined to Christ and to have been able to receive a share of the Word of God, according to which he is called the mediator of God and men, and according to which the Apostle says: "For in him we have access through faith into the hope of the glory of God."

» The rafters of our houses are cedars, our beams are cypresses «

The bridegroom seems to be replying graciously to those things which had earlier been spoken by the bride, so as to teach her of what sort these shared dwellings are, and what

kind of framing material is found in them. This is what the literal narrative holds. But the Church seems to be described by Christ — the Church which is a spiritual house, the house of God, as Paul teaches when he says: ”But if I tarry long, that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. If, then, the Church is the house of God, since all things that the Father has are the Son’s, the Church is the house of the Son of God. But frequently they are also called ”Churches” in the plural, as he says in that place: ”We have no such custom, neither the Churches of God. And again, Paul writes to the Churches of Galatia, and John to the seven Churches. So then, whether it be the Church or the Churches, they are the house of the bridegroom and of the bride, or the house of the soul and of the Word, in which the rafters are of cedar. We read also of certain ”cedars of God,” over which the vine that was brought over from Egypt is said to have stretched out its shoots, or its branches, as it says in the Psalms:

”Its shadow covered the mountains, and its branches the cedars of God. Evidently, therefore, through these words certain persons in the Church are named ”cedars of God. When, then, the bridegroom says, ”The rafters of our houses are cedars,” we ought to understand that those who roof over the Church are cedars of God, and that some of these, the stronger ones, are called beams. And I think that fittingly those who administer the episcopate well in the Church can be called beams, by which the whole building is supported and covered, whether from the ruin of the rains or from the burning heat of the sun. But in the second place after these, I think the presbyters are called rafters; and the beams indeed are called cypresses, in which there is both a more robust strength and a scent of sweetness, whereby he designates the bishop as both solid in works and fragrant in the grace of doctrine. But similarly he also called the rafters cedars, so that by this he might indicate that the presbyters ought to be full of the virtue of incorruption and of the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.

» I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys: as the lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters «

He who is the Bridegroom and the Word and Wisdom seems to be speaking of himself and of the Bride to his friends and companions. But according to the order of the exposition we have set forth, Christ is to be understood as speaking these things about the Church, and to be saying that he himself is the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys. A field is the term for a level stretch of earth, to which cultivation is applied and which is tilled by farmers. The valleys, on the other hand, indicate places that are rather rocky and untilled. But we can also understand that field to be the people that was cultivated through the prophets and the law, and the rocky and untilled valley to be the place of the Gentiles. This Bridegroom, then, was a flower among the people of the Jews; but since the law brought no one to perfection, for that reason the Word of God could not in that people advance to flower and arrive at the perfection of its fruits. Yet in that valley of the Gentiles he became a lily. But what kind of lily? Such, without doubt, as he himself in the Gospels says the heavenly Father clothes. And: ”Not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. So

the Bridegroom becomes a lily in this valley, in that the heavenly Father clothed him with such a garment of flesh as not even Solomon in all his glory could possess.

For Solomon did not have flesh that was immaculate and in no way whatever subject to sin, apart from the desire of a man and the embrace of a woman. But he also seems to show the reason why he who had been a flower in the field willed to be a lily in the valleys. For although he had been a flower in the field for a long time, he says that no flower came forth from that field itself in imitation and likeness of himself. But once he had become a lily in the valleys, straightway by his near imitation there is likewise made a lily; so that it was worth the effort, since he himself became a lily, that also what is near to him — that is, each soul that draws near to him and follows his example and imitation — should become a lily. Therefore, when he says, ”As a lily in the midst of thorns, so is my beloved in the midst of the daughters,” we shall take it as said of the Church of the Gentiles, either because she has emerged, as it were from thorns, out of the midst of the unfaithful and unbelieving, or because she is said to be set in the midst of thorns on account of the bitings of heretics clamoring around her. And this will seem the more likely from the fact that he says: ”So is my beloved in the midst of the daughters.

For he would not have called those souls ”daughters” who had never at all come to believe. All heretics, therefore, first come to belief, and after this they turn aside from the way of faith and from the truth of the doctrines. Just as the apostle John also says in his Epistle: ”They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would surely have remained with us. But we can also refer this to each individual soul, and say that for the soul which, on account of its simplicity and its levelness or evenness, can be called a field, the Word of God becomes a flower and teaches the beginnings of good works. But for those who now seek deeper things and search out things more profound, as it were in the valleys, he becomes a lily, whether on account of the brightness of chastity or the splendor of wisdom, so that they too may become lilies bursting forth from the midst of thorns — that is, fleeing the thoughts and worldly cares that in the Gospel are compared to thorns.

» Like an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my kinsman among the sons. In his shadow I longed to be and I sat down, and his fruit is sweet in my throat «

It was fitting indeed that the bridegroom should speak also of himself, of what he was in the field, and also of what he was in the valleys; and of the bride, of who she was and of what sort she was held to be among the other daughters. But it was not fitting that the bride, in answering these things, should say anything of herself, but rather that she should be wholly moved toward admiration of the bridegroom and should cling to his praises. She therefore compares him to an apple tree. But lest, from the resemblance of the word, some of the simpler folk should think the apple tree (arbor mali) to be an evil tree and named from evil (malitia), let us say ”the tree of meli,” using indeed a Greek word, but one better known to any of the simpler Latin speakers than ”mali. For it is better that we offend the grammarians than that we place some stumbling-block before the readers in the explanation of the truth. She compares him, then, to a meli tree, and his companions to the rest of the

trees of the wood. But she says the bridegroom is so like this meli tree that she even says she longed to sit beneath his shadow, and she declares that his fruit has been made sweet to her in her throat. And she seems to speak these things to the young maidens, just as the bridegroom too spoke earlier to his companions.

But let us now consider, according to the mystery, whom the bride calls "sons," among whom she asserts that the bridegroom excels, like a meli tree, the rest of the trees of the wood; and see whether we can, according to the things we expounded in a twofold way above concerning the daughters and the thorns, so here too understand that the "sons" are said to be either those who once were and are not, or the multitude of the heavenly ministers. For to all men in the beginning belongs that which is written: "I said: You are gods and all of you sons of the Most High. But a difference intervened through this which he says: "But you shall die as men, and shall fall like one of the princes. And this too has regard to that matter: "For who among the clouds shall be equal to the Lord? or who shall be likened to him among the sons of God? As therefore the meli tree is among the rest of the trees of the wood, so is the bridegroom among the sons, having a fruit which excels all not only in taste but also in fragrance, and which refreshes two senses of the soul alike, that is, both taste and smell together. For with varied provisions Wisdom prepares her table for us. On it she not only sets the bread of life, but also sacrifices the flesh of the Word;

and she not only mixes wine in her bowl, but also applies apples fragrant enough and sweet, which render sweetness not only in the mouth and on the lips, but, delivered to the inner throat, preserve their sweetness. And we can take the trees of the wood to be those angels who have been seen to have arisen as the authors and abettors of each heresy, so that the Church seems, comparing the sweetness of the doctrine of Christ to the harshness of the heretical dogmas and their barren and unfruitful teaching, to say: that the ecclesiastical dogmas, which are proclaimed in the Church of Christ, are indeed pleasant and sweet apples; but that the trees of the wood are those things which are affirmed by the various heretics. And of these unfruitful trees of the wood it will seem to be said, what is written in the Gospel: "Behold, now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire. The bride's kinsman, then, is like a meli tree in the Church of Christ; but the other heresiarchs, like the unfruitful trees of the wood, are by the divine judgment, as by an axe, to be cut down and cast into the fire.

Therefore in the shadow of this meli tree the bride longs to abide — or the Church, as we said, in the protection of the Son of God, or the soul fleeing all the remaining doctrines and clinging to the one Word of God alone, whose sweet fruit she also has in her throat, that is, by meditating unceasingly on the law of God, and by always ruminating upon it like a clean animal. But concerning the naming of this shadow, beneath which the Church says she longed to sit, I do not think it absurd, if we bring forward into the midst those things which we can find in the divine Scriptures, so that it may be recognized more worthily and more divinely what the shadow of this meli tree is. Jeremiah says in the Lamentations:

”The Spirit of our countenance, Christ the Lord, was taken in our corruptions, to whom we said: In his shadow we shall live among the nations. You see, then, how the prophet, moved by the Holy Spirit, says that life is furnished to the nations from the shadow of Christ; and how should his shadow not furnish us with life, when even at the conception of his body it was said to Mary: ”The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. If therefore there was an overshadowing of the Most High at the conception of his body, deservedly shall his shadow give life to the nations.

And deservedly does his bride, the Church, long to sit beneath the shadow of the meli tree, without doubt that she may become a partaker of the life which is in his shadow. But the shadow of the remaining trees of the wood is such that whoever sits beneath it seems to sit in the region of the shadow of death. But still, that the passage which we have in hand may be rendered more and more plain, let us inquire how the Apostle too says that the law has a shadow of the good things to come, and mentions that all the things which were written either concerning the feast days, or the sabbaths, or the new moons, are a shadow of the good things to come — namely in those things which were performed according to the letter; and how he declares that all the worship of the ancients is an example and shadow of the heavenly things. And if this is indeed so, all those whoever were under the law are shown to have sat beneath the shadow of the law, and to have had rather a shadow of the true law. But we are strangers to their shadow, since we are not under the law, but under grace. Yet although we are not under that shadow which the letter of the law made, we are nevertheless under a better shadow. For in the shadow of Christ we live among the nations.

And there is a certain advancement to come from the shadow of the law to the shadow of Christ; so that, because Christ is life, and truth, and the way, we may be made first in the shadow of the way, and in the shadow of life, and in the shadow of truth, that we may comprehend in part, and in a mirror and in an enigma, so that after these things, if we walk along this way, which is Christ, we may be able to arrive at this, that we may comprehend face to face those things which before we had seen as though in a shadow and in an enigma. For no one will be able to arrive at those things which are true and perfect, unless he has first desired and longed to abide in this shadow. But Job too says that all the life of men is a shadow upon the earth; I believe because of the fact that the soul in this life is overshadowed by the veil of this dense body. All those, then, who are in this life must of necessity be in a certain shadow. But some indeed are sitting in the region of the shadow of death — those assuredly who do not believe in Christ. But the Church says with confidence: ”In the shadow of the bridegroom I longed to be and I sat down”;

although certainly there was a time when one, abiding beneath the shadow of the law, could be defended from the harshness of the burning and heat. But that time has passed; one must now come to the shadow of the meli tree; and although one may make use of a different shadow, nevertheless every soul, so long as it is in the present life, seems to have a shadow necessary for it, because of that burning of the sun, I believe, which, when it has risen, straightway the seed that is not sunk with a deep root withers and perishes. But the shadow

of the law wards off this burning only slightly, whereas the shadow of Christ, in which we now live among the nations — that is, the faith in his incarnation — will turn it away utterly and extinguish it. For he who scorched those walking beneath the shadow of the law was seen, at the time of Christ's passion, to have fallen like lightning from heaven; although even the time of his shadow will be completed at the end of the age, because, as we said, after the consummation of the age we shall no longer see the truth through a mirror, nor in an enigma, but face to face. I think that also similar is that which is written: "Under the shadow of your wings I shall rejoice. But also in what follows in this little book the bride says thus:

"My kinsman is mine, and I am his, who feeds among the lilies until the day breathes, and the shadows are removed," teaching through this that a time will come when all shadows will be removed, and the truth alone will remain. And as for what she says: "And his fruit is sweet in my throat," this is for that soul to say which has nothing dead, nothing insensible in its throat, and is in nothing whatever like those of whom it is said: "Their throat is an open sepulchre. For whoever bring forth words of death and destruction from their throats, their throats are called sepulchres: such as are all those who either speak against the true faith, or bring forth something against the discipline of chastity, and justice, and sobriety. These, then, are they whose throats are sepulchres and places of death, from which words of death are brought forth. But the just man says: "How sweet are your words to my throat! And another, who taught the words of life, says thus: "Our mouth is open to you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged. And another too, who opened his mouth to the Word of God, says: "I opened my mouth and drew in the spirit."

» Bring me into the house of wine «

These are still the words of the bride, but they are directed, as I think, to the friends and intimates of the bridegroom, from whom she seems to ask that they bring her into the house of gladness, where wine is drunk and a banquet is prepared. For she who had already seen the royal chamber now desires also to enter the royal banquet and to enjoy the wine of gladness. We have already said above that the friends of the bridegroom are to be understood as the prophets and all who have ministered the word of God from the beginning of the world, to whom the Church of Christ, or the soul cleaving to the Word of God, may rightly say that they bring her into the house of wine, that is, where wisdom has mingled her wine in the mixing-bowl, and beseeches through her servants everyone foolish and lacking in sense, saying: "Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you. This is the house of wine, and the house of the banquet, in which banquet all who come from the east and the west shall recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. To this house and to this banquet the prophets lead the souls — those, at least, who hear and understand them. But so also do the holy angels and the heavenly powers who are sent in ministry, on account of those who receive the inheritance of salvation.

This is the wine to which are inscribed those psalms which are entitled "for the winepresses. This is the wine gathered from that vine which says: "I am the true vine"; which the heav-

enly Father, the husbandman, has pressed out. This is the wine which those branches brought forth, which remained in Jesus not only on earth but also in heaven. For thus do I hear that which is said, that ”every branch which does not remain in me cannot bear fruit. For no one produces the fruit of this wine except him who remains in the word, and in wisdom, and in truth, and in justice, and in peace, and in all the virtues. This is the wine with which even to be inebriated is deemed desirable by the just and by every holy person. This wine, I think, Noah too was even then contemplating in the spirit when he is said to have been inebriated; and David, marveling at the cup of this banquet, says: ”And your cup which inebriates, how excellent it is! To this house of wine, therefore, the Church, or each soul desiring to enter into the things that are perfect, and to enjoy fully the doctrines of wisdom and the mysteries of knowledge, as with the sweetness of a banquet and the gladness of wine.

It must indeed be known that, just as there is this wine which, pressed from the doctrines of truth, is mingled in the mixing-bowl of wisdom, so also there is a contrary wine, when sinners are wickedly inebriated, and those who receive the pernicious doctrines of false knowledge. Concerning whom Solomon says in Proverbs: ”But these eat the food of impiety, and are inebriated with the wine of iniquity. Concerning this same wine of iniquity we also read written thus in Deuteronomy: ”From the vine of the Sodomites is their vine, and their branch from Gomorrah; their grape is a grape of gall, and their cluster is one of bitterness for them; the fury of dragons is their wine, and the incurable fury of asps. But that wine which proceeds from the true vine is always new. For always, through the advances of those who learn, the recognition of divine knowledge and wisdom is renewed. And therefore Jesus said to his disciples that ”I will drink that new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father. For the recognition of secret things and the revelation of hidden things is always renewed through the wisdom of God, not only to men, but also to the angels and the heavenly powers.

» Set charity in order within me «

These are the words of the same bride to the same persons, except that perhaps the apostles of Christ may also be reckoned among those to whom these things are addressed. Now what she says—”Set charity in order within me”—has this sense. Without doubt all men love something, and there is no one who has come to that age at which he is now able to love and does not love something: as we also showed sufficiently in the preface of this work. But this love, or this charity, in some indeed proceeds fittingly arranged according to its own order, but in very many against order. And charity is said to be against order in someone when either he loves that which he ought not, or he loves that which he ought, but loves it more than is right, or less than is right. In such persons, then, charity is said to be disordered; but in those—whom I judge to be very few, namely those who walk along the way of life and do not turn aside, neither to the right nor to the left—in these alone is charity ordered and keeps its own order. And its order and measure is of this kind, for example: to love God there is no manner, no measure, save this alone, that you offer to Him all that you have. For

in Christ Jesus God is to be loved with the whole heart, and the whole soul, and with all one's strength. In this, then, there is no measure.

But to love one's neighbor is already a certain measure. "You shall love," it says, "your neighbor as yourself. If therefore either in the love of God you do something less than you can and than is in your power; or between yourself and your neighbor you do not preserve equity, but have some difference; then charity is not ordered in you, nor does it keep its own order. But since our discourse is about the order of charity, let us inquire more diligently through the particulars, both whom it is fitting to love, and how much it is fitting to love. For if, as the Apostle says, we are members one of another, I think that we ought to have this affection toward our neighbors, that we love them not as bodies foreign to us, but as our own members. According to this, then, that we are members of one another, it will be fitting to have an equal and like love toward all. But according to this, that there are in the body certain members more honorable and more comely, while others are less comely and inferior, I think that again, according to the merits and honor of the members, the measure of love too ought to be weighed. If therefore anyone proposes to do all things reasonably and to temper his acts and affections according to the Word of God, I think that toward each of these he ought both to know and to hold the order of charity.

But that what we say may become clearer, let us make use of somewhat more evident indications. If someone, for example, labors in the Word of God and instructs and enlightens our souls, teaches the way of salvation, and hands down the order of living, does he not seem to you to be indeed a neighbor here too, yet much more to be loved than that other neighbor who has done none of these things? For although that other is indeed to be loved, in that we are members of one body and of one substance; yet this one much more, who, though he also has with us the right of a neighbor which other men also have, nevertheless gives this greater cause of charity toward himself, that he shows the way of God, and confers the salvation of the soul by the enlightenments of the divine Word. But if someone should call me back, when erring and set upon the precipice of a womanly sin, to the light of piety, and should snatch me from destruction itself and draw me back to salvation, and rescue me from the very jaws of eternal death, does it not seem to you that he, if it can be, is to be loved with that very fullness of charity with which we love God—after God? And lest you think that we presume thus of ourselves, hear the apostle Paul saying of those who labor in the Word of God:

"That you may hold superabundantly in charity those who are such, on account of their work. Let us see yet another order of charity, that at least which is seen to be held toward neighbors. If there be someone who indeed does not have the grace of teaching or instructing, nor of preaching the word of the Lord, but is nevertheless a man of holy life, innocent, immaculate, and one who walks in the justifications and commandments of God without reproach, does such a man seem to you to be reckoned in the same order of charity as that one who does none of these things?—since either is called a neighbor. Should not this one too, on account of his work and the merit of his life, according to the Apostle's saying, likewise as that one

who labors in the Word of God, be held superabundantly in charity on account of the work of his life? There is still another order of charity. For we are commanded to love even our enemies. But let us see whether even in them there will be one single manner of love, or whether that saying which says, "Set charity in order within me," will have its place there. I think, then, that in these there is an order of charity, for example: there is a certain enemy of mine, who nevertheless in other respects acts well, is chaste, sober, keeping the commandments of God for the most part, yet erring in some things, as a man.

There is another who is indeed likewise an enemy to us, yet is an enemy of his own life and soul, prepared for crimes, headlong into disgraceful deeds, counting nothing holy, nothing religious: does it not seem to you that even among enemies themselves a certain diversity of charity is to be held? I think indeed that from these things it has become sufficiently plain that the force of charity is one, yet it has many causes, and many orders of loving, and that on this account the bride now says, "Set charity in order within me," that is, teach me the diverse orders of charity. But if it still seems that something is to be added to these, we can also bring forward that which the Apostle says: "Husbands, love your wives as your own bodies, as Christ loved the Church. What then? Ought husbands indeed to love their wives, but ought they not at all to love other women in all chastity and holiness? Or will not these too seem to be among neighbors? But love is indeed to be bestowed either on a spouse, or on a mother, or on a sister, provided they be faithful, cleaving to God; and toward another woman is no love to be bestowed by us, according to that by which she herself is called a neighbor?

But if this seems absurd, and chaste love ought, according to the order of the commandment, to be shown even toward them, then assuredly, among the very persons of women to whom love is to be bestowed, an order in charity and a fitting distinction must certainly be held. And with the greater honor is love to be shown to a mother; but in the next degree, with a certain reverence nonetheless, to sisters also. But with a proper and, from these, a set-apart manner is charity to be shown to spouses. And after these persons, according to merits and causes also, love is to be bestowed on each one in all chastity, as we have said. And according to these things we shall observe also concerning a father, or a brother, and other kinsfolk. But toward the holy ones who have begotten us in Christ, and also pastors and bishops, or the presbyters who preside over the Word of God, or those who minister well in the Church, or those who excel the rest in faith—how shall not, according to the merits of each one, an affection of charity be weighed out far more eminent than can be held toward those who have done either none of these things or not fully? But also between faithful parents and unfaithful, and faithful brothers and unfaithful, and sisters, can it come about that a diverse order of charity is not held toward these individuals?

Beholding these diversities, and seeing that concerning all these things the knowledge of these matters seems necessary to the soul tending toward perfection, that it may be able to hold the measures of charity for each place and order, the bride says to the friends of the bridegroom, namely to those who minister the Word of God: "Set charity in order within

me," that is, teach me and hand down to me how through each of these I ought to preserve the order of charity. For all men, as we have already said, according to this that they are like to us, are to be loved alike: nay, every rational creature is to be loved equally by us, inasmuch as we are rational. Yet something is to be added in charity to each one, in respect of this that he is a man, and of this that he is rational; if, for example, either in morals, or in work, or in purpose, or in pursuits he excels the rest; and for each of these, according to each one's own merit, to the general love there is to be added also something special of charity. But that a greater authority may be had concerning these things, let us take our example from God Himself. For He loves all things that are, equally, so that He hates none of the things He has made; for neither did He make anything that He would hold in hatred:

not however for this reason did He love the Egyptians alike as the Hebrews, and Pharaoh as Moses and Aaron. Nor again did He love the rest of the sons of Israel alike as Moses and Aaron and Miriam; nor again did He love Aaron and Miriam alike as Moses, although it be true what is said to Him: "But You spare all, because they are Yours, O Lord, lover of souls; for the spirit of incorruption is in all things"; nevertheless He who disposed all things by measure and number and weight, according to the measure without doubt of each one tempers the balance also of His love. Shall we suppose that Paul was not loved by Him alike when he was persecuting the Church of God, and when he was loved while he himself was bearing persecutions and torments for her, and was saying that there was in him the solicitude of all the Churches? It is much now that among these orders of charity we should insert even the affection of hatred, which seems contrary to this affection of charity; because the Lord also says: "I will be an enemy to your enemies and I will oppose your adversaries. And again: "If you stand by a sinner, and by him whom the Lord hates, you are his friend. Which indeed have this same solution as that which was said: "Honor your father and your mother"; and again:

"He who does not hate father and mother," and the rest, in which assuredly the excess of charity toward God seems to generate a contrary affection toward those who are adversaries, since there can be no concord of light with darkness, and of Christ with Belial, nor the same portion for the faithful with the unfaithful. These things, then, concerning the orders of charity having been set forth as we could, it is plain for the understanding what it is that the bride, that is the Church, or the soul tending toward perfection, asks to be granted to her by the friends of the bridegroom; since indeed she had asked to be brought into the house of wine, where without doubt she had understood that, among all those things which she had seen, the grace of charity is preeminent and surpassing, and she had learned that charity itself is the greatest of all, and alone is the charity that never falls: therefore she demands that she may learn its order, lest perchance, doing something disordered, she should receive some wound from it, as is said in the later passages: "I am wounded with charity. But whether we take these things to be said by angels, from whom she asks to be instructed and fortified, nothing absurd will appear; according to that which is said of the people of God: "Rejoice, O nations, with His people, and let all the angels of God strengthen them. And as is said elsewhere:

”The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him, and will deliver them. And again elsewhere: ”Do not despise one of these least ones who are in the Church, for their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. But also in the Apocalypse of John the Son of God gives testimony to the angel of Thyatira for the charity which the angel himself ordered in the Church committed to him. For thus it is written: ”I know your works and your charity, and your faith and ministry, and your patience, and your latter works greater than the former. But even if we refer these things to the prophets, who ministered the Word of God before the coming of the bridegroom, so that through their teaching the Church may be seen to wish to learn the order of charity, that is, to be instructed by the prophetic volumes, it will not appear absurd. But also all the saints who have departed from this life, still having charity toward those who are in this world—if they be said to bear care for their salvation, and to help them by their prayers, and by their intervention with God—it will not be unfitting. For it is written thus in the books of the Maccabees: ”This is Jeremiah the prophet of God, who always prays for the people. But also that these things are said to the apostles, as I have already said above, will not seem foreign:

for through these all the Church of God, or the soul seeking God, is brought into the house of wine, as we said above, and is filled with aromatic spices and odors, and is composed unto the better, as we read in the later passages, and we are taught the order and reason of charity.

» Strengthen me with perfumes, surround me with apples, for I am wounded by love «

In the Greek, indeed, it reads: ”Strengthen me with myrrhs”; and by naming ”myrrh” a certain kind of tree, which the Latins, supposing it to be so called, rendered as ”myrrha,” they interpreted it as ”perfumes. The sequence of the discourse, then, is of this sort: after the bride had heard the words from the mouth of the bridegroom himself, and had entered the chamber of the king, and the house of wine and the place of the banquet and of wisdom, and had beheld therein the victims and the mixing-bowl blended with his sacred mysteries, then, as if stupefied in admiration of all these things, and wounded, she nonetheless asks of these same friends and companions of the bridegroom that she be strengthened, and, as though fainting, be supported, leaning a little upon the myrrh-tree or the ash-tree. For, struck by the wound of love, she seeks out the solace of trees and of woodlands. These things according to the letter. But that we may be able to pursue from these the spiritual understanding, we have need of that grace which Solomon himself deserved to obtain from God, who learned the natures of all the roots and trees and shrubs that are God’s, so that we too might know both what the property and what the nature of the myrrh-tree is, from which a spiritual exposition may fittingly be drawn. Now this is the only thing that could reach us concerning the knowledge of this tree: that it has a sweet fragrance only, yet bears no fruit.

But the ash-tree is known to all as one that not only bears fruit, but bears fruit most sweet and most agreeable. All men, therefore, are called trees, whether good or evil, and fruitful or unfruitful, as the Lord also says in the Gospel: ”Either make the tree good, and its fruit

good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad"; and: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire. Three distinctions, then, seem to exist among men. There are certain ones who bear no fruit at all, and others who do bear fruit. But among those who bear fruit, the fruits are either bad or good. Here, therefore, the bride, that is, the Church of Christ, asks to be strengthened, and indeed to be made to recline upon a single ash-tree bearing good fruits: and rightly and fittingly. For upon these the Church is strengthened and surrounded, namely upon those who bear fruit and grow in good works. But what does it mean that she wishes to be strengthened among the myrrhs, that is, among unfruitful trees that delight in fragrance alone? I think that those who delight in fragrance alone, and do not yet bear the fruits of faith, are those whom Paul names in writing to the Corinthians, whom he calls: "Those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place of theirs and of ours.

Insofar, then, as they call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, they have within themselves a certain sweetness of fragrance from the very invocation of the name. But insofar as they do not approach the faith with all confidence and freedom, they bear no fruits of faith. In this passage we may understand the catechumens of the Church, upon whom the churches are in some part strengthened. For they too have within themselves no little confidence and very much hope that they also may one day become fruit-bearing trees and be planted in the paradise of God by the Father himself, the husbandman. For it is he who plants trees of this sort in the Church of Christ, which is the paradise of delights: as the Lord also says, "Every planting which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. The Church, therefore, is surrounded among the ash-trees and rests upon them. And what ash-trees are those souls to be reckoned which are daily renewed unto the image of him who created them. For because through their renewal the sons of God restore the image, deservedly they too are called ash-trees, since their bridegroom himself was also said above to be "as an ash-tree among the trees of the wood. And do not wonder if this same one is called both the tree of life and various other things, since the same is also named the true bread, and the true vine, and the Lamb of God, and many other things.

For the Word of God becomes all these things to each one, according as the measure or the desire of the partaker demands: even as the manna also, though it was a single food, yet rendered to each one the flavor of his own desire. He offers himself, then, not only as bread to the hungry and wine to the thirsty, but also, to those who wish to take delight, he presents himself as fragrant fruits. Therefore the bride, as though now refreshed and well fed, asks to be supported among the ash-trees, knowing that in the Word there is for her not only every food, but also every delight: and among these especially she ranges to and fro, while she feels herself wounded by the darts of love. If there is anywhere anyone who has ever burned with this faithful love of God, if there is anyone who, as the prophet says, has received the sweet wound and the blow of his chosen dart, if there is anyone who has been pierced by the lovely spear of his knowledge, so that he sighs for him with longings by day and by night, is able to speak of nothing else, is unwilling to hear anything else, knows

not how to think of anything else, and finds no pleasure in desiring or coveting or hoping for anything besides him: that soul deservedly says, ”I am wounded by love”;

and I received the wound from him of whom Isaiah says, ”And he set me as a chosen dart, and in his quiver he hid me. With such a wound does it befit God to strike souls, with such darts and spears to transfix them, and to wound them with saving wounds: so that, because God is love, they too may say, ”For I am wounded by love. And indeed in this, as it were, love-drama the bride says that she has received the wounds of love: but likewise a soul fervent toward the wisdom of God can say, ”I am wounded by wisdom,” namely that soul which was able to gaze upon the beauty of his wisdom. And another soul, beholding the magnificence of his power and admiring the might of the Word of God, can say, ”I am wounded by his power. Such a one, I believe, was she who said, ”The Lord is my light and my savior, whom shall I fear? But another soul too, fervent toward the love of his justice, and beholding the justice of his dispensations and of his providence, says without doubt, ”I am wounded by his justice. And another, regarding the immensity of his goodness and mercy, speaks likewise. But this wound of love, by which the bride proclaims herself wounded, is the general one of all these. Yet it must be known that, just as there are these darts of God, which inflict upon the soul that has a desire of good things the wound of salvation:

so also there are the fiery darts of the evil one, by which the soul that is not protected by the shield of faith is wounded unto death. Of these the prophet says: ”Behold, the sinners have bent the bow, they have prepared their arrows in their quiver, to shoot in the dark the upright of heart. Here he calls the invisible demons ”sinners shooting from concealment,” and they are the ones who have certain darts of fornication, others of covetousness and avarice, by which very many are wounded. They also have shafts of boastfulness and vainglory: but these are exceedingly subtle, so that the soul scarcely feels itself transfixed and wounded by them, unless it is clothed with the armor of God and stands watchful and immovable against the wiles of the devil, covering itself on every side with the shield of faith, and leaving absolutely no part of the body bare of faith. But however many weapons the demons may fashion, if they find the mind of a man fortified with faith, even though they be fiery, even though they burn with the flames of lusts and the conflagrations of vices, faith when full extinguishes them all.

» His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me «

This is indeed the description of a love-drama hastening toward the marriage of bridegroom and bride, and it runs its course, as it were, in rather more openly bodily terms of the body. But turn yourself more swiftly to the life-giving Spirit, and, fleeing from bodily terms, look closely at what the left hand of the Word of God may be, what the right hand, and also what the head of his bride — that is, of the perfect soul, or of the Church — and do not let a carnal and passible understanding sweep you away. For here this is the right hand and left hand of the bridegroom, which is spoken of concerning Wisdom in the Proverbs, where it says: ”For length of life is in her right hand, and in her left hand are riches and glory. And just as here you will not therefore suppose Wisdom to be some woman because she seems to be

called by a feminine name, so neither in this case, because the Word of God as bridegroom is spoken of in the masculine gender, ought you to understand his left hand or his right hand in a bodily way, or to perceive the embraces of the bride according to the feminine gender of the ”soul”;

but the Word of God — although among the Greeks it is uttered in the masculine, and among us in the neuter gender — is nevertheless to be conceived, in these matters of which we speak, as being above the masculine and neuter and feminine gender, and above absolutely everything that has regard to this: and not only the Word of God, but also his Church, and the perfect soul, which is likewise named the bride. For so also the Apostle says: ”For in Christ there is neither male nor female, but we are all one in him. Now these things are set down, on account of men who cannot hear otherwise except by these words which are in common use, after the manner of human speech in the divine Scripture: so that we may hear them indeed by known and customary words, yet may understand them with that meaning which is worthy of divine and incorporeal realities. For just as he who says that he is a lover of the beauty of wisdom shows this — that he has transferred the natural affection of love which is in him to the pursuits of wisdom — so also here the bride, whether the soul or the Church, demands that her bridegroom, who is the Word of God, may with his left hand support her head, and with his right hand embrace and hold fast all the rest of her body. Now the left hand is that in which Wisdom is said to contain riches and glory.

But what riches has the Church, and what glory, except those which she has received from him who, though he was rich, was made poor, that by his poverty the Church might be made rich? And what is the glory? That, without doubt, of which he says: ”Father, glorify thy Son” — designating, without doubt, the glory of the Passion. Therefore faith in the Passion of Christ is the glory and riches of the Church, which are contained in his left hand. And the left hand of the Word of God I think ought to be understood in this way: since indeed there are in him certain dispensations enacted before the Incarnation, and there are also some enacted through the Incarnation. That part of the Word of God which was accomplished in the dispensations before the assumption of flesh can be seen as the right hand; but this which was accomplished through the Incarnation may be called the left hand. Whence too the left hand is said to have riches and glory. For through the Incarnation he sought riches and glory — namely, the salvation of all. But in the right hand is said to be length of life: by which, without doubt, is indicated that part of him which in the beginning was with God, God the Word — its everlastingness. This left hand, then, the Church, whose head is Christ, desires to have under her head, and to have her head fortified by faith in his Incarnation;

but to be embraced by his right hand — that is, to acknowledge and to be instructed in those things which, even before the time of this dispensation carried out through the flesh, are held in secret and hidden places. For there all things are to be thought of as being the right hand, where nothing is contained of the miseries of sins, nothing of the fall of frailty. But the left hand is where he healed our wounds and bore our sins, being himself made sin

and a curse for us. All which things, although they support the head and the faith of the Church, will nevertheless rightly be called the left hand of the Word of God. In which he is also recorded to have endured certain things beyond that nature which is wholly the right hand, and wholly light, splendor, and glory.

» I have adjured you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and by the strengths of the field, that you lift up and awaken love, until it please «

The bride still speaks to the young maidens, urging them and exhorting them, indeed even adjuring them by those things which she knows to be dear and lovely to them, so that if perhaps they have begun to lift up love — which lies, as it were, dormant within them — and to rouse it, being still asleep among them, they may lift it up and rouse it up only so far as the bridegroom shall will, and may do nothing in it less than his will allows. For this is the perfection of the loving bride: that she wills that nothing be done by anyone contrary to the mind and will of him whom she loves. And that they may do this neither negligently nor sluggishly, they are adjured by the powers of the field — that is, by the seedlings and shrubs that are in the field — and by its strengths, doubtless by the things that have been sown in it. In such an order and such a composition of words is the text of the historical drama set forth. Now, then, let us seek out what secret it conceals within. Every soul is, above all, a daughter of Jerusalem, one that has a certain field of its own, which has been conferred upon it by a certain secret allotment of merits through Jesus. Such was also that field of Jacob, by whose sweetness the patriarch Isaac, moved, said in mystical utterances:

"Behold, the smell of my son is like the smell of a full field, which the Lord has blessed. Each soul, therefore, as we have said, has its own field; for so also is its manner of life, which is its field. In this field the soul which is loving and zealous for the Word labors much and strives to plant good perceptions, and to cultivate all the virtues of the mind — and not only the virtues of the mind, but also the strengths of works, by which, namely, the ministries of the commandments may be fulfilled. There is therefore, as we have said, to each soul its own field which it cultivates and plants and sows according to those things which we have said. But there is also of all the daughters of Jerusalem together one certain and common field, of which Paul says: "You are God's husbandry. Let us take this field to be the common exercise of ecclesiastical faith and manner of life, in which it is certain that there are heavenly powers, the strengths of spiritual graces. For each single soul which is here now called a daughter of Jerusalem, knowing that it has for its mother the heavenly Jerusalem, must needs contribute something toward the cultivation of this field, and desire that it be made worthy of a heavenly possession.

In the powers, then, of this field, the Church declares that the love of Christ is lifted up and roused by the young maidens who have the beginnings of faith, and she says to them: If you lift up and rouse love until it please; that is, if you have now come to this, that you begin to be led not by the spirit of fear but by that of adoption, and have so advanced in this that perfect love within you casts out fear, and so that you lift up and exalt love within you and rouse it — then lift it up for so long, and exalt it for so long, as the son of love himself shall will, nay

rather, as he himself shall will who is of God, love itself; lest perchance, thinking that the measures of human love suffice, you should do toward God, in the love of God, something less than is worthy. For this alone is the measure of love: that one be loved only as much as he himself wills; but the will of God is always the same, and is never changed. Never, therefore, is any change, or any end, admitted in the love of God. It is indeed to be noted that she did not say, if you receive love, but if you lift it up — as being something that is indeed within you, but lies and is not yet raised up.

And she did not say, if you find, but if you rouse love — as being something that is indeed within, but lies and sleeps in them, until it finds one to awaken it. This same love, I believe, Paul too was awakening, then still sleeping in the disciples, when he said: "Rise up, you who sleep, and you shall touch Christ."

» The voice of my kinsman «

It is fitting that we frequently remind ourselves that this little book is woven together in the manner of a drama. For the present little verse that we have set before us indicates something of this kind: that whereas the bride's speech had been addressed to the young maidens, the daughters of Jerusalem, suddenly, as though from afar, she perceived the voice of the bridegroom speaking with certain others, and, breaking off the speech she was making to the maidens, the bride turned her ear to the sound that had reached her, and said: The voice of my kinsman. Now understand the bridegroom to have been recognized by the bride at first, before he appeared to her eyes, by his voice alone; but after this to have appeared also to her sight, leaping upon certain mountains near to that place in which the bride was staying, and passing over the hills and mountains with certain great strides—or rather not so much strides as bounds—in the manner of a stag or a goat, and thus coming to his bride with all haste. But when he arrived at the house within which the bride was dwelling, understand that he stood for a little while behind the house, in such a way that he was indeed perceived to be present, yet did not yet wish to enter the house openly and evidently, but first, as under the guise of a lover, wished to gaze upon the bride through the windows.

Understand further that certain nets and snares had been set near the bride's house, so that if perchance she herself, or any of her companions among the daughters of Jerusalem, should at some time go out, she might be caught. And it is certain that the bridegroom came to these nets: and since he could not be caught by them, but, being made stronger than they, he tore the nets themselves apart, and, treading upon them, passed over; and after he had accomplished this work, he says: Arise, come, my near one, my bride; and this he says in order that by the very deed he may show her how she ought with confidence to despise the nets which the enemy had stretched out for her, and not to seek out those which she had already seen to be torn asunder by him. And still further, to rouse the bride the more to hasten to him, he says to her: Since all the time that seemed burdensome has passed, and the winter which seemed to have arisen as a cause of trouble for her has departed, and the useless rains have gone away, and now the time of flowering has come, delay not at all to set

out upon the journey of coming to me. For behold, the farmers too, because the springtime has now smiled forth, are tending the vines; and the sound now of other birds, now also the pleasing note of the turtledove in springtime, is heard.

But the fig tree also, in the sure mildness of spring, has put forth its bud; and the vines indeed so little doubt the calm of the season that they now dare to bring forth their flowers and their fragrance. These things indeed let him say to the bride concerning the calm of the season, that she may dare with greater confidence to seize the journey of proceeding to the bridegroom. But he also describes to her the place in which he wishes her to rest with him; and he says that by the covering of a certain rock which is adjacent to the wall itself, or serves in place of a wall, a most shady place is formed; and to this place he wishes her to come, and, the covering being removed, there to behold her unveiled face, so that face to face she may become known to her bridegroom, and that the bridegroom may not only see her face unveiled and clear, but may there also hear her voice, being now assured both that her face is beautiful and that her voice is sweet and delightful. These things we have joined together by anticipation, lest we should seem to interrupt the order of the drama and the thread of the narrative. But by anticipating a little we have carried forward the order of the story up to that place where he says: For your voice is sweet, your face is comely. Now therefore, taking it up again, let us see first what it is that he says:

The voice of my kinsman. By his voice alone Christ is first recognized by his Church. For first he sent forth his voice beforehand through the prophets, and though he was not seen, yet he was heard. And he was heard through those things which were announced concerning him: and for so long the bride, that is, the Church which was being gathered together from the beginning of the age, heard his voice alone, until she should see him with her own eyes, and say:

» Behold, here he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills «

For he was leaping upon the prophetic mountains and the holy hills — those, that is, who in this world bore his image and form. But even if you place him among the apostles, as one already leaping upon the mountains and towering above all men, and upon the hills, it will nonetheless be not unfitting to apply it to those who were chosen and sent by him in the second rank. For among these he is made ”like a roe and a fawn of the harts”: like a roe, because his voice excels all sight; and like a hart, because he comes for the destruction of the serpent. But every single soul — if indeed there be any that is bound fast by love of the Word of God — whenever it is set within a debate of discourse, as everyone knows who has experienced how it is when one is brought into a tight place and hemmed in by the straits of propositions and questions; whenever the riddles or the obscure sayings of the Law and the prophets shut it in, then, if perchance the soul should feel him present and receive from afar the sound of his voice, it is at once lifted up; and when he begins more and more to draw near to its senses and to illuminate the things that are obscure, then it sees him leaping upon the mountains and hills — suggesting to it, that is, the lofty and exalted meanings of understanding:

so that this soul may with good reason say, ”Behold, here he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. Now we say this not forgetting that already in the preceding passages he has spoken to the bride while set present before her: but because, as we have often said, this little book contains the form of a drama, some things are now said as to one present, and some also as to one absent; and thus the interchange of persons is carried on, so that either order may be seen fittingly to proceed. For although the bridegroom promises and says to his bride — that is, to those who are his chosen disciples — ”Behold, I am with you all the days even unto the consummation of the age”; yet again through parables he says that ”a householder called his servants, and distributed to each one money for the sake of trading, and set out on a journey. And again he says, ”That he went away to seek for himself a kingdom. And again it is said as of an absent bridegroom, that ”at midnight a cry arose of those who said that the bridegroom cometh. Thus, therefore, now the bridegroom is present and teaches, now he is said to be absent and is longed for; and each will aptly suit either the Church or the soul. For when the Church is permitted to suffer persecutions and tribulations, he seems to her to be absent.

And again, when she advances in peace and is established in faith and good works, he is understood to be present. But the soul too, when it seeks some meaning and desires to recognize the obscure and hidden things, so long as it cannot find them, the Word of God is without doubt absent from it. But when what is sought comes to meet it and appears, who doubts that the Word of God is present, and illuminates the mind and affords it the light of knowledge? And again we feel him withdrawn from us and again present, through each of the several things that are either opened or closed within our senses. And this we endure up to the point at which we are made such that he deigns not only to visit us again, but even to remain with us — according to what he answered when asked by a certain disciple who said: ”Lord, how is it that thou beginnest to manifest thyself to us, and not to this world? The Savior replied: ”If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him. If therefore we too wish to see the Word of God and the bridegroom of the soul leaping upon the mountains and exulting over the hills, let us first hear his voice;

and when we have heard him in all things, then we shall also be able to see him, according to those things whereby the bride in the present passage is described as having seen him. For she too, although she had also seen him before, had nevertheless not seen him as now, leaping upon the mountains and bounding over the hills, nor bending down through her windows, nor looking forth through the lattices, but rather it seems that she had seen him before in the time of winter. For now she says to him for the first time, ”That the winter is past. Therefore, as it indicates, he appears to the bride even through the winter — that is, in the time of tribulations and temptations. But there is also that other visitation, in which she is visited a little, and again forsaken, that she may be proved, and again is sought, that her head may be sustained, and that she may be wholly embraced, lest perchance she either waver in faith, or her body be weighed down by the burden of temptations. And therefore it seems to me that that was the time of winter, when she was begging that her head — that

is, the summit of faith — be held up by the bridegroom's left hand, and that his right hand embrace her whole body. But now this vision, which appears from the mountains and hills, designates, I think, the heights and powers of spiritual graces.

And that he is said to look forth through the windows seems to me to afford light to the senses. And the nets which he breaks apart and shatters, I think, indicate the diabolical snares, inasmuch as it is now, as it were, when the winter of temptations is over and done. There are shown also the signs of spring and summer, as it is said in the Psalms: "The summer and the spring, thou hast made them. Thence at last the Church has also brought forth the flowers of the perfect, the temptations being overcome, and the dispensation of pruning being accomplished, as will be shown in its own places when we come to discourse upon these things.

» Behold, here he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills «

We have already followed out the historical sense; but now we must consider how Christ, in coming to the Church, leaps upon the mountains and bounds over the hills. For "bounding" rather than "passing over" belongs more properly to the sense of the passage before us. Isaac, indeed, as he walked and advanced, kept growing greater, until he became very great. But Paul made his progress no longer by walking, but by running, when he says: "I have finished the course. Yet our Savior, the Bridegroom of the Church, is said neither to walk nor to run, but to leap and to bound over these things. For if you consider how in a brief span of time the Word of God ran through a world held captive by false superstitions, and recalled it to the acknowledgment of the true faith, you will understand how he leaps upon the mountains — surmounting, that is, by his leaps whatever great kingdoms there are, and bending them to receive the knowledge of the divine religion; and how he bounds over the hills, when he swiftly subdues even the lesser kingdoms and brings them to the piety of true worship; and thus, passing from place to place, from kingdom to kingdom, from province to province by the illumination of his preaching — through him who said that "from Jerusalem round about even unto Illyricum he had filled up the Gospel of God" — you will understand how he comes leaping upon the mountains and bounding over the hills.

But it can also be understood in another way, as we have already said above, since indeed Moses wrote of him, and the prophets likewise proclaimed him. Yet this proclamation, in the reading of the Old Testament, has a veil laid over it: but where, for the bride — the Church, that is, once she has turned to him — the veil has been removed, she suddenly sees him leaping upon those mountains, namely the volumes of the Law, and upon the hills of the prophetic Scripture, not so much appearing as bounding forth into evident manifestation; as if, for example, unrolling the several pages of the prophetic reading, she were to find Christ bounding forth out of them, and, the veil by which he was before covered being now at last removed, through the several passages of the readings she might behold him bubbling up and emerging and now breaking forth into evident manifestation. For this reason, I believe, Jesus himself, when he came to be transfigured, was not in any plain or valley, but climbed a mountain, where he was also transfigured; that you may know that he always appears

on mountains or on hills, and that he may teach you not to seek him anywhere save on the mountains of the Law and the prophets. And that the saints, each of them, are called mountains, you will find indicated in many places of Scripture, as it says in the Psalms: ”His foundations are in the holy mountains. And again:

”I have lifted up my eyes unto the mountains, whence help shall come to me. For in tribulations we take our help from the meanings of the divine Scriptures. We may still further take the mountains upon which the Word of God is said to leap, and, as it were, to be borne along more freely, to be the New Testament; but the hills, from which, as though long pent up and concealed, he bounds forth, to signify the volumes of the Old Testament. Moreover, in Jeremiah too the hunters and fishers who are sent to catch men unto salvation are said to catch them on the mountains and hills; for thus he says: ”Behold, I send many fishers, and many hunters, and they shall catch them upon every mountain and upon every hill. Which I think is rather to be fulfilled in the time to come, at the consummation of the age, so that when the angels have been sent, according to the Gospel parable, at the time of harvest to separate the wheat from the tares, whoever is of a loftier life and of a more eminent conversation may be found either on the mountains or on the hills. He will not be found in low and abject places, lest there he seem to be mingled with the tares: but placed among the loftier meanings, and in the eminence of faith, ever cleaving to the Word of God as it leaps upon the mountains and bounds upon the hills.

And this very thing is said, likewise by another parable but with the same meaning, in the Gospel: ”He that is on the housetop, let him not come down to take anything out of the house. This most rich saying of the present verse can still suggest yet another sense to us. For it is possible that everyone also who believes in God with full faith may be called either a mountain or a hill, according, that is, to the quality of his life and the greatness of his understanding; and even if he was at some time a valley, as Jesus advances in age, and wisdom, and grace, ”every valley shall be filled. But all the proud and lofty, like mountains and hills, shall be humbled: since ”whosoever exalteth himself shall be humbled, and whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted. For of these it is said: ”They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion,” and of Jerusalem it is said: ”The mountains are round about it. Whence I think that with good reason our Savior also — since he too is called ”a stone cut out of a mountain without hands,” and is said to have become ”a great mountain,” even as King of kings and High Priest of high priests — may also be called Mountain of mountains. But that a third exposition too may have its place, let the word be directed to each individual soul.

If there be any who are more capable of receiving the word of God, who have drunk of the water given them by Jesus, and it has become in them ”a fountain of living water springing up unto life eternal” — in those, namely, in whom the word of God bubbles up with frequent and abundant meanings, as with perennial streams; in these, made worthily mountains and hills of life and knowledge and doctrine, the word of God is most fittingly said to leap

and to bound, having become in them, by the affluence of doctrine, ”a fountain of living water springing up unto life eternal.”

» My brother is like a roe, and to the fawn of the stags upon the mountains of Bethel «

That the roe and the stag are reckoned among the clean animals is plainly shown by what is written in Deuteronomy, for it is written in this manner: ”For these are the animals which you shall eat: the calf, and the lamb from the flocks, and the he-goat from among the goats, the stag and the roe, and the buffalo and the tragelaph, and the ibex, the camel and the leopard. But that a holy person is also compared to a stag is found in many passages of divine Scripture, as in the Psalm, where it says: ”As the stag longs for the fountains of waters, so my soul longs for you, O God. Yet in the words which we have taken from Deuteronomy, this too seems worthy of no careless consideration: what dignity of order he observed in enumerating the clean animals, that first he should write of the calf, second the lamb, third the he-goat. But among those which, according to the same Moses, are not offered at the altar, he names first the stag, second the roe; and so after these he describes the remaining animals in order. The reason for these things will become clear and evident to those to whom a more abundant spiritual grace has been granted in the gift of knowledge through the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, since it now falls to us in the exposition of the present verse to speak of the stag and the roe, it seems fitting to gather together, so far as we are able, from the divine Scriptures the things that are related of these animals — of which the same Moses, when he was speaking of the flesh that might be eaten in every desire of the soul, not offered at the altar, said, ”like the roe and the stag. And the twenty-eighth Psalm says something excellent, where, writing in order of the powers and efficacy of the voice of God, it says of the stag in this manner: ”The voice of the Lord perfecting the stags,” that is, making the stags perfect, ”and he will reveal the thickets. For just as the voice of the Lord is said to cut through the flame of fire, and to shake the desert, so it is recorded to perfect the stags and to reveal the thickets. But in Job also we find it related thus of the stag, where the Lord, speaking to Job through the whirlwind and the cloud, says: ”Or have you observed the bringing forth of the stags, or numbered their months full unto the birth, and loosed their pains, or nourished their young, or will you send forth their offspring without pains? Their young will break away, and be multiplied in birth; they will go out, and not return? To these must also be joined those things which we read in the Proverbs in this manner:

”The stag of friendships, and the foal of graces, speaks to you. These, for the present, are the things concerning the stag that could come to us as written. Which we have taken up for this purpose, that we may speak not in the teaching of human wisdom, but in the teaching of the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. And therefore let us call upon God the Father of the Word, that he may manifest to us the mysteries of his Word, and remove our understanding from the teaching of human wisdom, and exalt and lift it up to the teaching of the Spirit, so that we may speak not those things which carnal hearing perceives, but those things which the will of the Holy Spirit contains. Paul the apostle teaches us that

the invisible things of God are understood from the visible things, and that those things which are not seen are contemplated by reason and likeness from those things which are seen; showing by this that this visible world teaches concerning the invisible, and that this earthly arrangement contains certain patterns of the heavenly things; so that from these things which are below we may be able to ascend to those which are above, and from those things which we see on earth may perceive and understand those things which are held in the heavens. To some likeness of these, that through them the diversities might more easily be gathered and perceived, the Creator gave a likeness of the creatures which are on earth.

And perhaps, just as God made man to his own image and likeness, so also he founded the other creatures by likeness to certain other heavenly images; and perhaps each single thing that is on earth has so much of an image and likeness in the heavenly things, that even the grain of mustard seed, which is least of all seeds, has something of an image and likeness in the heavens; and this — that such a certain alternation of nature is compounded for it, that though it be the least of all seeds, it becomes greater than all herbs, so that the birds of heaven can come and dwell in its branches — bears a likeness not only of some heavenly image, but of the very kingdom of heaven itself. So then it is possible that the other seeds too which are on earth may have something of likeness and reason in the heavenly things. But if the seeds, then without doubt the shrubs too; and if the shrubs, then without doubt the living creatures too, whether of the winged, or the creeping, or the four-footed. But this also can further be understood:

that just as the grain of mustard seed holds not one single likeness of the kingdom of heaven and of the dwelling of the birds in its branches, but has also another likeness or image, namely of the perfection of faith — so that if anyone should have faith like a grain of mustard seed, he may say to the mountain, ”Remove yourself,” and it will remove — so it is possible that the others too may bear the appearance and image of the heavenly things not in some one respect, but in many. And whereas there are, for example, several powers in the grain of mustard seed which hold images of heavenly things, that is its last and furthest use which is held among men in bodily service. So also may it be understood in the rest, whether seeds, or shrubs, or roots of herbs, or even in living creatures; that they indeed provide bodily service and use to men, but have the forms and images of incorporeal things by which the soul may be taught, and instructed to contemplate those things also which are invisible and heavenly. And this, perhaps, is what that writer of divine wisdom says:

”For he himself gave me the true knowledge of the things that are, so that I might know the substance of the world, and the powers of the elements, the beginning, and the end, and the middle of the times, the changes of the vicissitudes, and the conversions of the seasons, and the circles of the year, and the positions of the stars, the natures of animals, and the rages of beasts, the violences of the winds, and the thoughts of men, the differences of shrubs, and the powers of roots; and whatsoever things are hidden and manifest, I have known. See therefore whether from these words of Scripture we may be able to gather more lucidly and evidently the things which we have proposed to examine. For this writer of

divine wisdom, when he had enumerated each single thing, said at the last that he had received the knowledge of the hidden and the manifest things: showing without doubt that each one of those things which are in the manifest is referred to some one of those things which are in the hidden; that is, that each single visible thing has something of likeness and reason to the invisible things. Since therefore it is impossible for a man living in the flesh to know anything of the hidden and invisible things, unless he has conceived some image and likeness from the visible things;

for this reason I think that he who made all things in wisdom so created each single kind of visible things on earth, that in them he might place a certain teaching and knowledge of the invisible and heavenly things; whereby through these the human mind might ascend to spiritual understanding, and might seek the causes of things in the heavenly places, so that, taught through the wisdom of God, it might itself also be able to say: ”The things that are in the hidden, and the things that are in the manifest, I have known. According to these things also it knows the substance of the world, not only this visible and corporeal one, which is open to view, but also that incorporeal and invisible one which is in the hidden. It knows also the elements of the world, not only the visible, but also the invisible, and the powers of both. But also the beginning which it speaks of, and the end, and the middle of the times: it speaks indeed of the beginning of the visible world, which Moses designates as no beginning before six full thousands of years; the middle also according to the reckoning of times, and that end which is hoped for when heaven and earth shall pass away. But according to the knowledge of the hidden things, it speaks of that beginning which he understands whom the wisdom of God shall teach, which no times, no ages, can comprehend. And the middle, those things which now are;

but the end, those things which are to come, that is, the perfection and consummation of the universe, which nevertheless can be conjectured and understood from these visible things. But also the changes of the vicissitudes, and the conversions of the seasons, the circle of the year — from those things which are seen it refers to the invisible changes and vicissitudes of corporeal things. The circles too of the temporal and present years it refers to certain more ancient and everlasting years, according to him who said: ”And I had the eternal years in mind. But also the positions of the stars he did not hesitate to refer from those things which are openly seen to those things which are in the hidden — of which hidden and manifest things he merited the knowledge; and he says that there is a certain race of holy ones which descends especially from the stock of Abraham, like the stars of heaven. But also he declared that the glory of the future resurrection is stars, according to the knowledge of the hidden things, following him who said: ”One is the glory of the sun, and another of the stars. For star differs from star in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead.

Unless these things were understood according to this, that which he says — ”The natures of animals, and the rages of beasts” — the Savior would never have said in the Gospels, ”Tell that fox,” nor would John have said of certain men, ”Serpents, generation of vipers,” nor again would the prophet say of some that they ”became stallion horses,” and likewise

another: ”Man, when he was in honor, did not understand; he was compared to the senseless beasts of burden, and was made like unto them. But he too diligently knew the rages of beasts who said: ”Their fury is according to the likeness of a serpent, like the deaf asp, and stopping its ears. This will be the reasoning also concerning that which he says, ”the violences of the winds”: speaking visibly indeed of winds, and of the blasts of the air, but invisibly of the violences of unclean spirits, which Paul too named ”winds of doctrine. After these it follows that he should know the thoughts of men: corporeally indeed those which proceed from the human heart, but invisibly he should understand those who cast into men evil and most wicked thoughts, as it is written in the Gospel: ”When the devil had put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray the Lord. And in the Proverbs it is said: ”If the spirit of one having power should rise up against you, do not forsake your place, for soundness restrains great sins. But there is also some author of good thoughts:

on account of which I think it is written in the Psalms too: ”Blessed is the man whose help is from you, O Lord; he has disposed ascents in his heart. And again: ”The thought of man shall confess to you, and the remnants of thought shall keep a feast day to you. Thus therefore all things, according to those things which we have said before, can be referred from the visible to the invisible, and from the corporeal to the incorporeal, and from the manifest to the hidden, so that the very creature of the world may be understood to have been founded by a certain dispensation through the divine wisdom, which by the very things and examples may teach us the invisible from the visible, and transfer us from the earthly to the heavenly. But these reckonings are not only held in all creatures, but the divine Scripture too has been written with a certain such art of wisdom. For on account of certain hidden and mystical things, the people is visibly led out of Egypt, and makes its way through the earthly deserts, where there was the biting serpent, and the scorpion, and where there were no waters, and the other things which are related to have been done in these places. All which things, as we have said, hold the forms and images of certain hidden things. And not only in the scriptures of the ancients, but also in the deeds of our Lord and Savior which are related in the Gospels, will you find this.

Therefore, if all things which are in the manifest are, according to those things which we have approved above, referred to certain things which are in the hidden, it follows without doubt that this visible stag, or roe, which is written of in the Song of Songs, is, according to the reckoning of its nature which they bear corporeally, referred to certain causes of incorporeal things, so that to those hidden and invisible stags it may seem able to apply what was said: ”The voice of the Lord perfecting the stags. For what perfection comes from the voice of the Lord to these visible stags? Or what teaching ever descended to them from the voice of the Lord? But if we seek spiritual stags, whose form and image that corporeal animal holds, you may find that they can be led to the height of perfection from the voice of the Lord. But also of what stags it was fitting that the Lord should guard the young, and that it was proper for him to stand by, as one providing the offices of healing, to the ones giving birth, until they should bring forth such offspring as would oppose and persecute the

race of serpents — as is worthy already of the divine majesty, we ought to observe of what sort of stags it befits God to guard the young, lest they fall into miscarriage;

but also to number their months full unto the birth, and to keep their labors and pains, so that their generations may not fall in vain, but that their birth may be perfect, and that they may travail so long until Christ be formed in them. The young of stags of this kind the Lord nourishes — of those, that is, who cast their thought upon the Lord, that he himself may nourish them, and he himself may guard the pains of their birth, when out of the fear of God they have conceived in the womb, and travailed, and brought forth the spirit of salvation. The pains of birth of this kind the Lord himself guards and cares for. But he also sends forth their pains, that going they may go, and weep bearing their seeds, and be in the pains of men and be scourged with men, lest perhaps pride hold them. These same stags also break away, as he says, their young. For those whom they have begotten through the Gospel, they break away from the bonds of sins, and from the snares of the devil, that they may no longer be held bound to their will. These too shall be multiplied, and, as he says, shall not return. For they will not imitate the wife of Lot, they will not go back behind. For they know that he who puts his hand to the plow, if he looks back, will not be fit for the kingdom of heaven;

but they always forget the things that are behind, and reach forth to the things that are before them. For such stags the voice of the Lord makes to be perfect. Which voice of the Lord, but that which is held in the law and in the prophets, and reached even unto John, who was the voice of one crying in the desert? For the very voice of John, who said, ”Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God,” made stags perfect, that they might be perfect in the same understanding and in the same knowledge. For he who is such rightly says: ”As the stag longs for the fountains of waters, so my soul longs for you, O God. And who else will the stag of friendships seem to be but he who slew that serpent which had seduced Eve, and, pouring into her the poisons of sin by the blasts of his speech, had infected all the offspring of posterity with the contagion of transgression: and had come to loose in his own flesh the enmities which the harmful mediator had wrought between God and man? But the foal of graces can be taken as the Holy Spirit, from whom those thirsting and desiring God obtain spiritual graces and heavenly gifts. But all these things have been said by us so that the cause might become more manifest by which the bride seems to compare her brother to the fawn of stags.

But if this too must be inquired — why he is compared not, as elsewhere, to a stag, but to the fawn of stags — consider this: that though he was in the form of God, a son was given to us, and a child was born to us, whose power is upon his shoulder. Therefore, then, the fawn of stags, because a little child was born. And perhaps the stags can be taken as all the holy ones, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and David, and Solomon, and all from whose seed Christ descended according to the flesh. Which stags the voice of the Lord makes perfect, and theirs is this fawn, who was born from them according to the flesh as a child. That also moves me which is written in the hundred and third Psalm, where it says: ”The high mountains for the stags. And indeed of the stags we have already said above that all the

holy ones are taken, who for this reason came into this world, that they might destroy the poisons of the serpent. But let us see what the high mountains may be, as being those which seem set apart for the stags alone, and to which none unless he be some stag can ascend. I think that he called the persons of the Trinity the high mountains, to whose capacity none ascends unless he be made a stag.

But those same which here are called "high mountains" in the plural, are in other places called "a high mountain" in the singular; as Isaiah says: "Ascend upon a high mountain, you who bring good tidings to Zion. Lift up your voice in strength, you who bring good tidings to Jerusalem. For the same which there is a Trinity on account of the distinction of the persons, is here understood as one God on account of the unity of substance. Let these things suffice concerning the fawn of stags. Now let us see how the brother is also compared to the roe or the little doe. This animal, as far as the Greek words are concerned, has obtained its name from seeing and from looking forth more clearly. And who is there who so sees as Christ sees? For he alone is the one who sees, that is, who knows the Father. For even if those who are pure of heart are said to be about to see God, they will see him, without doubt, by his own revealing, since the roe too has in its nature that it not only itself sees and beholds most keenly, but also provides sight to others. For those who have skill in medicine assert that there is within the entrails of this animal a certain humor which drives away the dimness of the eyes, and sharpens the more dull sights.

Rightly therefore is Christ compared to the roe or the little doe, because he not only himself sees the Father, but also makes him to be seen by others, whose sight he himself has cured. But observe, lest hearing that the Father is seen, you should perceive something corporeal, and think God visible. The sight by which God is seen is not of the body, but of the mind, and of the spirit. Which the Savior himself also, distinguishing it in the Gospel by its proper word, said: "No one sees the Father except the Son. Finally, to those also whom he makes to see God, he gives the spirit of knowledge, and the spirit of wisdom, that through that spirit they may see God. And therefore he said to the disciples that "he who sees me, sees the Father also. And surely we will not be so foolish as to think that whoever saw him according to the body also saw the Father: otherwise the Scribes too, and the Pharisees, and the hypocrites, and Pilate who struck him with scourges, and all the people who cried, "Crucify, crucify him," seeing Jesus according to the flesh, would also have seen God the Father. Which surely seems to be not only absurd, but also impious.

For just as, when the crowds were pressing him as he went with the disciples, none of those who pressed and crushed him is said to have touched him, except that woman alone who came suffering a flow of blood and touched the fringe of his garment, and to her alone he bears testimony, saying, "Someone touched me, for I felt power go forth from me"; so also, when there were many who saw him, none is said to have seen him, except he who knew that he is the Word of God and the Son of God: in whom, surely, the Father is said at once to be known and to be seen. But let this also not escape us, that first he is compared to the roe, and now to the fawn of stags, though surely the stag seems a larger animal than the

roe. But consider whether rather this reckoning is to be held in these things: that since the salvation of believers consists in two ways, through the knowledge of faith and the perfection of works, the reckoning of faith — which, as we have said, is compared to the roe on account of the gaze and inspection of contemplation — is held to be the first grade of salvation; but in the second place is recorded the perfection of works, which holds the form of the stag conquering and destroying the poisons of serpents, that is, the diabolical arts.

If therefore the bride says that her brother is like a roe, or the fawn of stags, upon the mountains of Bethel — and Bethel is interpreted ”house of God” — then the mountains which are in the house of God can be taken as the volumes of the law and the prophets, but also the evangelical and apostolic ones, in which both the faith of God is perfected and contemplated, and the perfection of works is spoken of and fulfilled.

» Behold, he stands here behind our wall, leaning over the windows, looking through the lattices. My kinsman answers, and says to me «

When I consider the difficulties of investigating the meanings in these words that are set before us in the words of Scripture, I see that I suffer something like what happens to a man who advances to track down his prey with the sharp scent of a keen-nosed hound: where sometimes it is the custom that, when the hunter, intent upon the tracks, has thought himself to be near the quarry hidden in its lurking-places, suddenly he is disappointed of the indications of the tracks, and again, fixing the scent more firmly, he retraces backward the very paths he had opened up, until he finds the place at which the quarry, shaking itself loose more deeply, secretly betook itself to another path; and when the hunter has found this, he pursues it more eagerly, more certain in the hope of the prey, and more secure by the firmness of the track. So therefore we too, when the tracks of the explanation we have set before us have in a manner slipped away from us, retracing the little way we have measured out, and pursuing an order of exposition plainer than it seemed before, we hope that the Lord our God may deliver into our hands the prey which, when we have prepared it, and seasoned it according to the knowledge of our mother Rachel with the salt of the rational word, we may deserve to obtain the blessings from our spiritual father Jacob.

On which account it seems necessary, as we have said, briefly to repeat what has been said, and to re-weave the earlier explanation, so that whatever meaning is clearer may be opened up. It seems to me, then, that from the beginning of the drama set before us the bride is to be understood as standing outside at a crossroads, and, on account of her love for the bridegroom, looking this way and that in case perhaps he should come to her, in case perhaps he should appear; and she is unwilling to set out on any road while she does not know from which direction he is more likely to come, and she stands not at home but outside, and is driven by longing for him, and says: ”Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth”; but when the bridegroom comes, she says: ”Your breasts are better than wine,” and the rest, up to the place where she says: ”We will run after you. After these things, being beloved and receiving from the bridegroom himself a return of love, she is led into his chamber, and says: ”The king has brought me into his chamber. But also the rest of

the things that are afterward written, she speaks placed within to the bridegroom, in the presence and attendance of the maidens of the bride and the companions of the bridegroom.

Yet the bridegroom is to be understood, inasmuch as he is a man, as not always in the house, nor always sitting beside the bride placed within the house: but he goes out frequently, and she, as if anxious with love for him, seeks him when absent; but at times too he returns to her. On which account, throughout the whole little book, the bridegroom is seen at one time to be sought as though absent, at another time to speak as though present with the bride. But the bride herself, when she had seen through many and magnificent things in the bridegroom's chamber, asks that she too be brought into the house of wine. And when, having entered there, she had perceived that the bridegroom, inasmuch as he is a man, had not remained in the house, she again, driven about by love for him, went outside, and going around she wanders about the house as she enters, and looks out on every side for when the bridegroom may return to her; and behold, suddenly she sees him coming down to the house in which the bride, anxious with love for him, is aflame, surpassing the ridges of the neighboring mountains with immense leaps. But when the bridegroom reaches the wall of the house, he stands for a little while behind it, considering, as usually happens, something, and turning it over in his mind.

But now, he too feeling something of love toward the bride, and using his own height, which reaches up to the windows of the house — which windows have some part of the work that is, as they say, of lattice — and then he leans indeed through the windows, but being taller than the windows, he reaches up to the upper parts of them, which are marked out, as we have said, with lattice-work, and looking out from there he addresses the bride, and says to her:

» Rise up, come, my neighbor, my beautiful one, my dove «

These are the matters which, as we indicated above, seemed to us to present the greatest difficulty both in setting the order straight and in opening up their meaning. And this, I think, our present renewed investigation of the words will have rendered clearer. But the spiritual interpretation in these passages is not held to be so laborious and difficult. For the soul, the bride of the Word, which abides in the royal house — that is, in the Church — is taught by the Word of God, who is her Bridegroom, whatever things have been laid up and stored away within the royal hall and the king's chamber. In this house, which is the Church of the living God, she learns also the cellars of that wine which has been gathered from the holy winepresses — cellars of wine not only new but also old and sweet, which is the teaching of the law and the prophets. And when she has been sufficiently trained in these, she may receive into herself Him who was in the beginning with God, God the Word — yet He does not always remain with her, for this is not possible for human nature; but at one time she is visited by Him, and at another she is abandoned, so that she may desire Him the more.

And when she is visited by the Word of God according to the sense of the verse set before us, He is said to come to her leaping over the mountains — that is, revealing to her the lofty and elevated meanings of heavenly knowledge, so that He arrives even at the building up of the Church, which is the house of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth, and He stands beside the wall, or behind the wall, so that He is neither wholly hidden nor entirely out in the open. For the Word of God, and the discourse of knowledge, does not appear set out in public and openly, nor to be trampled underfoot; but when it has been sought, it is found, and it is found not, as we said, placed in the open, but covered over, and lying hidden as it were behind a wall. But the soul which is said to be in the Church is not understood to be set within buildings of walls, but placed within the defenses of faith and the buildings of wisdom, and covered over by the lofty summits of charity. Therefore a good resolve, and faith in right doctrines, makes the soul to be in the house of the Church; certain members of which house are called either the chamber, or the house of wine, or others of this kind, according, that is, to the grades of graces and the varieties of spiritual gifts.

So then the wall too is now a certain part of this house, which can signify the firmness of doctrines; beneath which the Bridegroom is said to stand, and in which He is so great and so lofty that He rises above the whole building, and looks upon the bride, that is, the soul; and not yet indeed does He show Himself open and wholly manifest to her, but, as it were looking through the nets, He urges her on and provokes her not to sit within, sluggish, but to go out to Him without; and to strive so that now she may see Him not through windows and nets, nor through a mirror in a riddle, but going forth outside, face to face. For now, since she cannot yet gaze upon Him thus, He therefore stands not before her, but behind her and behind the wall. And He leans in through the windows, which without doubt lay open for the receiving of light to illuminate the house. Through these, then, the discourse of God, leaning in and looking through, provokes the soul to rise up and to come to Him. But we may understand the windows to be the bodily senses, through which either death or life enters into the soul; for so does it signify when the prophet Jeremiah speaks concerning sinners, saying: ”Death has climbed up through your windows. How does death climb up through the windows?

If the eyes of a sinner should look upon a woman, and he should commit adultery with her in his heart, thus death has entered into the soul through the windows of the eyes. But also when someone receives an empty hearing, and especially of the false doctrines of perverse knowledge, then through the windows of the ears death enters into the soul. But if the soul, beholding the adornment of the world, and from the beauty of creatures perceiving God the Maker of all, should marvel at His works, and praise the Creator of the works, then life enters into the soul through the windows of the eyes. And also when it inclines its hearing to the Word of God, and delights in the reasonings of His wisdom and knowledge, to this soul, through the windows of the ears, the light of wisdom enters. Through these windows, then, the Word of God looking through, and directing His gaze toward the soul His bride, exhorts her to rise up and to come to Him — that is, to leave behind bodily and visible things, and to hasten to the incorporeal and invisible and spiritual things. Since the things which

are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Thus also the Spirit of God is said to go about, and to seek out worthy souls, which can fittingly and rightly be made into a dwelling-place of wisdom.

But that He is said to look through the nets of the windows, this without doubt signifies that, so long as the soul is placed in the house of this body, it cannot grasp the wisdom of God naked and open, but through certain examples and indications and images of visible things it contemplates those things which are invisible and incorporeal; and this is for the Bridegroom to look upon her through the nets of the windows. But if we should expound these things of Christ and the Church, the house in which the Church dwelt is the Scriptures of the law and the prophets. For there is the king's chamber, filled with all the riches of knowledge and wisdom. There too is the house of wine, that is, the teaching either mystical or moral, which gladdens the heart of man. Coming, then, Christ stood a little while behind the wall of the Old Testament. For He stood behind the wall, when He was not made manifest to the people; but when the time was at hand, and He began to appear through the windows of the law and the prophets — that is, through those things which had been foretold concerning Him — and to show Himself to the Church seated within the house, that is, within the letter of the law, He provokes her to go out from there, and to come outside to Him.

For unless she goes out, unless she comes forth, and advances from the letter to the spirit, she cannot be joined to her Bridegroom, nor associated with Christ. He calls her, therefore, and invites her to come from carnal things to spiritual, from visible to invisible, from the law to the Gospels. And therefore He says to her: "Rise up, come, my neighbor, my beautiful one, my dove. And that we may also anticipate some of the things that are to be said afterward, fearing to lose the sense which presents itself in this place: for this reason perhaps He also says that to her, that "the winter too has passed, the rain has gone away," at the same time indicating also the time of His passion, that, the winter being past and the showers cast down, He Himself suffered; and at the same time signifying also this by spiritual understanding, that up to that time in which Christ suffered, there were showers upon the earth. For the Lord still commanded the showers — that is, the prophets — to rain the rain of the word upon the earth. But since up to John the Baptist the prophetic offices are brought to an end, rightly are the showers said to have gone away and departed. But the prophetic showers ceased not to the harm of believers, but for the greater gains of the Church. For what need is there of showers, where the river of God gladdens the city?

where in the heart of each of the believers there becomes a fountain of living water springing up unto life eternal? What need of showers, where now the flowers have appeared in our land, and from the coming of the Lord the fig tree is no longer cut down, which before had brought forth no fruit? For now it has already put forth its unripe figs. But the vines too have given their fragrance. Whence also a certain one from that vineyard said: "For we are the good fragrance of Christ unto God in every place, among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing. But these things, as we indicated above, we have set

forth before we presumed to come to the very passages of Scripture, lest perchance the sense which seemed to present itself at the moment should escape us: now let us take up again how He is said to look through the nets. It is written: "For not in vain are nets stretched out for the birds. And again: "The just man, if he should fall into sin, is bidden to flee, just as the roe from the snares, and the bird from the nets. Full, therefore, is the life of mortals of the snares of offenses, full of the nets of deceptions, which he stretches out against the human race who against the Lord is called the giant hunter Nimrod. For who is the true giant other than the devil, who also rebels against God?

For the snares of temptations, and the traps of ambushes, are called the nets of the devil. And since the enemy had stretched out these nets everywhere, and had entangled almost all in them, there needed to be someone who should become stronger and more eminent than they, and should crush them, so that He might be able to open a way for those who follow Him. For this reason, therefore, the Savior too, before He came into wedlock and fellowship with the Church, was tempted by the devil, so that overcoming the nets of temptations He might look through them, and through them call her to Himself, showing her without doubt and teaching her that it was not through leisure and delights, but through many tribulations and temptations, that she must come to Christ. There was, therefore, no other who could overcome those nets. For all have sinned, as it is written. And again, as the Scripture says: "There is not a just man upon the earth who will do good, and will not sin. And again: "No one is clean from filth, not even if his life should be of one day. He alone, therefore, is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who committed no sin, but the Father made Him to be sin for us, in the likeness of the flesh of sin, that from sin He might condemn sin. He came, therefore, to those nets, but He alone could not be entangled in them:

nay rather, having burst and crushed them, He gives to His Church confidence, so that she may now dare to make void the snares, and to pass through the nets, and with all eagerness to say: "Our soul, like a sparrow, has been snatched from the snare of the hunters; the snare has been crushed, and we have been set free. But who crushed the snares, except He who alone could not be held in them? Although He too was in death voluntarily, and not, as we, by the necessity of sin. For He alone it is who was free among the dead. And because He was free among the dead, therefore, having conquered him who held the dominion of death, He drew away the captivity which was held in death. And He not only raised Himself from the dead, but also those who were held in death He at the same time roused up, and at the same time made to sit in the heavenly places. For ascending on high He led captivity captive, not only leading forth souls, but also raising up their bodies, as the Gospel testifies that many bodies of the saints were raised up, and appeared to many, and entered into the holy city of the living God, Jerusalem. This exposition concerning the nets has been taken up by us in the second place. Let it indeed be the reader's judgment which of them cannot but be more worthily fitted to mystical utterances.

Commentary on the Song of Songs — Book Four

English translation of Origen of Alexandria's Commentary on the Song of Songs (Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum), in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 410). Translated from the OCR-corrected Migne Patrologia Graeca 13 (Delarue) base text. Rufinus's translation is intrinsically incomplete, running only as far as Song of Songs 2:15. This English translation is in the public domain.

BOOK FOUR

» Rise, come, my neighbor, my beautiful one, my dove; for behold, the winter has passed, the rain has gone and departed of itself, the flowers have appeared in the land, the time of pruning has come, the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. The fig tree has put forth its shoots, the flowering vines have given forth their fragrance. «

What the sequence of the drama contains we have already described above; but now let us consider what either the Word of God is to be understood as saying to the soul that is worthy of it and suited to it, or what Christ is to be understood as saying to the Church. But meanwhile let the Word of God first speak to this beautiful and comely soul, to whom, through the bodily senses -- that is, through the gaze of reading and through the hearing of teaching -- he appeared as if through windows, and showed the loftiness of his greatness, so that in the passages above he spoke to her while leaning over, and calling her forth, that she might come outside, and, being now made to be beyond the bodily senses, might cease to be in the flesh, so that she might deservedly hear: "But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. For the Word of God would not call her his neighbor in such a way unless he joined himself to her and became one spirit with him; nor would he call her beautiful unless he saw his image being renewed in her from day to day; and unless he saw her capable of receiving the Holy Spirit, who descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus in the Jordan, he would not say to her: "My dove. For she had conceived a love of the Word of God, and desired to come to him in swift flight, saying:

"Who will give me wings like a dove, and I shall fly, and be at rest? I shall fly with the senses, I shall fly with the spiritual understandings, and I shall be at rest when I have laid hold of the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge. For I think that, just as those who

receive the death of Christ, and mortify their members upon the earth, become sharers in the likeness of his death, so also those who receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and are sanctified by him, and filled with his gifts -- since he himself appeared in the form of a dove -- may themselves also become doves, that they may fly up from earthly and bodily places to the heavenly ones, lifted up on the wings of the Holy Spirit. But that this may be the fitting time in which these things can come to be, he consequently added: "For behold," he says, "the winter has passed, the rain has gone. For the soul is not joined and united to the Word of God before every winter of disturbances and every storm of vices has departed from her, so that she may no longer be tossed about, and carried around by every wind of doctrine.

When, therefore, all these things have departed from the soul, and the tempest of desires has fled from her, then the flowers of the virtues will begin to bloom in her; then the time of pruning also will come to her mind, and if anything superfluous and less useful has been in her senses or understandings, it will be cut away, and she will be recalled to the buds of spiritual understanding. Then also she will hear the voice of the turtledove -- that voice, without doubt, of the wisdom which the dispenser of the word speaks among the perfect, the higher wisdom of God which is hidden in a mystery. For this is what the naming of the turtledove indicates. For this bird passes its life in more secret places, remote from the multitude, either loving the deserts of the mountains or the hidden recesses of the woods, always set far from the multitude, and a stranger to the crowds. But what else is there that befits the opportuneness and the loveliness of this time? "The fig tree," he says, "has put forth its shoots. Not yet, indeed, the fruits themselves of the Spirit, which are joy, charity, peace, and the rest, but nevertheless the spirit of man -- which in him is singularly named the fig tree -- already begins to bring forth their shoots. For just as generally in the Church the various trees are understood to be each of the souls of believers, of which it is said:

"Every tree which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. And again Paul, who says that he is a fellow worker of God in God's husbandry, himself also says: "I planted, Apollos watered. But the Lord too in the Gospels: "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or the tree bad, and its fruit bad. Just as, therefore, generally in the Church the several believers are understood as various trees, so also in each soul the various virtues and its various efficacies are understood as various trees. There is, therefore, also in the soul a certain fig tree which puts forth its shoot; there is also a vine which may flower, and give forth its fragrance. The branches of this vine the heavenly Father, the husbandman, prunes, that they may bring forth much fruit. But this vine first, by the sweetness of the fragrance which is given forth from the flower, gladdens the sense of smell; according to him who said: "For we are the good fragrance of Christ to God in every place. Seeing, therefore, these beginnings of the virtues in the soul, the Word of God calls her to himself, that she may hasten and go forth; and, casting aside all bodily things, may come to him, that she may become a partaker of his perfection.

Therefore, then, to her who as it were still lies prostrate and is bent down upon bodily things, he first says: Rise up; and to her who, as it were, has straightway obeyed and complied with

the one calling her, he gives praise and she hears: My neighbor, and my dove. And after this, lest she tremble at the whirlwinds of temptations, he announces to her that the winter has departed, and the rain has passed and gone away for itself. And he has finely signified the nature of vices and sins by uttering one wonderful saying, so that he calls ”winter” and ”rain” of this kind that which descends from the offense and storm of vices, indicating that it has gone away for itself, and by this that sins have no substance. For the vices that fall away from a man are not gathered together into some other substance of sins, but they go away for themselves, and dissolved into their own selves they vanish, and are reduced to nothing. And therefore he said, ”it has gone away for itself.” There comes about, then, a tranquility of the soul when the Word of God appears to it and sin ceases; and thus at last, when the vineyard is in flower, the virtues and the young trees of good works will begin to bring forth fruit.

But now again Christ speaks these things to the Church, and sets the whole span of the present age within the circuit of a year. And by ”winter” he indicates that time in which either the hail and whirlwinds and the remaining blows of the ten plagues scourged the Egyptians; or when Israel was enduring diverse wars; or even when it resisted the Savior himself, and, seized by the whirlwind of unbelief, was sunk in the shipwreck of faith. Since, therefore, by their offense salvation has been made for the nations, he now calls the Church to himself, and says to her: Rise up, and come to me, for now the winter which drowned the unbelievers, and was holding you back in ignorance, has withdrawn. But the rain also has passed away, that is, now I will no longer command the clouds—namely the prophets—to rain the rain of the Word upon the lands; but the very voice of the turtledove, that is, the very wisdom of God itself, will speak in the lands, and will say: I who was speaking am myself present. The flowers, therefore, of the believing peoples and of the rising Churches have appeared in the land. But the time of pruning also has come, through faith in my passion and resurrection. For sins are cut off and excised from men, when in baptism the remission of sins is granted.

The voice of the turtledove, as we have said, is now heard in the lands not through diverse prophets, but through the mouth of the wisdom of God itself. And the fig tree buds forth, which can be understood in the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which now for the first time are opened and shown to the Church; or even in the letter of the law, which before the coming of Christ was closed and constricted, and covered over with a certain garment of carnal understanding. But from his presence and coming there was brought forth from it the bud of spiritual understanding, and the green and living sense which was hidden in it appeared, so that the Church, which was hidden by Christ within the fig tree—that is, within the law—should not appear dry and following the letter that kills, but the flowering and life-giving spirit.

But the vines also are said to flower, and to have given their fragrance. Now the diverse Churches which are held throughout the world can indeed be called flowering vines, or vineyards. For the vineyard of the Lord of Sabaoth is the house of Israel, and the house of

Judah is his beloved young plant. These vineyards, therefore, when they first come to the faith, are said to flower; but when they are adorned through the religion of their works with sweetness, they are said to have given their fragrance; not without reason, I think, that he did not say, "they gave a fragrance," but "their own fragrance": so as to show that there is present in each soul the force of possibility and the freedom of will, by which it can do all that is good. But because this good of nature, plucked away by the occasion of transgression, had been bent either to ignominy or to wantonness, when it is repaired through grace, and restored through the teaching of the Word of God, it renders without doubt that fragrance which God the first Creator had implanted in it, but which the fault of sin had taken away. And by "vines" or "vineyards" there can also be understood the heavenly and angelic powers, which bestow upon men their fragrance, that is, the good of teaching and instruction, by which they instruct and imbue souls, until they come to perfection and begin to be made capable of God. Just as the Apostle also, writing to the Hebrews, says:

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth in ministry for the sake of those who receive the inheritance of salvation? And therefore men are said to receive from these, as it were, the first flower and fragrance of good works: but the very fruits of the vine they are to hope for from him who said: I will not drink of the offspring of this vine, until I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father. Those perfect flowers and fruits, therefore, are to be hoped for from him: but the beginnings and, so to speak, the sweetness of making progress can be ministered by the heavenly powers, or certainly through those who were saying, as we said above, that we are the good fragrance of Christ to God in every place.

But we can also understand in yet another way these matters that are before us, so that we may say that there seems to be here, as it were, a certain prophecy made to the Church, by which she is called to the promises of things to come — so that, as it were, after the consummation of the age, when the time of the resurrection has arrived, it is said to her: Arise. And because this word at once designates the work of the resurrection — as though, made brighter and more splendid by the resurrection, she is invited to the kingdom — it is said to her: Come, my neighbor, my beautiful one, my dove, for the winter has passed. By "winter" he undoubtedly names the storms and whirlwinds of this present life, by which human life is tossed about with the tempests of temptations. That winter, then, has passed with its rains, and has gone its way. Each one has done for himself in this life everything that he has done. But the flowers are the beginning of the promises to come. Understand as the time of pruning the axe laid to the root of the tree at the consummation of the age, that it may cut down every tree not bearing good fruit.

But mark as the voice of the turtledove — which is heard in the writings of the promise, which the meek shall receive in their inheritance — the person of Christ teaching face to face, and no longer through a mirror and in a riddle. And let the fig tree that puts forth its shoot be reckoned the fruit of the whole congregation of the just. But those holy and blessed angelic powers, with whom each of the elect and the blessed shall be joined out of the resurrection — who shall be as the angels of God — these are themselves the vines and

the flowering vineyards, which impart their fragrance to each soul, and the grace which it first received from its Creator, and now has recovered again after it had been lost; and by the sweetness of the heavenly fragrance they at last drive away from them the stench of mortality and corruption, once it has been cast off.

» Arise and come, my neighbor, my dove, into the coverings of the rock, beside the outwork. Show me your face, and make your voice heard by me, for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful. «

According to the order of the drama set forth, the bridegroom, who leaping upon the mountains and bounding over the hills had come to the bride, looking upon her and gazing through the windows, now in the second place says to her: Arise, come, my neighbor, my beautiful one, my dove. But now he adds this also, in order to show her the place to which she ought to come, which place is set under the covering and shelter of the rock. And let this same place be not so much beside the wall as beside a certain outwork. Now it is called an ”outwork” when, outside the walls that encircle the city, another wall is drawn, and there is a wall before the wall. Then next, as though for the sake of reverence the bride herself is covered over and veiled, the bridegroom himself asks that, coming to that place which he showed above — being, as it were, more secret — she may there, with the veil as it were thrown back, show him her face. And because out of much reverence the bride would be silent, the bridegroom at some point desires also to hear her voice, and to be delighted in her words, and he says that she should make her voice heard by him. It seems, however, that her face is not entirely unknown to him, nor is he ignorant of her voice, but that something has come between, in which he has neither seen her face nor heard her voice.

Let this be the text of the drama set forth. To which this also is added, that the season of spring seems to be in progress, since flowers are recorded to have appeared in the earth, and the voice of the turtledove to sound, and the trees to have put forth their shoot. On account of this, as at an opportune time, he calls the bride forth to advance — she who undoubtedly had remained the whole winter within the enclosures of the house. But these things seem to me (so far as pertains to the historical narrative) to confer no benefit upon readers, nor at least to preserve any consequence of the narrative itself, such as we find in the other histories of Scripture. Hence it is necessary to transfer everything to the spiritual understanding.

First, then, understand for me the winter of the soul, when it is still tossed by the waves of the passions, and beaten by the storms of the vices and by the harsh blasts of the malignant spirits. While she is set in these, the Word of God does not exhort her to go outside, but to gather herself within herself, and to be united on every side, and to be sheltered against the destructive blasts of the malignant spirits. Then no flowers of studies in the divine writings are with her, nor do the secrets of deeper wisdom and the hidden mysteries resound as it were through the voice of the turtledove. But neither does her sense of smell receive anything of grace as it were from the flowers of the vineyard, nor is her sight delighted as it were in the shoot of the fig tree; but it is enough that in the tempests of temptations

she remain safe and fortified from the fall of sin. But if she obtains this, that she endure unharmed, the winter passes for her, and spring comes to her. For it is spring for her when rest is given to the soul, tranquillity to the mind. Then the Word of God comes to her, then it calls her to itself and exhorts her to go out, not only outside the house, but outside the city: that is, that she may come to be not only outside the vices of the flesh, but outside whatever is bodily and visible contained in the world. For we have already clearly shown above, figuratively in the law, what the city is.

The soul, therefore, is called forth beyond the wall, and is led as far as the outwork, when, casting away and leaving behind those things which are seen and are temporal, she presses on toward those things which are not seen and are eternal. This journey, then, is shown to her as one to be made under the covering of the rock, not under the naked air, nor in such a way that she should suffer the burning of the sun, lest she become dark again, lest she say again, ”the sun has looked askance at me”; and for this reason she makes this journey under the covering of the rock. But this covering itself He does not wish to be of leaves or of linen cloths or of skins, but He wills the rock to be her covering — that is, the firm and solid teachings of Christ. For that the rock itself is Christ, Paul declares, saying: ”And the rock was Christ. If, then, the soul is covered and veiled with the doctrine and faith of Christ, she can safely arrive at that hidden place where, with unveiled face, she may contemplate the glory of the Lord. And rightly is this covering of the rock believed to be safe, since Solomon too says of it in the Proverbs that the tracks of the serpent cannot be detected upon the rock. For he says thus: ”There are three things which it is impossible for me to understand, and a fourth which I do not know:

the tracks of a flying eagle, and the way of a serpent upon a rock, and the paths of a ship on the sea, and the ways of a man in his youth. The tracks of the serpent, therefore — that is, certain signs of sin — cannot be found in this rock which is Christ, because He alone is the one who did no sin. By the true covering, then, of this rock, the soul arrives safely at the place of the outwork — that is, at the contemplation of things incorporeal and eternal. Of this same rock, under another figure of speech, David says in the thirty-ninth psalm: ”And He set my feet upon a rock, and directed my steps. And do not wonder if in David this rock is, as it were, the foundation and footing of the soul by which she journeys to God, while in Solomon it is the covering of the soul reaching toward the mystical secrets of wisdom; since Christ Himself is now called the way by which believers walk, and now also the forerunner, as Paul says: ”Whither the forerunner Jesus has entered in for us. Like to this also is that which is said by God through Moses: ”Behold, I have set you in a hole of the rock, and you shall see My back parts. Therefore this rock, which is Christ, is not closed on every side, but has a hole. And the hole of the rock is that which reveals God and makes Him known to men.

No one, then, sees the Father except the Son; no one, then, sees the last things of God — that is, the things which come to pass in the last times — except one placed in the hole of the rock, namely when he has learned those things by the revelation of Christ. And here

too, under the covering of the rock, the Word of God invites the soul, made near to Himself, to the place of the outwork, as we have already said above, to the contemplation of those things which are not seen and are eternal; and there He says to her: ”Show me your face” — assuredly that He may see whether she has upon her countenance anything still of the old veil, or whether she can behold the glory of the Lord with fearless gaze, so that she may say these very words: ”And we saw His glory, as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. But also, when she has become worthy that it may be said of her as it was said of Moses, that ”Moses spoke, and the Lord answered him,” then is fulfilled in her that which He says: ”Make me hear your voice.”

But a great praise of her is shown in what is said: Your voice is sweet. For thus the most wise prophet David spoke: ”May my discourse be sweet to him. And the voice of the soul is sweet when it speaks the word of God, when it expounds concerning faith and the doctrines of truth, when it explains the dispensations of God and his judgments. But if either foolish talk, or scurrility, or vanity proceeds from her mouth, or an idle word, for which an account must be rendered in the day of judgment, that voice is unsweet and unpleasant. From such a voice Christ turns away his hearing. And therefore every perfect soul sets a guard upon her mouth, and a door of restraint about her lips, so that she may always bring forth such speech as, seasoned with salt, may give grace to the hearers, and that the Word of God may say of her, ”Your voice is sweet. ”But also your face,” he says, ”is beautiful. If you understand that face of which Paul speaks: ”But we all with unveiled face”; and again when he says: ”But then face to face”: then you will see what is the face of the soul which is praised by the Word of God and is said to be beautiful. That face, without doubt, which is daily renewed after the image of him who created it, which has in itself no spot, or wrinkle, or anything of this kind, but is holy and immaculate;

such as Christ also presented the Church to himself, namely the souls which have come to perfection, which all together make up the body of the Church. Which body will assuredly appear beautiful and comely, if the souls out of which that body is made up remain in every beauty of perfection. For just as, when the soul is in anger, it renders the countenance of the body troubled and fierce; but when it persists in gentleness and tranquillity, it renders the appearance placid and mild: so also the face of the Church is pronounced either comely or foul according to the virtues and morals of believers, according to that which we read written: ”The trace of the heart in good things, a cheerful countenance. And again elsewhere: ”The face of a glad heart is flourishing, but of one placed in sorrows the countenance is mournful. Therefore the heart is glad when it has in itself the Spirit of God: whose first fruit is charity, the second is joy. From these I think certain wise men of the world took up that saying by which one says, that only the wise man is beautiful, but every wicked man is foul. It remains for us to say something also more openly concerning the word ”before-the-wall” (promuralis). Which, as we said above, indicates that there is a wall before a wall, which is also said in this manner in Isaiah: ”Set a wall, and around the wall. A wall is the fortification of a city.

But another wall before the wall, or around the wall, designates greater and stronger fortifications. By which it is shown that the word of God, calling the soul and leading it away from bodily affairs and corporeal senses, desires to teach it concerning the mysteries of the age to come, and thence to gather fortifications for it, so that, fortified and surrounded by the hope of things to come, it may in no way be either conquered by allurements or wearied by tribulations.

Now let us also see how these words may be spoken by Christ to the Church, who is near to him and beautiful. And beautiful to no one else but to him alone. For this is what he means when he says, my beautiful one. This one, then, Christ rouses up, and to her he announces the Gospel of the resurrection, and therefore he says: Arise, come, my neighbor, my beautiful one. And because he also gave her the wings of a dove, after she slept in the midst of the lots: now the Church was called midway between the two callings of Israel, because first Israel was called, and afterward, when he himself stumbled and fell, the Church of the Gentiles was called; but when the fullness of the Gentiles has entered in, then again all Israel, being called, shall be saved. In the midst, therefore, of these two lots the Church sleeps. And on this account he gave her the silvered wings of a dove, which signifies the rational wings within the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And the hinder parts of her back, either ”in the greenness of gold,” as some read, or, as others have it written, ”in the paleness of gold. This can show that that later calling which the Apostle says will come from Israel will not be in the observance of the law, but in the preciousness of faith. For faith, flowering with virtues, bears the appearance of the greenness of gold.

But it can also be said that the Church sleeps, or rests, in the midst of those lots, in the midst of the two testaments; and her wings are silvered from the senses of the law. The gold on the hinder parts of her back can be understood as the gift of the evangelical office. To this Church, then, Christ says: Come, my dove, and come in the covering of the rock; teaching her to come covered, lest she suffer anything from the temptations that rush upon her, but let her walk covered under the shadow of the rock, saying: The Spirit of our countenance, Christ the Lord, of whom we said: In his shadow we shall live among the nations. And she walks covered and veiled, because she ought to have power over her head, on account of the angels. But when she has come to the place before the wall, that is, to the state of the age to come, there he says to her: Show me your face, and make your voice heard by me, for your voice is sweet. He wishes the voice of his Church to be made heard, because whoever shall confess him before men, he also will confess him before his Father who is in heaven. For your voice is sweet.

And who does not admit that the voice of the catholic Church confessing the true faith is sweet, but that the voice of the heretics is unsweet and unpleasant, who speak not the doctrines of truth, but blasphemies against God, and iniquity against the Most High? So too the face of the Church is beautiful, but that of the heretics base and foul; if, however, there is anyone who well knows how to test the beauty of a countenance, that is, if anyone is spiritual who knows how to examine all things. For among the unskilled and animal men,

the sophisms of falsehood seem more beautiful than the doctrines of truth. But concerning the place before the wall we can further add this also, that the place before the wall is the bosom of the Father, in which the only-begotten Son, being placed, sets forth all things and declares to his Church whatsoever things are contained in the secret and hidden bosom of the Father. Whence one who had been taught by him said: No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he himself has declared him. Hither, then, Christ calls his bride, that he may teach her about all the things that are held with the Father, and may say: For I have made known to you all things which I heard from my Father; and that he may say again: Father, I will that where I am, there also may be my minister.

» Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vineyards, and our vineyards shall flourish. «

According to the order of the drama the speaker has changed, for now the bridegroom no longer speaks to the bride, but to the companions, and to them he says that they should catch the little foxes that lie in wait for the vineyards, where they have first put forth their buds, and do not allow them to reach the flower. He commanded, therefore, that they be caught, taking counsel for the welfare and benefit of the vineyards. But these things, as we have begun to do, must be examined by spiritual exposition. And I think that if you consider these things concerning the soul which joins itself to the Word of God, the foxes ought to be understood as the opposing powers and the wickednesses of demons, which through depraved thoughts and perverse understanding destroy the flower of virtues in the soul and kill the fruit of faith. Therefore the foresight of the Word of God, who is the Lord of hosts, commands his angels who are sent for service, on behalf of those who receive the inheritance of salvation, that they catch from each soul thoughts of this kind sent in by the demons, so that, these being cast out, the souls may be able to bring forth the flower of virtue. And they catch the evil thoughts in this way:

when they suggest to the mind that these are not from God, but are from the malignant spirit, and they give to the soul the discernment of spirits, so that it may understand which thought is according to God, and which is from the devil. But that you may know that there are thoughts which the devil sends into the hearts of men, see in the Gospel what is written: ”When the devil,” it says, ”had put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him. There are, therefore, thoughts of this kind which are cast by the demons into the hearts of men. But because divine Providence is not lacking, lest perhaps through importunity of this kind the freedom of the will should be disturbed, and there be no just cause for judgment, therefore the care of men is entrusted to the kindly angels and friendly powers, so that when the deceivers, like foxes, begin to assail a man, they may lift him up with their right-hand helps. And therefore it is said: ”Catch us the little foxes. Fittingly indeed he commands that they be caught and seized while they are still little. For while an evil thought is in its beginnings, it can easily be cast out of the heart. But if it is frequently repeated, and remains for a long time, it without doubt leads the soul to consent; and after consent, once

it has been confirmed within the heart, it is certain that it tends toward the disposition of sin.

While therefore it is in its beginnings, and is little, it ought to be caught and cast out, lest, if it should become grown and inveterate, it can then no longer be expelled. Finally, Judas too had the beginning of evil in the love of money, and this was for him the little fox. But when the Lord saw the soul of Judas, like a flowering vineyard, being harmed by this too, wishing to catch it and cast it out of him, he entrusted to him the money-bags, so that, possessing what he loved, he might cease from covetousness. But he, inasmuch as he had the freedom of his own will, did not embrace the wisdom of the physician, but gave himself up rather to that counsel by which his soul was being destroyed, than to that by which it was being healed.

But if we understand these things of Christ and the Church, the discourse will seem to be directed to the teachers of the Church, and a charge to be laid upon them concerning the catching of the foxes that lay waste the vineyards. Now by ”foxes” we may understand the perverse teachers of heretical doctrines, who by the cunning of their arguments seduce the hearts of the innocent, and lay waste the Lord’s vineyard so that it may not flourish in the right faith. A precept, therefore, is given to the catholic teachers, that while these foxes are still small, and have not yet deceived many souls, but the depraved teaching is only at its beginning, they should make haste to convict and restrain them, and to refute by the word of truth those who contradict, and to catch them by true assertions. For if these foxes remain in their first principles and grow strong, their word creeps like a cancer and becomes incurable; so that many are found who, deceived by them, now begin to fight on their behalf and to defend the authors of the error they have taken up. Thus, then, it is fitting to catch the foxes while they are small, and at the very first beginnings to confute the deceitful sophisms of the heretics with true assertions. But that the assertion of both our expositions may shine forth more clearly, let us gather from the divine volumes wherever mention has been made of this animal.

We find, then, in the sixty-second Psalm that it is said of the impious: ”But they have sought my soul in vain; they shall go into the lower parts of the earth, they shall be delivered into the hands of the sword, they shall be portions for foxes. But also in the Gospel according to Matthew the Savior answered the scribe who said to him, ”Master, I will follow you wherever you go”: ”The foxes have holes, and the birds of heaven have nests where they may rest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. And likewise in the Gospel according to Luke, to those who said to the Lord, ”Go out, and depart hence, for Herod wishes to kill you,” Jesus answered: ”Go and tell that fox: Behold, I cast out demons and accomplish healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I shall be consummated. In the book of Judges also, Samson, when the wife who was of the race of the Philistines had been taken from him, said to her father: ”I am innocent this time before the Allophyli, for I will do evil to you. And Samson went, and took three hundred foxes, and took torches, and bound tail to tail, and set one torch between the two tails of the foxes, and kindled fire in the torches, and

sent them through the harvests of the Allophyli, and burned all their harvests and their stubble, and their vineyards, and their olive groves.

And further, in the second book of Ezra, where Tobiah the Ammonite hindered the building of those who had returned from captivity, that they might build the temple and the wall, he said to the Allophyli: "Will these men sacrifice, or eat things offered in this place? Do not the foxes go up, and will they not destroy the wall of these men which they are building of stones? These, for the present, are the things that could occur to us from the divine Scriptures, in which the memory of this animal has been made, so that from these every wise reader may prudently conjecture whether we have used a fitting exposition in the things that have been set before us, for explaining that which it says: "Catch us the little foxes. And although it is laborious to explain each of the things we have taken up by way of example, nevertheless we shall briefly touch upon what we can.

And first, in the sixty-second Psalm, let us see, where, when the impious were persecuting the soul of the just man, he sang, saying: "But they have sought my soul in vain; they shall go into the lower parts of the earth, they shall be delivered into the hands of the sword, they shall be portions for foxes." In which it is surely shown that the depraved teachers, wishing by vain and empty words to deceive the soul of the just man, are said to go into the lower parts of the earth—being wise, as it were, in earthly things, and speaking of the earth, and descending into its lower parts, that is, into the depth of foolishness. For I think that those who live more carnally, because they harm only themselves, are said to be earth and to dwell in the earth. But those who understand the Scriptures with earthly and carnal senses, and by so teaching deceive others—for this very reason, that they contrive certain subtleties and arguments of carnal and earthly wisdom, they are said to enter into the lower parts of the earth: or certainly it is thus, because those who teach earthly things sin more grievously than those who merely so live, a still heavier punishment threatens them; and these same are prophesied to be delivered into the hands of the sword, perhaps of that flaming and turning sword.

But let us also see how they become the portions of foxes. Every soul is either a portion of God, or a portion of whoever has received power over men. For when the Most High divided the nations and scattered the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God, and the Lord's portion became Jacob. Since, then, it is established that every single soul is either in the portion of God or in the portion of some other, seeing that through the freedom of the will it is possible for each one to pass over from the portion of another — either to the portion of God, if with his help he chooses the better, or, if more wickedly, to the portion of the demons — hence mention is made of these in the psalm: "Those who have sought the soul of the just in vain shall be the portions of foxes," as if it said that they shall be the portions of the worst and most wicked demons: so that every malicious and crafty power, through which the deceptions and frauds of a false knowledge have been introduced, is figuratively called foxes;

and those who are led into this error, and are unwilling to acquiesce in the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the teaching which is according to godliness, but suffer themselves to be deceived by such, these shall become the portions of foxes of that kind, and shall enter with them into the lower parts of the earth. These same are also those in whom, according to the Gospel, these foxes which we mentioned above are said to have holes, in which the Son of Man has not where to lay his head. Herod too, we must believe, was named a fox for his deceitful cunning. For concerning Samson, who is recorded to have caught three hundred foxes, and to have bound them together by their tails, and to have set burning torches in the midst of the tails, and to have sent them through the harvests of the Philistines, and to have burned them up along with the standing grain and the olive groves and the vineyards, the explanation of this form or figure seems to me exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless let us attempt to knock at some of these things according to our strength, and let us suppose, as our exposition in the foregoing maintains, that the foxes are the deceitful and perverse teachers.

These Samson, who holds the image of the true and faithful teacher, catching them by the word of truth, will bind tail to tail — that is, he will confute those who are opposed to him and who think and teach things at variance with one another; and, taking from their own words their premises and conclusions, he will send the fire of his conclusion into the crop of the Philistines, and out of their own arguments will burn up all the fruits and vineyards and olive groves of that most wicked generation. But the very number of the three hundred foxes, which were divergent and dissonant from one another, indicates the threefold form of sins. For every sin is committed either in deed, or in word, or in the consent of the mind. Yet not even that which we said is written in the second book of Ezra is wholly to be passed over: where, when the Holy of Holies was being built — that is, when the faith of Christ and the mysteries of his saints were being founded — the enemies of the truth and the adversaries of the faith, who are the wise of this world, seeing the walls of the Gospel rise up without the art of grammar and without philosophical skill, say, as with a certain mockery, that this can very easily be destroyed by the cleverness of words through cunning fallacies and dialectical arguments. Let these things, meanwhile, said about the examples we have taken up, suffice as far as brevity could allow.

Now let us return to our theme.

It seems, then, that in the Song of Songs a command is given by the bridegroom to the virtues that are dear to him, that they should catch and refute the opposing powers which lie in wait for the souls of men, lest these powers exterminate the beginnings of faith and the flower of the virtues under the appearance of some secret and hidden wisdom—hiding themselves, like foxes in their holes, in those men who have offered themselves up to these second matters. And in order that they may the more easily be confuted and refuted, while they are still little foxes and hold only the beginnings of a most wicked persuasion, the command is given that they be caught. For if perchance they should grow and become larger foxes, they can no longer be caught by the enemies of the bridegroom, but perhaps

by the bridegroom himself alone. But the holy teachers too, and the masters of the Church, just as they have received power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, so also they receive power even to catch foxes. For thus power has been given to them over every power of the enemy.

Without doubt one of the enemy's powers is the fox, which exterminates the flowering vineyards, and which, while it is still small, is commanded to be caught—just as in the hundred and thirty-seventh psalm he is called blessed who takes and dashes the little ones of Babylon against the rock, and does not permit the Babylonian understanding to grow and increase within himself, but while it is still small in its beginnings dashes it down and holds it against the rock: for then it is easily destroyed. So, then, let the order run thus: "Catch us the little foxes, which foxes exterminate the flowering vineyards. When it says "us," this means "me the bridegroom and the bride"; or "me and you who are my companions. It can also be taken thus: "Catch us the foxes," and afterward, "the little ones exterminating the vineyards," so that it refers not so much to the foxes as to the vineyards, so that the little vineyards seem to be the ones that can be exterminated—that is, the small souls, which have only beginnings and are not firm and robust, and can be injured by the opposing powers. As it is said in the Gospel: "If anyone shall scandalize one of these little ones. In this it is shown that a great and perfect soul cannot be scandalized, but a small and untrained one can, as it is said in the psalm: "Much peace to those who love your name, and there is no scandal for them.

By a similar example, therefore, it can be seen that any little vineyard, a soul that is beginning, can be injured by the foxes—that is, by malignant or depraved teachers—but a perfect and strong one cannot. But if these foxes are caught by good teachers and cast out of the soul, then it will advance in the virtues and flourish in faith. Amen.

[Commentary ends here at Song of Songs 2:15 — Rufinus's translation goes no further (intrinsic).]

Commentary on the Song of Songs — Prologue

English translation of Origen of Alexandria's Commentary on the Song of Songs (Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum), in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 410). Translated from the OCR-corrected Migne Patrologia Graeca 13 (Delarue) base text. Rufinus's translation is intrinsically incomplete, running only as far as Song of Songs 2:15. This English translation is in the public domain.

PROLOGUE
[opening (Migne coll. 61–62, absent from the PG 13 scan) supplied from Baehrens GCS 33]

This little book is an epithalamium, that is, a wedding-song, and it seems to me to have been written by Solomon in the manner of a drama, which he sang after the likeness of a bride about to be wed and burning with heavenly love toward her bridegroom, who is the Word of God. For she has fallen deeply in love with him — whether it be the soul, which was made after his image, or the Church. But what words this magnificent and perfect bridegroom himself has used toward the soul or the Church joined to him, this same Scripture teaches us. What the young maidens, the companions of the bride, have said as well, standing together with the bride herself, and likewise what the friends and companions of the bridegroom have said, we learn nonetheless from the same book, which is entitled the Song of Songs. For the opportunity was given even to the friends of the bridegroom themselves to say certain things — those things, at least, which they had heard from the bridegroom himself, rejoicing over his union with the bride. A discourse is therefore made by the bride herself, not only to the bridegroom but also to the maidens; and again the discourse of the bridegroom is directed not only to the bride, but also to the friends of the bridegroom. And this is what we said above, that the wedding-song was written in the manner of a drama.

For a thing is called a drama when a story is enacted upon the stage, as it is wont to be, where different characters are introduced; and, as some come on and others in turn go off, the text of the narrative is completed by different persons speaking to different persons. Each of these things this Scripture contains in its own order, and its whole body is formed of mystical utterances. But first we ought to know that, just as a childish age is not moved to passible love, so neither is the little and infant age of the inner man admitted to grasp

these words — the age, that is, of those who are nourished in Christ with milk, not with strong food, and who now for the first time long for the reasonable milk that is without guile. For in the words of the Song of Songs there is that food of which the Apostle speaks: "But solid food belongs to the perfect"; and it requires such hearers as, according to their capacity for receiving it, have their senses exercised for the discernment of good and evil. And indeed the little ones whom we have mentioned, if they should come to these passages, it may be that they will gain nothing from this Scripture, yet neither will they be greatly harmed, whether in reading the very things that are written, or in reviewing the things that are to be said for their explanation.

But if anyone should approach who is a man only according to the flesh, to such a one no small danger and peril will arise from this Scripture. For, not knowing how to hear the names of love with pure and chaste ears, he will turn every hearing away from the inner man to the outer and carnal man, and will be turned from the spirit to the flesh, and will nourish carnal desires in himself, and by occasion of the divine Scripture he will seem to be stirred and incited to the lust of the flesh. For this reason, therefore, I give warning and counsel to everyone who is not yet free from the troubles of flesh and blood, and who does not withdraw from the affection of material nature, that he abstain wholly from the reading of this little book and of the things that are said in it. For they say that among the Hebrews this too is observed: that unless a man has arrived at a perfect and mature age, he is not even permitted to hold this little book in his hands. And we have received from them that this also is kept: since it is their custom that all the Scriptures be handed down to boys by their teachers and by their sages, together with those which they call deuteroseis, these four things are reserved to the last — that is, the beginning of Genesis, in which the creation of the world is described;

and the beginnings of the prophet Ezekiel, in which the account of the cherubim is given, and the end, in which the building of the temple is contained; and this book of the Song of Songs. Therefore it seems necessary to me, before we come to examine the things written in this little book, first to discourse briefly about love itself, which is the chief cause of its writing; and after these things, about the order of Solomon's books, among which this book seems to be placed in the third position; then also about the title of the little book itself, why it is inscribed the Song of Songs; and further, how it seems to be composed in the manner of a drama and as a play upon the stage, of the kind that is wont to be enacted by the changing of characters.

Among the Greeks, indeed, very many learned men, wishing to track down the pursuit of truth, put forth many and varied writings concerning the nature of love, even in the style of dialogues, attempting to show that the power of love is nothing other than that which leads the soul up from the earth to the lofty heights of heaven, and that one cannot arrive at the highest blessedness except when the desire of love provides the impulse. Moreover, questions on this matter are reported to have been proposed as it were at banquets—among those, I suppose, among whom a banquet not of foods but of words was being held. Others,

too, left behind writings on certain arts by which this love might seem able to be engendered or increased in the soul. But carnal men have dragged these arts down to vicious desires and to the mysteries of a blameworthy love. Let it be no wonder, then, if among us also—where the more numerous the simple appear, the more numerous also the unskilled—we have called a discussion on the nature of love difficult and close to danger;

since even among the Greeks who seem learned and wise there have nevertheless been some who did not receive these things as they are written, but, taking occasion from what has been said about love, plunged into the lapses of the flesh and into the precipices of unchastity, either taking certain admonitions and incitements from those things that had been written, as we mentioned above, or setting forth the writings of the ancients as a cloak for their own incontinence. Therefore, lest we too fall into anything of this kind, perceiving in a vicious and carnal manner those things that were written well and spiritually by the ancients, let us stretch out to God the palms both of our body and of our soul, that the Lord who gave the word to those who preach the gospel with much power may grant to us also, in his power, the word by which we may be able to show, from those things that have been written, an understanding that is sound and fitted to the edification of chastity, whether regarding the very name or the nature of love.

At the beginning of the words of Moses, where the constitution of the world is recorded, we find that two men are said to have been created. The first was made according to the image and likeness of God, the second was formed from the mud of the earth. The apostle Paul, knowing this well and being clearly instructed in these matters, wrote in his letters more openly and evidently that there are two men in each and every person. For he said thus: ”For though our man who is outside is corrupted, yet the one who is within is renewed day by day. And again: ”For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man,” and how many other things like these does he write? Hence I think that no one ought now to doubt that Moses wrote in the beginning of Genesis concerning the making or fashioning of two men, since he sees that Paul, who certainly understood better than we do the things written by Moses, says that there are two men in each and every person. Of these he records that one, that is the inner man, is renewed day by day; but the other, that is the outer man, he declares to be corrupted and weakened in certain saints and men such as Paul was. But if it should seem to anyone that something must still be doubted about this, it will be better explained in its proper places.

Now, however, let us pursue the reason for which we have made mention of the inner and outer man. For from these things we wish to show that in the divine Scriptures, through homonyms — that is, through similar appellations, or rather through the very same terms — both the members of the outer man and the parts and affections of that inner man are named, and that these are compared with one another not only in terms but in the very realities themselves. For example, someone is a boy in age according to the outer man, who can grow and be brought to the age of a young man, and thence, by successive increases, arrive at the perfect man and become a father. But we have wished to use these names so

that we might set down terms consonant with the divine Scripture, namely with that which was written by John. For he says: ”I have written to you, boys, because you have known the Father; I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning; I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. It is certainly evident, and I think it is doubted by no one at all, that John here calls them boys or adolescents or young men, or even fathers, according to the age of the soul, not according to the age of the body.

But Paul too says in a certain place: ”I could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal; as to little ones in Christ I gave you milk to drink, not solid food. A little one in Christ is without doubt so named according to the soul, not according to the age of the flesh. Finally, this same Paul also says in another place: ”When I was a little one, I spoke as a little one, I was wise as a little one, I thought as a little one. But when I became a man, I destroyed the things that were of a little one. And again elsewhere he says: ”Until we all meet into the perfect man, into the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ. For he knows that all who believe will meet into the perfect man, and into the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ. Therefore, just as these names of ages which we have mentioned are ascribed by the same terms both to the outer man and to the inner, so also you will find that the names of the bodily members are transferred to the members of the soul — or rather, these are to be called the operations and affections of the soul. It is said, then, in Ecclesiastes: ”The eyes of the wise man are in his head. Likewise in the Gospel: ”He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Also in the prophets:

”The word of the Lord which came by the hand of the prophet Jeremiah,” or of any other. Similar too is that which he says: ”But your foot did not stumble. And again: ”But my feet were moved a little. Evidently also the belly of the soul is designated where it is said: ”Lord, from fear of you we have conceived in the womb. For who would doubt of it, when it is said: ”Their throat is an open sepulcher”? And again: ”Cast down, O Lord, and divide their tongues. But also that which is written: ”You have broken the teeth of sinners. And again: ”Break the arm of the sinner and of the malignant one. And what need is there for me to gather more of these, since the divine Scriptures are filled with most abundant testimonies? From these it is evidently shown that these names of members can by no means be fitted to the visible body, but must be referred to the part and powers of the invisible soul; for although they indeed have similar terms, yet they openly and without any ambiguity carry the significations not of the outer but of the inner man. There is, therefore, for this material man, who is also called the outer, food and drink akin to his own nature — that corporeal and earthly food, namely. And likewise for the spiritual man himself, who is also called the inner, there is his own proper food, such as that living bread which came down from heaven.

But there is also that drink from that water which Jesus promises, saying: ”Whoever shall drink of this water which I give him shall not thirst forever. Thus, therefore, throughout all things a similarity of terms is set down according to each man, but the property of the realities is kept distinct for each, and to the corruptible corruptible things are furnished,

but to the incorruptible incorruptible things are set forth. Hence it comes about that certain simpler people, not knowing how to distinguish and separate what things in the divine Scriptures are to be assigned to the inner man and what to the outer, deceived by the similarities of terms, have betaken themselves to certain foolish fables and empty fabrications; so that they even believed that after the resurrection corporeal foods must be used, and drink taken not only from the true vine that lives unto the ages, but also from these vines and the fruits of the wood. But of these things we shall see elsewhere.

Now therefore, as we distinguished in the preceding observation, there is indeed, according to the inner man, one kind of person without children and barren, but another abounding in children. In accordance with this we also note that saying: "The barren has borne seven, and she who was fruitful in children has grown weak. And as it is said among the blessings: "There shall not be among you one without children nor a barren woman. Therefore, if these things are so, just as there is said to be a certain carnal love, which the poets have also called Cupid, according to which he who loves sows in the flesh; so also there is a certain spiritual love, according to which that inner man who loves sows in the spirit. And to say it more plainly, if there is anyone who still bears the image of the earthly according to the outer man, he is driven by an earthly desire and love. But he who bears the image of the heavenly according to the inner man is driven by a heavenly desire and love. And the soul is driven by heavenly love and desire when, having beheld the beauty and comeliness of the Word of God, it has fallen in love with His splendor, and has received from Him a certain dart and wound of love.

For this Word is the image, and the brightness of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, in whom were created all things that are in the heavens, and that are on the earth, whether visible or invisible. Therefore, if anyone can with a capacious mind conceive and consider the beauty and comeliness of all these things which were created in Him, being struck by the very loveliness of things and pierced by the magnificence of their splendor as by a chosen arrow, as the prophet says, he will receive from Him a saving wound, and will burn with the blessed fire of His love. It is fitting also for us to know this: that just as an unlawful love and one contrary to law can befall the outer man — for example, that he should love not a betrothed nor a wife, but either a harlot or an adulteress — so also there can befall the inner man, that is, the soul, a love directed not toward the lawful bridegroom whom we have said to be the Word of God, but toward some adulterer and corrupter. This the prophet Ezekiel plainly declares under this same figure, where he introduces Oholah and Oholibah under the guise of Samaria and Jerusalem, corrupted by an adulterous love, as the passage itself of the prophetic Scripture shows to those willing to know more fully.

But this spiritual love of the soul is kindled sometimes indeed, as we have taught, toward certain spirits of wickedness, and sometimes toward the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, who is the faithful bridegroom and is called the husband of the learned soul, whose bride she herself is named especially in this Scripture which is here in hand, as we shall show more fully, the Lord granting it, when we begin to explain the words of the little book itself.

Now it seems to me that divine Scripture, wishing to guard against any stumbling arising among its readers under the name of love, has for the sake of the weaker sort designated by the more respectable term ”charity” or ”affection” (dilectio) that which among the wise of this world is called desire (cupido) or love (amor). For example, when it says of Isaac: ”And he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her. And again of Jacob and Rachel Scripture likewise says: ”Now Rachel was fair in her eyes and beautiful in appearance, and Jacob loved Rachel, and said: I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter. But this changed use of the word appears more evidently in the case of Amnon, who fell in love with his sister Tamar. For it is written: ”And it came to pass after these things, that Absalom the son of David had a sister very beautiful of countenance, and her name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David loved her. Here ”loved” is put for ”fell in love with. ”And Amnon was so troubled,” it says, ”that he fell sick on account of Tamar his sister: for she was a virgin, and it seemed hard in the eyes of Amnon to do anything to her. And a little later, concerning the violence which Amnon inflicted upon Tamar his sister, Scripture speaks thus:

”And Amnon would not hearken to her voice, but prevailed over her, and humbled her, and lay with her, and Amnon hated her with an exceeding great hatred: for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And so both in these passages, and in many other places, you will find that divine Scripture has shunned the word ”love” (amor) and has put ”charity” and ”affection” (dilectio) instead. Sometimes, though rarely, it does name love by its proper word, and it invites and incites souls toward it, as when it says in Proverbs concerning wisdom: ”Love her, and she will keep you; surround her, and she will exalt you; honor her, and she will embrace you. But also in that little book which is called the Wisdom of Solomon, it is written thus concerning wisdom itself: ”I became a lover of her beauty. And I think that only where no occasion of stumbling seemed to appear did it insert the very name of love. For what passion, or what unseemliness, could anyone discern in the love of wisdom, or in one who professes himself to be a lover of wisdom? For if it had said that Isaac fell in love with Rebecca, or Jacob with Rachel, some unseemly passion might well have been understood through these words with regard to the holy men of God, especially among those who do not know how to ascend from the letter to the spirit.

But most plainly, in this very little book which is now in hand, the name of love has been exchanged for the word ”charity,” in the place where it says: ”I have adjured you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my kinsman, that you tell him that I am wounded with charity”; whereas it might indeed have said: ”I am struck by the dart of his love. Therefore it makes no difference in the divine Scriptures whether it be called charity, or love, or affection, except that the name of charity is exalted to such a degree that even God himself is called charity, as John said: ”Beloved, let us love one another, for charity is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God; but he who does not love does not know God, for God is charity. And although it belongs to another occasion to say something about those things which we have brought forward from John’s Epistle by way of example, nevertheless it has not seemed absurd to touch briefly upon a few points. ”Let us love one another,” he

says, ”for charity is of God”; and a little later: ”God is charity. In this he shows both that God himself is charity, and again that he who is of God is charity. But who is of God, except that one who says: ”I came forth from God, and came into this world”? But if God the Father is charity, and the Son is charity;

and the charity of the Father and the charity of the Son are one thing, not one person; then consequently the Father and the Son are rightly said to be one. And therefore Christ is fittingly called charity, just as he is called wisdom, and power, and justice, and word, and truth. And therefore Scripture says that if charity remains in us, God remains in us. And God, that is, the Father and the Son, who also come to him who is perfect in charity, according to the word of the Lord and Savior who says: ”I and the Father will come to him, and will make our abode with him. It must therefore be understood that this charity which is God, when it has been in anyone, loves nothing earthly, nothing material, nothing corruptible. For it is contrary to its nature to love anything corruptible, since it is itself the fount of incorruption. For it alone is that which has immortality: seeing that God is charity, who alone has immortality, dwelling in light inaccessible. But what else is immortality but eternal life, which God promises he will give to those who believe in him, the only true God, and in Jesus Christ his Son whom he sent? For this reason therefore, first of all and before all things, this is said to be lovable and pleasing to God: that one should love the Lord his God with his whole heart, and with his whole soul, and with all his strength.

And because God is charity, and the Son who is of God is charity, he requires something like himself in us: so that through this charity which is in Christ Jesus, who is charity, we may be joined as it were by a certain kindred affinity through the name of charity; just as that man too, who was already joined to him, said: ”Who shall separate us from the charity of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Now this charity loves every man as a neighbor. For it was on this account that the Savior rebuked a certain man who supposed that a just soul does not keep the laws of kinship toward that soul which is entangled in iniquities: and for this reason he wove that parable which says that a certain man fell among robbers while he was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he indeed blames the priest and the Levite, who, seeing the half-dead man, had passed by; but he embraces the Samaritan who showed mercy, and by his response he confirmed that this man had been neighbor to the very one who had posed the question, and said to him: ”Go, and do you likewise. For indeed by nature we are all neighbors to one another. But by the works of charity that one becomes a neighbor who is able to do good to him who is not able.

Whence also our Savior became a neighbor to us, and did not pass us by when we lay half-dead from the wounds of the robbers. Therefore it must be understood that the charity of God always tends toward God, from whom it drew its origin, and looks toward the neighbor, with whom it has entered into partnership, inasmuch as he too was created alike in incorruption. So then, whatever things have been written concerning charity, receive them as though said concerning love, caring nothing for the names. For the same power is displayed in both. But if anyone should say that we are also called to love money, a harlot, and other

evil things likewise, by the same word which seems to be derived from charity: it must be understood that in these cases charity is named not properly but by abuse. Just as, for example, the name "God" is principally in him from whom are all things, and through whom are all things, and in whom are all things: which of course openly proclaims the power and nature of the threefold singularity. But in the second place, and, so to speak, by abuse, Scripture also calls "gods" those to whom the word of God comes, as the Savior confirms in the Gospels. But the heavenly powers too seem to be called by this name, when it is said: "God stood in the assembly of the gods, and in the midst he judges the gods.

But in the third place, now not by abuse but falsely, the gods of the nations, the demons, are so called, when Scripture says: "All the gods of the nations are demons. And so the name of charity is first in God, on account of which we are commanded to love God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, and with all our strength, inasmuch as he is the one from whom we have this very thing, that we are able to love. In him without doubt it is already contained that we should love wisdom, and justice, and piety, and truth and all the virtues equally. For to love God and to love good things is one and the same. In the second place, by a name as it were derived from that one by abuse, we are also commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves. But the third is that which is falsely named under the title of charity: to love either money, or pleasures, or whatever pertains to corruption and error. It therefore makes no difference whether God be said to be loved (amari) or loved (diligi). Nor do I think that anyone can be blamed if, just as John names God charity, he himself should name him love. In short, I remember that a certain one of the saints, Ignatius by name, said concerning Christ: "But my love is crucified"; nor do I judge him worthy of reproach for this.

But it should be understood that everyone who loves either money, or the things in the world that belong to corruptible matter, drags down the power of charity which is from God to earthly and perishable things, and abuses the things of God for the ends that God does not will. For God did not give to human beings the love of these things, but the use of them. We have discussed these matters at somewhat greater length, wishing to distinguish more openly and more attentively concerning the nature of charity and love, lest perhaps — since Scripture says that God is charity — everything that is loved, even if it be corruptible, should be thought to be from God, and this be reckoned as charity and love. But it is shown that charity is indeed a thing of God, and his gift, yet it is not always taken up by human beings for those things which are God's, and which God wills to be his work. But this too must be understood, that it is impossible for human nature not always to love something. For everyone who has reached that age which they call puberty loves something, either less rightly, when he loves what he ought not, or rightly and usefully, when he loves what he ought. But some drag this affection of love, which is implanted in the rational soul by the Creator's benefaction, either toward the love of money and the pursuit of avarice, or toward the securing of glory, and they become greedy for empty glory;

or toward the pursuit of harlots, and they are found captives of shamelessness and lust; or toward other things similar to these they pour out the power of so great a good. But even when this love is directed toward the various arts that are ministered by the hand, or is applied through the pursuits of the present life — not only the necessary ones, as, for example, to say, toward the art of wrestling, or the exercises of running, or indeed even toward geometry, or music, or arithmetic, and toward other disciplines of this kind — not even so does its use seem to me to be taken in a commendable way. For if that which is good is also commendable, and good in the proper sense is understood not in relation to bodily uses, but first in God and in the virtues of the soul, then it follows that the love is commendable which is fitted to God and to the virtues of the soul. And that this is so is shown by the very definition of the Savior, where, being asked by someone what was the greatest commandment of all, and the first in the law, he answered: ”You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. ”And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And he added: ”On these two commandments the whole law hangs, and the prophets”;

showing through these two that just and lawful love consists, and that on these the entire law and the prophets hang. But also that which he says: ”You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness”; and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up anew in this word, in which he says: ”You shall love your neighbor as yourself” — which will be explained more easily in this manner.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, a woman burning with love for some man and longing to be received into partnership with him: will she not do everything in such a way, and so govern all her movements, that she may know how to please him whom she loves — lest perhaps, if she should do anything contrary to his will, that most excellent man should reject and spurn partnership with her? Will this woman, who is aflame toward the love of that man with her whole heart, her whole soul, and all her strength, be able to commit adultery, when she knows that he loves chastity? or murder, when she knows him to be gentle? or theft, when she knows that generosity pleases him? or will she covet what belongs to another, she who has all her own desires occupied with the love of that man? Thus, therefore, in the perfection of charity, every commandment is said to be renewed, and the force of the Law and the Prophets to hang. On account of this good of charity or of love, the saints are neither straitened in tribulation, nor in perplexity driven to despair, nor cast down and destroyed; but that which is present, momentary, and light in their tribulation works for them beyond measure an eternal weight of glory. For this present, momentary, and light tribulation is not spoken of for all, but for Paul and for those who are like him:

because they have the perfect charity of God in Christ Jesus poured out in their heart through the Holy Spirit. So too, in the end, love of Rachel did not allow the patriarch Jacob, placed for seven continuous years amid labors, to feel the burning of the daytime heat and the nighttime cold. So I hear Paul himself, kindled in this love, saying: ”Charity suffers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, charity never falls. There

is nothing, therefore, which he who loves perfectly does not endure. But when we do not endure many things, it is certain that this is because we do not have the charity which endures all things. And if we do not bear certain things patiently, it is for this reason: that charity is lacking to us, which suffers all things. In the wrestling too which is ours against the devil, that we frequently fall, there is no doubt that this happens because there is not in us that charity which never falls. This love, therefore, the present Scripture speaks of, by which the blessed soul makes use of and is inflamed toward the Word of God; and it sings this wedding song through the spirit, by which the Church is joined and united to her heavenly bridegroom Christ, desiring to be mingled with him through the Word, that she may conceive from him, and may be able to be saved through this chaste generation of children, when they shall have remained in faith and holiness with sobriety:

inasmuch as they are conceived from the seed indeed of the Word of God, but brought forth and begotten either by the immaculate Church, or by the soul that requires nothing corporeal, nothing material, but burns with the love of the Word of God alone. These things, for the present, could occur to us concerning love, or charity, which is treated of in this wedding song of the Song of Songs. But it must be known that there are as many things which ought to be said about this charity as about God: since he himself is charity. For just as no one knows the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son shall will to reveal him, so no one knows his charity except the Son. And likewise the Son himself also — since he too is charity, and this charity is from God the Father — no one knows except the Father. Yet according to this, that God the Father himself is called charity, so also is the Son, who proceeds from the Father, and therefore knows the things that are in God, just as the spirit of man knows the things that are in man. But now the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, goes about seeking whether he may find any souls worthy and capable, to whom he may reveal the greatness of this charity which is from God.

Now therefore, invoking God the Father himself, who is charity, let us through that charity which is from him come also to the discussion of what remains.

And let us first attempt to inquire concerning this: what is the reason that, whereas the Church of God has received three books written by Solomon, the first of them set down is the book of Proverbs, the second the one called Ecclesiastes, and in the third place is held the volume of the Song of Songs. The considerations, then, that can occur to us in this matter are these. The general branches of learning by which one arrives at the knowledge of things are three, which the Greeks called ethics, physics, and theoretics; these we may call moral, natural, and inspective (contemplative). Some among the Greeks, indeed, also placed logic in the fourth number, which we may call rational. Others said that it is not something external, but is woven and joined throughout the whole body by means of these three disciplines which we mentioned above. For logic — or, as we say, the rational — is that which seems to contain the principles of words and sayings, and their proprieties and improprieties, and to teach the genera and species and figures of each of the several sayings; and this discipline it is fitting not so much to separate as to insert and interweave with the

others. But that is called moral through which an upright manner of living is fitted, and habits tending toward virtue are prepared.

That is called natural in which the nature of each single thing is examined, so that nothing may be done in life contrary to nature, but each single thing may be assigned to those uses for which it was brought forth by the Creator. That is called inspective, by which, going beyond visible things, we contemplate something of divine and heavenly things, and behold these with the mind alone, since they surpass bodily sight. These, then, as it seems to me, the wise men among the Greeks, having taken them from Solomon — inasmuch as he, being far prior to them in age and time, had learned these things earlier through the Spirit of God — put forward as though they were their own discoveries, and, having comprised them in the volumes of their teachings, left them to be handed down to posterity. But these things, as we have said, Solomon discovered before all others, and taught them through the wisdom which he received from God, as it is written: ”And God gave prudence to Solomon, and wisdom exceeding much, and breadth of heart like the sand which is on the shore of the sea; and wisdom was multiplied in him above all the ancient sons of men, and above all the wise men of Egypt.

Solomon, therefore, wishing to distinguish and separate from one another these three which we have said above to be general disciplines — that is, the moral, the natural, and the inspective — set them forth in three little books, each of them also fitted in its own order consequently. First, then, in Proverbs he taught the moral part, composing the rules of life, as was fitting, in concise and brief maxims. But the second, which is called natural, he comprised in Ecclesiastes: in which, discoursing much concerning natural things, and separating the empty and vain from the useful and necessary, he admonishes that vanity is to be abandoned, and that the useful and right things are to be pursued. The inspective part also he handed down in this little book which is in our hands, that is, in the Song of Songs, in which he instills into the soul the love of heavenly and divine things under the figure of the bride and bridegroom, teaching that one must come to fellowship with God by the ways of charity and love. And that, in laying the foundations of true philosophy and in establishing the order of disciplines and instructions, the rational part was not hidden from him, nor cast aside by him, he evidently shows at the very beginning of his Proverbs. First of all, by this very fact, that he entitled his little book ”Proverbs” — which name, of course, signifies that one thing is said openly, but another is indicated inwardly.

For this both the common usage of proverbs teaches, and John in the Gospel writes that the Savior spoke thus, saying: ”These things I have spoken to you in proverbs; the hour will come when I shall no longer speak to you in proverbs, but shall announce to you plainly concerning the Father. So much, then, in the very inscription of the title. But in what immediately follows he adds a discrimination of speech, distinguishes knowledge from wisdom, and instruction from wisdom, and sets down the understanding of words as something distinct, and says that prudence consists in this, that one may be able to detect the subtlety of words. He also distinguishes true justice from the direction of judgment; and he even

names a certain shrewdness as necessary for those whom he instructs — that, I believe, through which the craftiness of sophisms may be understood and avoided. And therefore he says that to the innocent shrewdness is given through wisdom, doubtless lest they be deceived in the word of God by sophistic fraud. But in this he seems to me to make mention of the rational discipline, through which the significations of words and sayings are discerned, and the proper meaning of each utterance is distinguished with sure reasoning. In which it is especially fitting that boys be trained. For this he urges, when he says: "That he may give to the younger boy sense and reflection.

And because he who is trained in these things necessarily governs himself rationally through what he has learned, and balances his life more moderately, therefore he says: "But the understanding one will acquire the means of guidance (helms). After this, moreover, recognizing that in the divine words — by which through the prophets the order of living was delivered to the human race — there are diverse figures of speech and various species of expression; knowing that among them there is held a certain figure which is called a parable, and another which is called an obscure saying, and others which are named enigmas, and others which are called sayings of the wise, he writes: "You will understand also a parable and an obscure discourse, and the sayings of the wise, and enigmas. Through these several things, then, he manifestly and evidently sets forth the rational part, unfolding, after the manner of the ancients, great and perfect meanings in concise and brief maxims.

And these, if anyone should meditate upon them in the law of the Lord day and night, and if anyone, like the just man whose mouth meditates the wisdom of the Lord, shall be able to investigate them more diligently, he will also be able to find them — provided nevertheless that he has sought rightly, and, seeking, has knocked at the door of wisdom, asking of God that it may be opened to him, and that he may be worthy to receive through the Holy Spirit the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, and to be made a partaker of that wisdom which was saying: "For I was extending my words, and you were not hearing. And rightly did she say that she extends her words in the heart of him to whom God has given, as we said above, breadth of heart. For the heart of that man is enlarged who is able to explain, with a broader teaching, those things which have been briefly said in mysteries, by means of assertions taken from the divine volumes. It is fitting, therefore, according to this same teaching of the most wise Solomon, that he who desires to know wisdom should begin from moral instruction, and understand that which is written: "You have desired wisdom; keep the commandments, and the Lord will give it to you.

For this reason, then, this master, who first teaches men divine philosophy, set the little book of Proverbs as the beginning of his work, in which, as we have said, the moral part is handed down: so that when one has advanced in understanding and in morals, he may come also to the discipline of natural understanding, and there, distinguishing the causes and natures of things, may recognize that vanity is to be abandoned, but that one must hasten toward the eternal and everlasting; and therefore, after Proverbs, one comes to Ecclesiastes, which

teaches, as we have said, that all visible and corporeal things are transient and fragile — which, of course, when he who is devoted to wisdom has discerned to be so, he will without doubt despise and disdain them, and, renouncing (so to speak) the whole world, he will stretch out toward the invisible and eternal things, which indeed are taught by spiritual senses, but under certain veiled figures of love, in the Song of Songs. For this book holds the last place for this reason, that one may then come to it when one has both been cleansed in morals, and has learned the knowledge and distinction of corruptible and incorruptible things, through which he may in no way be able to take offense at these figures by which the love of the bride toward the heavenly bridegroom — that is, of the perfect soul toward the Word of God — is described and formed.

For when those things have been premised by which the soul is purified through acts and morals, and is led into the discernment of natural things, then one comes fittingly to matters of doctrine and to the mystical things, and ascends to the contemplation of the divinity by a sincere and spiritual love. This threefold form, then, of divine philosophy I think was also prefigured in those holy and blessed men, on account of whose most holy institutions the most high God willed to be called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Abraham sets forth, as it were, moral philosophy, through obedience. For so great was his obedience and observance of the commandments that, when he heard: "Go forth from your land, and from your kindred, and from the house of your father," he did not delay, but did it at once — nay rather, he did something even greater. For hearing that he should sacrifice his son, not even then does he doubt, but he obeys the precept: and, to give to posterity an example of the obedience which is moral philosophy, he did not spare even his only son. Isaac also holds to natural philosophy, since he both digs wells and searches out the depths of things.

But Jacob too holds the inspective place, inasmuch as he was named Israel on account of the contemplation of divine things, and saw the camps of heaven, and beheld the house of God and the ways of the angels — that is, the ladder stretched out from earth to heaven. Whence also with good reason we find that these three blessed men set up altars to God, that is, consecrated the advances of their philosophy, namely that they might teach that these things are to be referred not to human arts, but to the grace of God. But they also dwell in tents, so that through these they may show that neither on earth is anything of one's own to be possessed by him who is devoted to divine philosophy, but that he must always be advancing, not so much from place to place as from the knowledge of inferior things to the knowledge of perfect things. But you will find also many other things in the divine Scriptures which designate this order — which we have said is contained in the little books of Solomon — according to this same form: but to pursue these now would be long, since we have another matter in hand. If anyone, then, has fulfilled the first part in the amending of morals and the keeping of commandments, which is designated through Proverbs;

and after this, when the vanity of the world has been detected, and the fragility of transient things perceived, has come to this — that he renounces the world and all that is in the world:

he will consequently come also to the contemplation and the desiring of those things which are not seen and are eternal. Yet, that we may be able to attain to these, we have need of divine mercy, if perchance we may be strong enough, having perceived the beauty of the Word of God, to be kindled in a saving love for Him, so that He also may deign to love such a soul as He has perceived to have a desire for Him.

After these things, the logical order of our discourse requires us to speak also about the very title, the Song of Songs. For this is similar to those things which in the tabernacle of the testimony are called the Holy of Holies, and to those things which in the book of Numbers are mentioned as the works of works, and to those things which in Paul are called the ages of ages. But in what way the Holy of Holies differs from the holy things in Exodus, and in what way the works of works differ from the works in the book of Numbers, we have stated, as far as we were able, in our treatises. And concerning the age of ages too, in the places where it occurs, it has not been passed over; and, so that we may not repeat the same things, let those suffice. Now, therefore, let us first inquire what the songs are, of which songs this is said to be the Song. I think, then, that the songs are those which of old were sung through the prophets or through the angels. For the Law is said to have been ministered through angels by the hand of a mediator. All those things, therefore, which were announced through them, were songs going before, sung by the friends of the bridegroom. But this is a single song, which was now to be sung, in the manner of an epithalamium, by the bridegroom himself as he was about to receive his bride to himself:

in which the bride no longer wishes to have it sung to her through the friends of the bridegroom, but now desires to hear the words of the bridegroom himself present, saying: ”Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. Whence also it is rightly preferred to all songs; for the other songs which the Law and the prophets sang seem to have been chanted to a bride still small, and to one who has not yet entered the vestibules of mature age; but this song is chanted to one grown up, and now very strong, and who is now capable of the manly power and the perfect mystery. According to which it is said of her that she is one, a perfect dove. As a perfect bride, therefore, of a perfect man, she has received the words of perfect doctrine. The first song, then, Moses and the children of Israel sang to God when they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, and when they saw the strong hand and the exalted arm of the Lord, and they believed God and his servant Moses. Then they sang, saying: ”Let us sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously glorified.

But I judge that no one can come to that perfect and mystical song, and to that perfection of the bride which is contained in this Scripture, unless he first walk through the dry ground in the midst of the sea, and the water become for him a wall on the right hand and on the left, and thus he escape from the hands of the Egyptians; so that he may see them dead on the seashore, and, gazing upon the strong hand of the Lord, because he slew the Egyptians, may believe the Lord and his servant Moses. And by Moses I mean the Law and the Gospels and all the divine Scriptures; for then he will rightly sing and say: ”Let us sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously glorified. But this Song one will sing when first he has been freed from

the servitude of the Egyptians. And after these things, when he has passed through all these things which are written in Exodus and in Leviticus, and has come to this, that he is taken up into the divine numbers, then again he will sing the second Song, when he has gone out from the valley of Zared, which is interpreted "an alien descent," and has come to the well concerning which it is written: "And the Lord said to Moses: Gather the people together, and I will give them water from the well to drink. For there he will sing and say: "Consecrate the well to it.

The princes dug it, the kings of the nations hewed it out in their kingdom, when they ruled over them. But concerning these things it has been said more fully in the book of Numbers, according as the Lord granted us. It behooves one, therefore, to come to the well which was dug by the princes and hewn out by the kings, in which work no common person labors, but all the princes, all the kings — that is, royal and princely souls, which seek out the depth of the well that contains the living water. After that song one comes to the song of Deuteronomy, concerning which the Lord says: "And now write for yourselves the words of this song, and teach it to the children of Israel, and put it into their mouth, that this song may be to me for a testimony among the children of Israel. And see how great and of what sort this song is, for whose hearing the earth does not suffice, but heaven too is called together. For he says: "Give heed, O heaven, to the things I shall speak, and let the earth hear the words from my mouth. See how great, how immense are the things that are said. "Let my utterance be awaited," he says, "like rain, and let it descend like dew, like snow upon the grass, and upon the hay, because I have invoked the name of the Lord," and the rest. The fourth song is in the book of Judges, concerning which it is written:

"And Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying: When the leaders in Israel began, in the purpose of the people, bless ye the Lord. Hear, O kings, and give ear," and the rest. But she who sings these things ought to be a bee, whose work is such that both kings and ordinary folk use it for health. For Deborah, who sings this song, is interpreted "a bee," and Barak too along with her: and Barak is interpreted "lightning-flash. And this song is sung after victory, because no one can sing what is perfect until he has conquered his adversaries. So, finally, in the song itself it is said: "Arise, arise, Deborah, rouse up the thousands of the people. Arise, arise, sing a song, arise, Barak. But concerning these things too you will find matters more fully discussed in those little discourses which we have published on the book of Judges. The fifth song after these is in the second book of Kingdoms, when David spoke to the Lord the words of this song in the day in which the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul, and he said: "The Lord is my rock and my fortress, the Lord my deliverer, my God shall be my keeper.

If, then, you too can consider who are the enemies of David whom he overcomes and lays low in the first and second book of Kingdoms, and how he was made worthy to merit the help of the Lord and to be delivered from enemies of this kind: then you too will be able to sing that fifth song. The sixth is the song in the first book of Chronicles, where David appointed

Asaph and his brothers at the beginning to praise the Lord, and the beginning of this song is such: ”Praise the Lord and give thanks and call upon him in his name, make known his wishes among the peoples, sing to him, and speak a hymn, recount all his devisings which the Lord has made,” etc. It must be known, however, that the song which is in the second book of Kingdoms is very like the sixteenth psalm. But that which is in the first book of Chronicles, in its beginnings indeed, up to that place where it says: ”And among the prophets do not deal maliciously,” is like the one hundred and fourth psalm. But the latter portions, from this place on, bear a likeness to the first parts of the ninety-fifth psalm, where it is said: ”Sing to the Lord, all the earth,” up to that place where it says: ”For he comes to judge the earth. Therefore, if the number of songs is to be concluded within these, this book of the Song of Songs will seem to be placed in the seventh position.

But if anyone should think that the song of Isaiah also is to be numbered with the rest — although it does not seem very fitting that the song of Isaiah should be thought to have preceded, since Isaiah wrote in far later times — nevertheless, if anyone should think that prophetic sayings are to be weighed not by their times but by their meaning, he will add that song also; and he will say that this which Solomon sang is the Song of Songs not only of those which were to be sung before, but also of those which seemed to be sung afterward. But if anyone should think that some should be taken also from the book of Psalms — wherever in it either ”a song” is written or ”a song of a psalm” — he will gather together a multitude of preceding songs. For he will join to the rest also the fifteen songs of the steps together: and inquiring into the virtues of the individual songs, and from these gathering the steps of the advancing soul and again composing the order and sequence of the spiritual progress, he will be able to show with how magnificent strides the bride, advancing through all these things, comes at last to the chamber of the bridegroom, going forth into the place of the wondrous tabernacle, even to the house of God, with the voice of exultation and confession, the sound of one feasting;

and coming, as we have said, even to the very chamber of the bridegroom, that she may hear and speak all these things which are contained in the Song of Songs.

But before we come to the body of the little book itself, we can also inquire into these matters: why is it that Solomon, who in these three little books seems to comply with the will of the Holy Spirit, is in Proverbs indeed called ”Solomon the son of David, who reigned in Israel”; whereas in the second book he is not written down as Solomon, but it says, ”the words of the Preacher (Ecclesiastes), the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem”; and he writes himself to be the son of David, just as in the first, and king of Israel, but there he sets down ”proverbs,” here ”words”; and himself, whom there he named Solomon, here he calls Ecclesiastes. And whereas there he had set down only the nation over which he had reigned, here he set down both the nation and designates the place of his reign, Jerusalem. But in the Song of Songs he writes neither the name of the nation, nor the place in which he reigns, nor at all that he is king, nor that he has David for his father, but only says, ”The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s own. And although it seems difficult to me either to examine, or

to be able to attain, the differences among these, or in any way to bring forth openly what has been investigated and to entrust it to these pages:

nevertheless, insofar as either our own understanding or the hearing of those who read can grasp it, we shall attempt to open up a few things. That in very many places Solomon bears the type of Christ, whether according to the fact that he is called ”peaceable,” or according to the fact that ”the queen of the south came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon,” I think there is no room for doubt. He therefore, both according to the fact that he is called the son of David, reigns in Israel, and according to the fact that he reigns over those kings, on account of which he himself is called King of kings, reigns. And again he is himself the true Ecclesiastes, who, when he was in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, that he might gather together the Church; for from gathering together the Church he is called Ecclesiastes. And then, who is so Solomon, that is, peaceable, as our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and peace? Therefore in the first book, that of Proverbs, when he instructs us in moral disciplines, he is said to be king in Israel, but not yet in Jerusalem: because although we are called Israel on account of faith, nevertheless it has not yet been attained that we should seem to have arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem.

But when we shall have made progress, and it shall have come to this, that we are joined to the Church of the firstborn which is in heaven, and, with the ancient and natural causes more diligently examined, come to know that the heavenly Jerusalem is our mother: then already Christ himself becomes for us also Ecclesiastes, and is said to reign not only in Israel, but also in Jerusalem. But when it shall have come to the perfection of all things, and there shall be joined to him as a perfect bride the whole rational creation without exception—because he made peace through his blood not only for the things that are on earth, but also for those that are in heaven—then he shall be called Solomon only, when he shall have handed over the kingdom to God the Father, when he shall have made void all rule and authority. For he must reign until he puts his enemies under his feet, and the last enemy, death, shall be destroyed. And thus, when all things have been made peaceable and made subject to the Father, when God shall now be all in all, he shall be named Solomon only, that is, the peaceable one alone.

Fittingly, therefore, in this little book, which was to be written concerning the love of the bride and the bridegroom, for this reason also he is written down neither as son of David, nor as king, nor as anything else of these that could pertain to a bodily understanding, so that with good reason the bride, now already perfect, may say of him, ”even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we no longer know him thus”—lest anyone suppose that she loves something bodily, or set in the flesh, and lest some blemish be believed to be brought into her love. On this account the Song of Songs is Solomon’s only, neither the son of David’s, nor the king of Israel’s, nor is there mingled in these at all any understanding of a carnal name. And do not wonder that, although our Lord and Savior is one and the same, we speak of him as, so to say, lesser in the first place in Proverbs, and then making

progress in Ecclesiastes, and after these having perfection in the Song of Songs, since you may see these things written also in the Gospels, where for our sake he too is said to make progress in us. For thus it is reported, that "Jesus made progress in age and wisdom with God and men. I think, therefore, that for all these reasons he is written down neither as son of David, nor as king of Israel:

but also for this reason still, that in the Song of Songs the bride had already made progress so far that it was something greater than the kingdom of Jerusalem is. For the Apostle says that there is a heavenly Jerusalem, and he records that believers draw near to it. This Bridegroom, then, to whom the bride now hastens, the same Paul, when he calls him the great high priest, writes of him as one who is not in the heavens, but has passed through all the heavens, and thither too this his perfect bride follows him—nay rather, cleaving to him and joined with him, thither she has ascended, for she has been made one spirit with him. Whence it seems to me that he said also to Peter, who could not follow him at first, when he said, "Where I go, you cannot come now," that he said: "But you shall follow afterward. And that there is something greater even than Israel, we gather from this: that in the book of Numbers all Israel indeed is numbered, and the twelve tribes of Israel are reckoned under a fixed number; but the tribe of Levi, as being more eminent than the rest, is held to be above this number, and is by no means counted in the number of Israel. For it says thus: "This is the visitation in which the children of Israel were reckoned according to the houses of their families. All their visitation, with its host, was six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty.

But the Levites were not numbered among them, as the Lord commanded Moses. You see how the Levites are set apart from the children of Israel as more eminent, and are not associated in their number. And again, the priests are written down as more eminent than the Levites. For thus it is contained in the same Scripture: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Take the sum of the Levites, and set them in the sight of Aaron the priest, and let them minister to him. You see in this too how it names the priests as superior to the Levites, and again sets the Levites as more eminent than the children of Israel? These things we have seen fit to discuss a little more carefully, wishing through them also to show the reason why, in the very titles of his books, Solomon has employed necessary distinctions, and from the very inscription of the title has designated one thing in Proverbs, another in Ecclesiastes, and yet another in the Song of Songs. And still, as to why in the Song of Songs, where perfection is now shown, he is written down neither as son of David nor as king, this too can be said: because when he was made a servant like his lord, and a disciple like his master, he now seems neither to be a servant a servant—having been made, that is, like his lord—nor a disciple a disciple, inasmuch as he has been made like his master;

but to have been indeed at one time a disciple, yet now to be like the master; and to have been indeed at one time a servant, yet now to be like the Lord. By a similar reasoning, therefore, it will seem that this can be observed also concerning the king and concerning those over whom he reigns, when the kingdom shall now be handed over to God the Father. But let

this too not be hidden, that some write the title of this little book as "Songs of Songs," which is not rightly written. For it is called here not in the plural, but in the singular, "the Song of Songs. These things have been said by us as if in a preface concerning the superscription itself, or the title of the little book. Now then, with our Lord aiding us, let us set about the beginnings of the work itself, lest even that remain omitted by us which some have thought still to require concerning the very title and superscription of the book, which reads: "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's own. For they take it as though this were "the Song of Songs of Solomon," so that out of his many songs he has marked this to be one.

But how shall we accept an understanding of this kind, when neither has the Church of God taken up any songs of Solomon from outside to be read, nor is there held among the Hebrews—from whom the oracles of God seem to have been handed down to us—anything more in the canon beyond these three little books of Solomon which are also among us? Those who assert this, however, wish to confirm their opinion from this, that in the third book of Kingdoms it is written that there were almost many songs of Solomon, so that they may confirm this to be one out of many. This, then, is reported there: "And God gave prudence to Solomon, and wisdom exceeding much, and breadth of heart like the sand which is on the seashore, and Solomon became exceeding wise beyond the wisdom of all the ancients, and beyond all the wise men of Egypt, and beyond Ethan the Ezrahite and Heman, and Chalcal and Dorda the sons of Maol, and he was renowned among all the nations round about: and Solomon spoke three thousand parables, and his songs were five thousand. Out of these five thousand songs, then, they wish it to seem that this one song which we have is one: but until when, or where, they were sung, has come not only not to the use, but not even to the knowledge, of the Churches of God.

But it is laborious, and far from the work we have set before us, if we should now wish to inquire how many books there are of which mention is made in the divine Scriptures, of which no reading at all has been handed down to us. But neither do we find that among the Jews there was any use of readings of this kind—which, whether because they contained certain things above human understanding, it pleased the Holy Spirit to take out of the midst, or because they were of those scriptures which are called apocryphal, on account of the fact that many things are found in them corrupted and against the true faith, handed down by the elders, it did not please them to give a place, nor to admit them to authority. It is above us to pronounce concerning such things. This, however, is plain, that many examples have been brought forth either by the apostles or by the evangelists, and inserted into the New Testament, which we have never read in these Scriptures that we hold as canonical, but which are nevertheless found in the apocrypha, and are evidently shown to have been taken from them. But not even so is a place to be given to the apocrypha; for the bounds which our fathers set are not to be crossed. For it may have come about that the apostles or evangelists, being filled with the Holy Spirit, knew what was to be taken from those Scriptures and what was to be rejected;

but for us it is not without danger to presume anything of the kind, for us who have not so great an abundance of the Spirit. And therefore, concerning the present little verse, we hold that edition which we have expounded above, especially since there is contained in it an evident distinction, where it says: "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's own. For if he had wished it to be understood that this was "of the songs of Solomon," he would surely have said, "The Song of Songs which are Solomon's," or "The Song from the songs of Solomon": but now, because he said "which is Solomon's," it is shown that this Song which is in our hands, and which was to be sung by him, is Solomon's. And let this suffice concerning the title which he set forth. Let us therefore now see also what follows.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.