# Book 8

Sidonius Apollinaris (c. AD 430–490)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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# I.

To his friend Petronius c. A. D. 480 [1] A MAN who makes it a principle, whenever he can, to encourage his friends along the path of glory deserves the gratitude of all good men everywhere: the practice is your honourable distinction; be true to it always. To no other cause can I ascribe this new request that I should turn out my cases at Clermont in the search for further letters. I should have thought the examples already published would have satisfied you; but I must needs obey, though I shall merely append a few at the end to supplement the original series, and crown the completed volume, as it were, by a marginal addition. [2] I shall now have fresh reason to be on my guard against malignant critics, for adding in this way to a book which has already seen the light. How, indeed, could I hope to escape the edged tongues of the spiteful-born, when even a Demosthenes and a Cicero for all their masterly periods and their perfected eloquence were not permitted to go free? The first found his detractor in Demades, the second in Antonius, carpers both, whose malice was as clear as their diction was obscure, and who have come down to posterity simply through their hate of excellence. [3] But since the command has gone forth, I set my sail to the old winds; I have navigated oceans, and shall I not cross this quiet water? I have always been convinced that a man should give of his best in anything he writes, and then tranquilly face all criticism. There is no middle course; one must either care no jot for what the malignant say, or else hold one's peace altogether. Farewell.

# II.

To his friend Johannes A. D. 478 [1] I SHOULD hold myself guilty of something like a crime against polite learning, most accomplished of friends, were I for a moment to defer congratulation on your own success in deferring the decease of Literature. One might almost speak of her as dead and buried; it is your glory to have revived, supported and championed her, and in this tempest of war which has wrecked the Roman power, you are the sole master in Gaul who has brought the Latin tongue safely into port. [2] Our contemporaries and our successors should all with one accord and fervent gratitude dedicate statues or portraits to you, as to a new Demosthenes or Tully; by your example they were formed and educated, and they shall preserve in the very midst of an invincible but alien race this evidence of their ancient birthright. Since old grades of rank are now abolished which once distinguished the high from the low, in future culture must afford the sole criterion of nobility. None is more deeply indebted to your learning than I; for like all authors professed, who write for posterity, I shall owe to your school and your teaching the certainty of an understanding audience. Farewell.

# III.

To his friend Leo A. D. 478

[1] I SEND you, at your request, the Life of Apollonius the Pythagorean,1 not in the transcription by Nicomachus the Elder, from Philostratus, but in that from Nicomachus himself by Tascius Victorianus.2 I was so eager to fulfil your wish, that the result is a makeshift of a copy, obscure and over-hurried, and rough as any version could be.3 Yet the work took me longer than I expected, and for this you must not blame me, for all the time I was a captive within the walls of Livia,4 release from which I owe, next to Christ, to you. My mind was sick with care and really unable to fulfil my task even in the most desultory manner; all kinds of hindrances prevented me----various obligations by day, my utter misery at night. [2] When the evening hour brought me at last to my quarters, ready to drop with fatigue, my heavy eyelids knew small repose; there were two old Gothic women established quite close to the window of my chamber, who at once began their chatter----quarrelsome, drunken, and disgusting creatures, whose like will not easily be seen again. As soon as my restoration to my own home gave me a little leisure, I dispatched the book with all its faults upon it, uncorrected, ill-digested, as you might say, an immature wine; in doing so, I thought more of your anxiety to have it, than of my own responsibilities. [3] Now that your wish is gratified, forsake awhile Apollo's bays and the fount of Hippocrene;

forget the measures of which you alone are absolute master, and which, in those who have only your learning without your eloquence, seem not so much to rise from a well-spring as to drip painfully from fevered brows. Stay the renowned stream of an eloquence peculiar to your race and line, which, flowing from your ancestor the great Fronto through successive generations, has now passed in due course into your breast. Lay aside awhile the universally applauded speeches composed for the royal lips, those famed deliverances with which the glorious monarch from his exalted place strikes terror into the hearts of tribes beyond the seas, or binds a treaty on the necks of barbarians trembling by the Waal,1 or throughout his newly extended realm curbs force itself by law as once he curbed his foes by force. [4] Shake off the burden of your endless cares and steal a little leisure from the affairs and agitations of the court. Not till you surrender yourself wholly to this book, and in imagination voyage with our Tyaneus to Caucasus and Ind, among the Gymnosophists of Ethiopia and the Brahmins of Hindostan, not till then shall you know the story you desired in its right hour

and as it should be known. [5] Read, then, the life of a man who, but for his paganism, in many points resembled you, as one who did not pursue riches, but was pursued by the rich; who loved knowledge and did not covet money;

who was abstemious among the feasters and went in coarse linen among princes robed in purple; who was grave amid luxurious follies; whose hair was matted, whose face was rough and hirsute among smooth, anointed peoples; who was conspicuous in the dignity of his squalor among satraps of crowned monarchs exquisite in person and drenched with nard and myrrh; who abstained from animal flesh and would not clothe himself in wool,----for such abstinence, indeed, held more in honour than contempt in the Eastern kingdoms which he traversed. When royal treasures were placed at his disposal, he asked only the gifts he liked to offer others and would not keep himself. [6] Why pursue the subject further? Unless I am much at fault, it may be doubted whether our ancestors' days produced a biographer fit to write so great a life; but of this there is no doubt at all, that in your person our own times have produced a student worthy to peruse it. Farewell.

# IV.

To his friend Consentius c. A. D. 478

[1] WILL Providence ever allow us to meet once more, honoured lord, on your estate of Octaviana----I call it yours, but it seems really to belong to your friends just as much as to you. Situated as it is near town and sea and river, it offers continual hospitality to all comers, and to yourself a regular succession of guests. How charming, too, is its first aspect, with its walls so cleverly designed in perfect architectural symmetry! how brilliant is the gleam of chapel colonnade and baths conspicuous near and far! Then there is the amenity of its fields and waters, its vines and olives, its approach, its beauty of hill and plain. Well stocked and furnished with abundance, it has also a large and copious library; when the master is there, dividing his interests between pen and plough, one might be in doubt whether his mind or his estate enjoys the finer culture. [2] No wonder this was the chosen place (unless my memory deceives me) where you have produced the swift iambics, the pointed elegiacs, the rounded hendecasyllables, and all the other verses fragrant with thyme and flowers of poesy to be sung by every one at Béziers and Narbonne! These poems, no less remarkable for speed of composition than for charm of style, make you beloved of your contemporaries and must increase your fame among those who shall come after us.

I have always been convinced of it myself every time a new poem of yours has been brought me, as it were hot from the composer's anvil, and though I may be an indifferent writer, I am no such despicable critic. [3] My earlier life might not improperly find time for such pursuits, and in fact it did so. But now I only read and write of serious things, for now it is high time to think rather of eternal life than of posthumous renown, and to remember that after death our good works, and not our literary work, will be weighed in the balance. [4] I am far from implying by this that you do not excel in both, or that the lively style which you still affect is inconsistent with gravity of judgement; but since by Christ's grace you are already a saint in secret, I would have you openly submit to His salutary yoke a head and heart alike devoted to His service, your tongue unwearying in prayer and praise, your mind filled with pious thoughts, your hand ever open in benefaction. Especially would I insist upon the open hand, for all that you cast abroad among the churches is really gathered in for yourself. Let this reflection above all incite you to the exercise of generosity, that whatever be our

opportunities in respect of the things which the foolish call this world's goods, all that we give in charity remains our own, all that we keep is really lost to us. Farewell.

# V.

To his friend Fortunalis c. A. D. 480 [1] You too shall figure in my pages, dear Fortunalis, column of friendship, bright ornament of your Spanish country. Your own acquaintance with letters is not, after all, so slight as to deprive you of any immortality which they can confer. The glory of your name shall live; yes, it shall survive into after ages. [2] If my writings win any favour or respect, if they command any confidence among men, I will have posterity know that none were more stout of heart than you; that none were goodlier to see or more equitable in judgement, none more patient, none weightier in council, gayer in company, or more charming in conversation. Last, and not least, it shall learn that these praises have been enhanced by your misfortunes. For it is more likely to hold you great, as one proved in the hard day of adversity, than as one who lay hidden in the bosom of kind fortune. Farewell.

# VI.

To his friend Namatius* c. A. D. 480

[1] CAIUS JULIUS CAESAR, reputed the greatest master of strategy who ever lived, was a great reader and a great writer also. Though he was the first man of his age, and the arts of war and rhetoric disputed his genius with equally glorious results, yet he never considered himself to have attained the summit in either branch of knowledge until your orator of Arpinum proclaimed him without a rival among men. [2] To compare small things with great1, it has been the same in my own case, however vast my inferiority. No one should know this better than yourself, concerned as you have always been for my success and for my modesty in bearing it. I learn that Flavius Nicetius, distinguished above all his countrymen by his birth, his rank, his merit, his prudence, his wise knowledge of the world, has accorded my small work unlimited praise. He has gone further and declared that while yet in the prime of life I have surpassed in the two fields of literature and war the great number of our young men and not a few of the older among us. [3] If I may say it without vanity, I derive real satisfaction from the approval of so eminent a judge. If he is right, his weight counts for much; if partial, I have a fresh proof of his friendship; though nowadays every man of us is but a sluggard in deed, and in word an infant in comparison with his forefathers.

To the men of earlier ages the ruler of all ages granted supreme excellence in these arts; but now the world waxes old, the quickening seed is exhausted, the marrow lost; and if in our time aught of admirable or memorable appears, it is manifest in exceeding few. [4] Nicetius may lead all learning and all letters, but I fear that our intimacy may have led him to exaggerate my merit through the bias natural to friendship. And were it so, I will not deny that in the past I used often to attend the delivery of his luminous speeches, and however fleeting or imperfect my memories, I may properly recall some of them in the present place, even at the risk of being thought to join a game of mutual admiration.

[5] I heard him speak when I was growing to manhood and had just left boyhood behind me; at that time my father was praetorian prefect presiding over the tribunals of Gaul, and in his term of office Astyrius assumed the trabea and in a propitious hour inaugurated his consulship.1 On that day I hardly stirred from the curule chair; my age gave me no right to a seat, but my rank allowed me to keep in the foreground; so I stood next to the censor's men

who in their official mantles stood nearest to the consul. As soon as the largess had been distributed (and that took little time though it was no little one), as soon as the diptychs had been bestowed, the representative advocates of the province who had come in from every district asked with one consent that the assumption of the consul's office might be celebrated in a panegyric. The ceremonies had anticipated the day, and there was yet some time before the late dawn, which otherwise would have been passed in silence. [6] All eyes turned at once towards Nicetius, the first men present were the first to look his way; the assembly called upon him not by a voice here or there, but by general acclamation; he reddened, and cast down his eyes, giving us such an earnest of his modest nature as gained him hardly fewer bravos than the eloquence he subsequently displayed. He spoke with method, with gravity, with fire;

if his ardour was great, his fluency was yet greater, and his science greatest of all; his coloured and golden language seemed to enhance the splendour of the consul's palm-embroidered robe, steeped though it was in Sarranian dyes and rich with applied strips that rustled at every movement of the wearer. [7] About that time (to speak like a decemvir) was promulgated the statute of limitations1 which decreed in summary terms that all cases protracted to thirty years should automatically lapse. It was our orator who first introduced this law, as yet unknown in Gaul; he advocated it at the tribunal; he expounded it to the various parties; and he finally saw it added to the statute-book, before a great audience whose members mostly kept their feet in their excitement and only interrupted by applause. [8] I had many other occasions of observing his intellectual capacity, myself unobserved, and therefore in the best of all positions to see the real man; for though my father governed the province, it was to Nicetius that he went for advice. It must suffice to say that I never heard of a single action of which I did not like to hear, and which I did not admire.

[9] The union in his person of all these fine qualities naturally makes me proud to receive the suffrage of a critic so high in the public esteem. Whatever his opinion, it must have great influence; if rumour is true, he is on my side, and I shall have just as good reason to be reassured as I should have had to feel uneasy had his vote gone the other way. In any case, I am determined, as soon as I know for certain what he thinks, either to give silence a loose rein, or curb my facility according to the verdict. For if he supports me I shall be inclined to go on talking like an Athenian; if he condemns, no citizen of Amyclae shall hold his tongue like me.1

[10] But no more of myself or of my friend: how does the world go with you? I am every whit as eager to hear your news as to give you mine. Are you hunting, or building, or playing the country gentleman? Are you indulging one only of these pursuits or each in turn, or all together? As for Vitruvius and Columella,2 you do well to study either one or both, for you are competent to deal with either admirably, as one who is equally at home in agriculture and in building. [11] With sport the case is different, and I beg you not to plume yourself upon your prowess. It is useless to invite the boar to meet your spears, so long as you take

the field alone with those exceedingly merciful hounds of yours; you just rouse the quarry, but not enough to make him run. It is excusable enough that your dogs should dread close quarters with such formidable beasts as boars; but what apology can you make when they hunt poor helpless kids and timid does, head high and spirits prone, stinting the pace but prodigal of music? [12] You will find it more profitable to net in the rough rocks and likely coverts, and cry the dogs on from a chosen post; if you have any self-respect left, you will give up galloping over the open country and lying in wait for the leverets of Oléron. Indeed it is hardly worth while to worry them on rare occasions by unleashing the hounds in the open, unless our good Apollinaris comes to help you and your father, and gives you a better run.

[13] But, joking apart, do let me know how things go with you and your household. Just as I was on the point of ending a letter which had rambled on long enough, lo and behold! a courier from Saintonges. I whiled away some time talking with him about you; and he was very positive that you had weighed anchor, and in fulfilment of those half military, half naval duties of yours were coasting the western shores on the look-out for curved ships; the ships of the Saxons,1 in whose every oarsman you think to detect an arch-pirate. Captains and crews alike, to a man they teach or learn the art of brigandage; therefore let me urgently caution you to be ever on the alert. [14] For the Saxon is the most ferocious of all foes. He comes on you without warning; when you expect his attack he makes away. Resistance only moves him to contempt; a rash opponent is soon down. If he pursues he overtakes; if he flies himself, he is never caught. Shipwrecks to him are no terror, but only so much training. His is no mere acquaintance with the perils of the sea; he knows them as he knows himself. A storm puts his enemies off their guard, preventing his preparations from being seen; the chance of taking the foe by surprise makes him gladly face every hazard of rough waters and broken rocks.

[15] Moreover, when the Saxons are setting sail from the continent, and are about to drag their firm-holding anchors from an enemy's shore, it is their usage, thus homeward bound, to abandon every tenth captive to the slow agony of a watery end, casting lots with perfect equity among the doomed crowd in execution of this iniquitous sentence of death. This custom is all the more deplorable in that it is prompted by honest superstition. These men are bound by vows which have to be paid in victims, they conceive it a religious act to perpetrate this horrible slaughter, and to take anguish from the prisoner in place of ransom; this polluting sacrilege is in their eyes an absolving sacrifice. [16] I am full of anxiety and apprehension about these dangers, though on the other hand there are factors which encourage me mightily. Firstly, the standards under which you sail are those of an ever-victorious nation. Secondly, men of prudence, among whose number you may fairly be included, are not in the habit of leaving anything to chance. Thirdly, very intimate friends who live far from each other are apt to feel alarm without due cause, because it is natural to be apprehensive of events at once incalculable and occurring very far away. [17] You will perhaps argue that the cause of my uneasiness need not be taken so seriously. That may be true; but it is also true that we are most timid in regard to those whom we love best. So take the

first opportunity of relieving the fears which your situation has aroused by a good account of your fortunes. I am incorrigible on this head, and shall always fear the worst for friends abroad until they contradict it themselves, especially those harassed by the watchword or the signal for attack.

[18] In accordance with your request, I send you the Libri Logistorici of Varro and the Chronology of Eusebius.1 If these models reach you safely, and you find a little leisure from the watches and the duties of the camp, you will be able, your arms once furbished, to apply another kind of polish to an eloquence which must be getting rusty. Farewell. * The latter part translated by Hodgkin (ii. 366-8), who also refers to the episode of Nicetius' oration (ibid. 306-7).

# VII.

To his friend Audax A. D. 474

[1] I WISH you would tell me into what corner of the world the folk are crept who used to be so proud of wealth amassed, and heaps of tarnished family plate.1 Where, too, are the men who on mere grounds of seniority thought to overbear those whose one sin it was to be younger? Where are the people gone whose real affinities come out in nothing so clearly as in their capacity for hatred? [2] As soon as ever merit found recognition, as soon as ever weight of character, and not weight of coin, began to tell in the scales of imperial opinion, these worthies were left in the cold with their insolent claim to precedence by simple right of property. Brooding over their money-bags, and, I may add, their vices, they want to brand those who rise in the world as vain upstarts, while they would be shocked at the suggestion that they owe their own riches to greed. Athletes in this arena of defamation, they rub in the poisonous juice of spite in place of oil, and so reduce their weight. [3] But all hail to you, whose way is the opposite of theirs. You have now the honour of prefectorian rank, and though the prestige of high descent was always yours, you have if anything laboured rather the more on that account to shed a new lustre upon your posterity.

To an enlightened mind, none seems nobler than he who steadily devotes all his power, his intellect, and his resources to the single end of excelling his forefathers. [4] Well, it shall be my prayer that your sons may equal you, or even (a better prayer still) leave you behind; and that if there is any envious soul who cannot bear to see you advanced above him, he may just endure the seething torment of his own spite, and never having had the chance of patronizing you, have now the fullest reason for his jealousy. It is only justice that under a just prince he should come at the bottom who is personally nothing and only important in personalty; a starveling spirit, and counting only for his money. Farewell.

# VIII.

To his friend Syagrius A. D. 474 (?) [1] TELL me, fine flower of our Gallic youth, how much longer your ardour for country labours will bid you scorn the town? How long shall rustic implements unrightfully usurp the hands only worn before by throwing dice? How much longer is your estate of Taionnacus to weary your patrician limbs with a peasant's toil? How much longer, O cavalier turned ploughman, will you go on burying in the winter fallows the spoil of the waving meadows? how much longer ply your blunt and heavy hoe along the interminable vine-rows? [2] Why, professed rival of Serranus and Camillus,1 do you guide the plough, yet renounce the embroidered toga? Give up this rustic folly; cease to disgrace your birth. Who cultivates in moderation is lord of his land, who does too much is slave of it. Return to your fatherland, return to your father, return to all the loyal friends who can justly claim a place in your affections. Or, if the life of Cincinnatus the Dictator attracts you so, first wed a Racilia 1 to yoke your oxen for you. [3] I don't suggest that a man of sense should neglect his domestic affairs; but he should use moderation and think not merely of what he ought to have but what he ought to be. If you renounce all higher interests, if your one motive in life is the increase of your property, then, what can it avail you to descend from a line of consuls and see every day their ivory curule chairs with applied ornament of gold and their calendars enriched with purple? Your plodding and obscure career will bring you rather burdens from the revenue officials than honour from the censor. Farewell.

# IX.

To his friend Lampridius * A. D. 478 [1] ON my arrival at Bordeaux, your messenger brought me a letter from you full of nectar, rich with blooms and pearls. You arraign my silence, and ask me for some of my poems, in a few of those verses of yours which your cadenced voice so often sends echoing from your melodious palate, like music poured from a flute of many stops. In this you take mean advantage of your royal munificence; you have sent your gift; you feel impregnable. Perhaps you have forgotten one satirist's remark about another: 'When Horace says "Evohe", he has plenteously dined.'1

[2] Enough! You are right to send a command from your place of ease, bidding me sing because you are in the mood to dance. In any case I must obey; and far from acknowledging compulsion, I yield of my own free will; but spare me, if you can, the criticism of your proud Catonian brow. You know well enough what manner of thing a poet's gladness is; his spirit is entangled in grief as the fish in nets; if sorrow or affliction comes, his sensitive soul does not so lightly work free from the bonds of anguish: I am still unsuccessful in obtaining a decision about my mother-in-law's estate, even provisionally, though I have offered a third part of it as ransom.2 [3] You must see whether the theme of my verses is such as to please you; but my cares forbid me to live in one mood and write in another. It would be unfair to me were you to institute a comparison between our two poems. I am harassed; you are happy. I am in exile; 3 you enjoy your rights of citizenship. I cannot attain your level; I want of you verse like my own, but receive something infinitely better. [4] But if by any chance these trifles composed in the midst of much mental tribulation obtain indulgence at your hands, I will let you persuade me that they are like the swan's notes, whose song is more harmonious just before his death;

or that they are like lyre-strings tensely drawn, which make the sweeter music the tighter they are strained. But if verses without suggestion of gaiety or ease can never really please, you will find nothing satisfactory in the enclosed. [5] Do not forget, moreover, a second point which tells against me, namely that a piece which you only read and cannot hear recited is robbed of all the advantage which delivery by the author lends it. His manuscript once dispatched, the most musical of poets has no further resource; distance does not allow him to do for himself what mimics do by their accompaniment----make bad verse acceptable by dint of fine delivery.

* 'Lampridius, glory of our Thalia, why urge me now to sing of Cirrha,1 or the Boeotian Muses, or Helicon's poetic stream called by neighing Pegasus to life at a stroke of his hoof? Why would you make me write as if I had received the Delphic insignia from your Delian god, and, myself a new Apollo, possessed the hangings, and the tripods, the lyre, the quivers, the bows, and gryphons, or tossed from my brow the laurel and the ivy? You, O happy Tityrus, have won your lands again; you may wander through the groves of plane and myrtle, and strike a lyre with which your voice makes perfect harmony. Wondrous is the music of string and tone and measure.

Twice has the moon risen upon me prisoned here; 2 and but once have I been received into the presence. For scant leisure has the King even for himself, since all the subjugated earth awaits his nod. We see in his courts the blue-eyed Saxon, lord of the seas, but a timid landsman here. The razor's keen blade, content no more to hold its usual course round the head's extremity, with clean strokes shearing to the skin, drives the margin of the hair back from his brow, till the head looks smaller and the visage longer. We see thee, aged Sygambrian warrior, the back of thy head shaven in sign of thy defeat; but now thou guidest the new-grown locks to the old neck again. Here strolls the Herulian with his glaucous cheeks, inhabitant of Ocean's furthest shore, and of one complexion with its weedy deeps. Here the Burgundian bends his seven feet of stature on suppliant knee, imploring peace. Here the Ostrogoth finds a powerful patron, and crushing the Hun beyond his border, triumphs at home only through his homage to this mighty patron. And here, O Roman, thou also seekest thy protection; if the Great Bear menaces commotion, and the Scythian hordes advance, the strong arm of Euric is invoked, that Garonne, drawing power from the Mars who loves his banks, may bring defence to the dwindled stream of Tiber. Here the Parthian Arsacid 1 himself asks grace to hold, a tributary, his high hall of Susa. He perceives in the regions of the Bosphorus dread war arise with all its enginery, nor hopes that Persia, dismayed at the mere sound of conflict, shall avail to guard alone Euphrates' bank. He who boasts himself kin with stars and near allied to Phoebus, even he becomes a simple mortal, and descends to lowly supplication.

At such a court my days go by in vain. But do you, O Tityrus, refrain, nor invite me more to song. I envy thee no longer; I can but marvel at thy fortune. For myself, I effect nothing; I utter fruitless prayers, and so become another Meliboeus.'1 [6] There is the poem. Read it at your leisure, and like a charioteer already crowned, look down from the balcony to the arena where I struggle still in the sweat and dust of contest. Do not expect me to do the like again, whatever pleasure you derive from this present effort, until the happy day arrives when I can turn my mind once more from dark vaticinations to the service of the Muse. Farewell. * The poem partly translated by A. Thierry, Lettres sur l'histoire de France, p. 103. * Translated into verse by Fertig, Part ii, p. 23; and into prose by Chaix, ii. 229.

# X.

To his friend Ruricius A.D. 479

[1] I AM indeed delighted that you derive from letters at once a benefit and a pleasure. But I should be freer to extol the fire and fluency of your style, were it not that while assiduously praising me yourself you forbid me to return the compliment with interest. Your letter had all the sweetness of affection, all the grace of natural eloquence, all the mastery of style; it failed only in one respect----the choice of subject, and even there you have the credit of good intention, an error of judgement forms its only fault. You cover me with immense laudation. But you should have spared my blushes, and recalled betimes the saying of Symmachus: 'True praise adorns, false praise lashes.'2 [2] But unless I misjudge your genius you have not only shown sincere affection, but also remarkable dexterity. The really eloquent love to show the stuff they are made of by choosing a subject full of difficulty; they drive the accomplished pen as if it were the plough of fertile speech through matter sterile as dry and barren soil. Life abounds with examples of skill similarly applied. The hopeless case proves the great doctor, the tempest proves the steersman; for both, the perils traversed enhance reputation; their talent wastes unseen until it finds a proper scope. [3] In the same manner the great orator proves his ample genius most effectively in strait places. Thus Marcus Tullius, who always surpassed his rivals, in his speech for Aulus Cluentius surpassed even himself.

Marcus Fronto stood head and shoulders above others in all his pleadings, but in that against Pelops he rose above his own high level. Gaius Plinius won greater fame for his defence of Attia Viriola from the centumvirs' tribune than for the panegyric which almost matched the matchless Trajan.1 [4] You have followed these great examples; confident in your powers, you have not feared to take so miserable a subject as myself. But let me rather have the succour of your prayers in my depression; do not lure me with a cozening eloquence, or crush my frail and ailing soul by the weight of an illusory renown. Your diction indeed is fine, but your life finer; and I think you will serve me better by your orisons than by your perorations. Farewell.

# XI.

To his friend Lupus* c. A. D. 480 [1] TELL me about your folk of Périgueux and Agen,1 whose competing claims upon you are ever a source of pious emulation? You are bound to the people of the one place by your own property, to those of the other by your wife's family connexions; your birth tells in favour of the first, your marriage speaks for the second; and the best of it is that each place has good ground for its contention. God has verily marked you for happiness, when the privilege of securing you and keeping you longest becomes an object of ambition to two rival communities. [2] You grant the favour of your presence to each in regular alternation, restoring to one its Drepanius, to the other its Anthedius; if rhetoric be the object of their desire, neither need regret a Paulinus and an Alcimus as long as you are with them.2 All this makes me marvel more that you should care to ask for any old poems of mine when any day you like you have the rummaging of so representative a library as your own. I cannot refuse you, though this is a time of mourning, and the revival of the old jests is somewhat out of place.

[3] It is but recently that the news reached me of Lampridius the rhetor's murder. He was my very dear friend; and even if no violent death had snatched him from our midst, his end would have smitten me with profound affliction. In the days that are gone, we had our jokes together, as intimates will; I was Phoebus, he the Odrysian bard.1 So much it was necessary to premise, or the use of these fanciful epithets would have obscured the sense of the following poem. You must know that once upon a time, when about to visit Bordeaux, I wrote him a letter of inquiry as to quarters, sent with the Muse in advance. Sad though the present occasion is, I feel less constraint in sending these verses, than if I had forwarded some mournful composition on our loss; anything of that sort I should have written ill, while the subject would have been no less painful to yourself.

'Orders of Phoebus to his own beloved Thalia. Dear pupil, lay aside the lyre awhile; bind up your flowing hair with a verdant wreath, and let a zone of ivy gird the up-bound folds of your full-bosomed robe. See you put no soccus on, plunge not the foot deep, as your custom is, in the loose cothurnus; but bind on such sandals as did Harpalyce,2 or she who felled her wooers with victorious sword. You shall go the swifter, you shall leap and fly along, if your toes are left uncovered to guide your sandalled feet with quick firm steps, and if the chain of laces, with their converging loops, is brought up through a great loop to the leg.3

So equipped for speed, see that you find my Orpheus, who daily by his sweet and tuneful art softens rocks and trees, aye, and the hardest hearts; my Orpheus, whose style the sonorous tongue of the Arpinate enriches, and the pen of Maro, or thine, Horace, which gladdens the heart of Latium. As lyric bard he excels the great Alcaeus; he is skilled to indite the high strain of tragedy, or the humours of the comic Muse; he can flame out in satire, and arraign the raging tyrant with resounding voice. To this Orpheus say: "Phoebus comes; he has left the road, his oars now smite the bosom of Garonne, white with sails. He bids you meet him, but first be swift to prepare him hospitable welcome.

And to Leontius whom Livia bare, she of the old Senatorial line, say this: "He is almost here. Then go to Rusticus, whose wit belies his name. But if they say they have no room, and that their houses are full, go next to the bishop's gate; kiss the holy Gallicinus' hand, and ask the freedom of his lowly dwelling lest, rejected on all sides, I am driven to turn sadly to some sodden tavern, where I should soon need to hold my nose and inveigh against the reeking kitchen with its ruddy sausages which hang in two rows, exhaling odours from thymy pots, while jars and hissing plates send up clouds of steam together. Even there, when the feast-day rouses the hoarse song, and the parasite in the ecstasy of his grumbling makes the air resound, yes, even there and even then, my voice incited by the muse of a thirsty host, I, worse barbarian than all, shall whisper verses more worthy of your praise.'

[4] Alas for the abject necessity of being born, alas for the miserable necessity of living, alas for the hard compulsion of death! to these things we are borne round on the voluble wheel of human life. I liked the dead man well; he had his failings, which were venial enough, blending with his virtues qualities of less worth. The slightest cause would excite him, but his wrath was also slight; I always tried to persuade his other friends that these were defects of temperament, and nowise due to malice; I suggested other points in his favour, as that his passion was a physical tyranny, dominating his nature; I tried to clear him of the blot of cruelty by lending it the colour of mere severity. Though before his mind was made up he was weak, he was most resolute when once convinced. Like all credulous men, he was reckless; like all those who mean no harm, he suspected none in others. He hated no one enough to abuse him, and liked no one enough to resist the pleasure of sometimes breaking out against him. Though a very conspicuous figure, he was not ready of access; he had to be borne with, but he was bearable.

[5] If one were to attempt an estimate of him as orator, one would say that he was at once terse and copious, concise and ample; if as poet, that he had feeling, that he was a master of measure, and a consummate literary craftsman. He had the gift of writing verse of extreme finish, and wonderfully varied alike in metre and in metaphor. His hendecasyllables were easy and fluent, his hexameters stately and sonorous; in elegiacs he could handle the 'echoing' or the 'recurrent' line, and could link end with beginning by ingenious repetitions.1 [6] He could adapt his style to person, place or occasion as the subject required, and that too, not with commonplaces, but by chosen terms replete with dignity and beauty. In controversy he was a power, and wielded a strong arm; in satire alert and mordant. If his subject

was tragic, he could command terror and pathos; if comic, he was polished and infinite in resource. In Fescennines his diction was of a vernal freshness and ardent in vows; his bucolics were terse, alert, and musical. In georgics he could strike the perfect rustic note, though he had no touch of rusticity about him. [7] In epigram he shunned diffuseness and aimed at point; he would always write at least two lines, but never exceeded four; there was often a sting in the words, more often still some graceful turn, and, without exception, wit. Horace was his model in lyrics; his iambics went with a swing, his choriambics with a fine gravity; his Alcaics had a supple grace, and his Sapphics were inspired. In short, his work was so fine, so accomplished, so happy in expression, that one might fairly think of him as a bird of glorious wing, following next after the Horatian and Pindaric swans.

[8] His interest in different amusements was very unequal. Hazard was a weariness, the ball game a delight. He liked to chaff his friends; and it was a nice feature in him that he liked being chaffed himself still better. He wrote a great deal, but was always longing to write more. He read the ancients with perseverance and reverent admiration, the moderns without jealousy; he would give ungrudging praise to talent, perhaps the most difficult form of generosity on earth. [9] Unfortunately he had the indefensible, I might say the fatal, fault of superstition. He was curious as to the manner of his death, and consulted those African astrologers whose nature is as fiery as their native clime. They considered the position of the stars when he was born, and told him his climacteric year, month, and day----I use the astrological terms----as men to whom the scheme of his nativity was revealed in all its sinister conditions. It seemed that in the year of his birth, all the planets which rose favourably in the zodiac sank with blood-red fires; whether it was that Mercury made them baleful, asyndetic upon the diameter, or Saturn retrograde upon the tetragon, or Mars returning to his old position upon the centre.1 [10] Beliefs like these, whatever their precise form, are false, and cannot but delude;

if we are to discuss them openly, and at length, we must wait until we meet, for you too are deep in the science of numbers, and with your wonted diligence study Vertacus, Thrasybulus, and Saturninus from end to end: yours is a mind always intent on things lofty and arcane. It must be admitted that in the present case there was neither appearance of mere conjecture nor deliberate ambiguity: death enmeshed our reckless inquirer into the future exactly when and how it had been foretold; all his shifts to evade it were in vain. [11] He was strangled by his own slaves in his own house; choked and throttled he died the death of Scipio of Numantia, if not quite that of Lentulus, Jugurtha, and Sejanus. The one relieving feature in the cruel business was the discovery of crime and criminal as soon as the day broke. The first sight of the body was enough to show a fool or a blind man that death had come by violence. [12] The livid hue, the protruding eyes, the distorted features with their look of mingled fury and anguish, all were so many proofs of what had happened. The floor was wet about his lips, because the scoundrels had turned him with his face to the ground when the deed was done, as if to suggest that life had left him with a sudden haemorrhage. The source, inciter, and ringleader of the conspiracy was first captured;

next his accomplices were seized and separately confined till the terror of torture drew the truth from their unwilling breasts. [13] Would we could say that our friend had not deserved his end by his rash and ill-advised resort to vain advisers. But I fear that he who presumes to probe forbidden secrets sets himself beyond the pale of the Catholic faith; he deserves the lot of all who put unlawful questions and receive replies that point to doom. His death was avenged, it is true, but only the survivors gain by that, for the execution of a murderer cannot mend the mischief; it only affords a certain satisfaction of revenge.

[14] My attachment to the dead man has led me to write at too great length; such a grief I could not vent in silence. I will end by begging you to give me any news you can, if only a line or two, to relieve the burden of my melancholy. For the relation of this sad story with all its horror has naturally troubled me, and filled my mind with mournful thoughts; indeed, for the time being I can neither think, speak, nor write on any other subject. Farewell. * An abridged translation is given by Hodgkin, ii. 331 ff.

# XII.

To his friend Trygetius A. D. 461-7 [1] HAS Bazas, built on dust in place of good green earth, such charms, have lands sandy as Syrtes, and moving soil and dunes bandied by retorting winds such hold upon you, that neither earnest prayers of invitation, nor force of friendships, nor even the most succulent oysters of our pools, suffice to bring you this trifling distance in to Bordeaux, where we have been expecting you all these days? Is it that the hardships of a winter journey deter you? those wild winds of Bigorre will often obliterate the soft tracks, and perhaps you dread a kind of shipwreck upon land? [2] If so, your memory is short; how long ago was it that Gibraltar was conquered by your bold foot? or that your camp was pitched on the uttermost shores of Cadiz? or the last goal of great wanderings reached, common to Hercules and to my Trygetius? Are you grown such a traitor to your proper nature as to abandon yourself wholly to sloth, you who once ranged the lands of mystery and fable, you whose limbs might fail, but never your indefatigable purpose? [3] Yet with such a record, you come down to Langon harbour 1 crawling with no less reluctance than one bound for the Danube to resist the all-invading Massagetae, or for the dull flood of Nile with all its awful crocodiles. If a bare twelve miles can so delay you, what would you have done had you been with Marcus Cato on his marches through the deserts of Leptis? 2

[4] You shiver, it seems, at the mere name of the winter months; but I can assure you we enjoy the gentlest, mildest, and clearest skies, where the lightest breezes serve as winds; so nominal a winter season should less deter than the temperate reality attract. But if my letter of invitation leaves you still obdurate, you shall not resist the verses which in two days' time shall go forth to the attack, more insidious in persuasion, yet I trust none the less strenuous agents of my wishes. [5] My friend Leontius, first of all our Aquitanians, with Paulinus, worthy son of worthy sire, are to meet you with the falling tide on the Garonne at the appointed place; so that not only the boats, but the very river itself shall come out with them to greet you. The oarsmen at the thwarts, the steersmen on the poops, shall tune their chants to sing your praises. They shall pile high for you a couch of cushions, there shall be a board set with men of two colours1; the dice shall await you, ready to be thrown and thrown again from the ivory steps of the boxes. A pine-wood grating shall be fixed across the bottom of the boat so that the bilge flowing to and fro shall never wet your dangling foot; a wicker screen above shall protect you from the treacherous winter sun. [6] What more

could the most pampered of the indolent expect than to find himself at his destination before he seemed well under weigh?

A truce to your objections and delays; I could swear that the snail with his house on his back would easily outstrip you. And to think that there is a store-room at your command crammed with piles of the most exquisite delicacies and only wanting an enterprise to do it justice! [7] Come, then, to be entertained or to entertain; or, best of all, to do both; come with all your armoury of Mediterranean fare to crush and subjugate the finely equipped gourmets of Médoc.2 On our battle-ground let us see the fish of Adour triumph over the mullets of Garonne, and our coarse crew of crabs fall back before the lobster-armies of Bayonne. Join battle after this wise with the rest of us; but if you value my opinion, take a veteran's advice as a wise man should, and leave my senatorial host out of the contest; if you once come beneath his hospitable roof, you will feast as if you enjoyed continual feasts or the banquets of a Cleopatra. His own and his country's honour will be involved in the competition; and it is generally agreed that he surpasses all his rivals just as far as his city leaves all other cities behind. Farewell.

# XIII.

To the Lord Bishop Nunechius A.D. 472-4 [1] No one, most blessed father, rejoices more than I over the number and variety of virtues with which you are so richly endowed by Heaven. You are described as a man of birth who is never arrogant, a man of influence who makes a blameless use of power, a man of piety untouched by superstition. You are praised as one who is learned without airs and serious without fatuity; one whose wit is never rehearsed, who is courteous, but knows his mind, and sociable without any love of popularity. [2] And not content with allowing you these qualities, Fame crowns them with another of yet higher degree, the supreme gift of charity----Fame who, however she may sing your praises, must leave the greater part unsung. For though she can explain to distant friends the aim of your good deeds, their number is beyond the powers of her relation. The tale of them fires me now to make you a first advance, as a conscious inferior should. I therefore proceed to pay my homage; hitherto I might so justly have been accused of backwardness, that I have no apprehension now of being considered forward.

[3] I commend to your kindness the bearer Promotus, whom you already know, and whom your prayers have now made my fellow penitent. Though by birth a Jew, he has preferred to be numbered with those chosen by faith rather than blood; he has sought the franchise of the heavenly city; by grace of the Spirit which makes alive he has rejected the letter that kills. Considering, on the one hand, the rewards laid up for the just, on the other the punishment, endless as eternity, awaiting him who dares not desert the Circumcision for the camp of Christ, he has made up his mind to be accounted no longer a citizen of the Solyma on earth, but a son of the Holy Jerusalem which is above. [4] Which thing perceiving, let now the spiritual Sara take to her maternal arms the truer son of Abram; for he ceased to belong to the handmaid Hagar when he exchanged the servitude of conformity according to law for the freedom which comes of grace. The special reason for his journey you will more conveniently learn from his own lips. To me he will always be very dear for the cause above related; I have dwelled upon it because the most effective introduction of all is that which simply sets forth a man's indisputable claim to be well received. Deign to hold us in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

# XIV.

To the Lord Bishop Principius A. D. 472-4

[1] THOUGH I have never seen your face, venerable father, for a long time I have seen the effect of your activities. The praise of such saintliness as yours is widely spread; it overleaps mere bounds of space; and just as the influence of a great character knows no bound, so no term is set to the range of a noble reputation. [2] You will put this all down as my exaggeration unless I adduce in support of my statement some competent witness. I therefore cite a revered member of the famous brotherhood at Lerins,1 a contemporary there with Maximus and Lupus, one who went such lengths in renunciation that he might claim to rival the archimandrites2 of Memphis or the Holy Land. I mean Bishop Antiolus, who was the first to tell me about your father and brothers, and the high example which both of you set in the exercise of your exalted functions in the Church; his account of you first kindled in me the desire to know a story, familiarity with which has ever since been my delight. [3] One might almost compare your father to Aaron the High Priest of old, whom his brother, the Lawgiver, first anointed with the oil of sanctification in the midst of the people in the wilderness, calling next his sons to the same sacred office. But Aaron's happiness in Ithamar and Eleazar was marred when Nadab and Abihu were destroyed by lightning;

they were cut off and punished in the flesh, but we may believe that in the spirit they had absolution. [4] I never heard that you offer strange fire when you come to lay your hands upon the altar; rather with the censer of the heart you burn a glowing incense, offering the sacrifices of chastity and love. As often as with the cords of exhortation you bind the yoke of the law upon the necks of the proud, so often in spirit do you sacrifice bulls to the Lord. As often as with the goad of your rebuke you drive sinners polluted by the rankness of sensual indulgence to the sweet savour of a modest life, so often do you offer rank goats in the sight of Christ. [5] As often as your rebuke leads the soul to sigh in penance and compunction over the committed fault, who shall doubt that you present in mystic sacrifice the pair of turtle-doves and the two young pigeons which by their number and their plaints symbolize the twofold nature of man? As often as your warning voice moves the glutton to parch by fire of frequent fastings his gross body and heaving swollen stomach, who shall doubt that you consecrate, as it were, the finest flour in the pan of continence?

[6] Every time that you persuade a sinner to renounce the vanities of misbelief, to profess right doctrine, to hold the faith, to keep the way, or to hope for eternal life, who doubts that in the making of a convert triply freed from heresy, hypocrisy, and schism, you dedicate the purest shewbread with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth? [7] Who, in fine, is not aware that the corporeal sacrifice slain as type under the Law is more than replaced by the spiritual sacrifice which you offer under grace? That is why I give abundant thanks to God for your letter, from which I perceive that although the aforesaid prelate told me great things of you, there were greater things which he left unsaid. I am persuaded that you who seem so admirable in other men's description, and more admirable yet in your own letter, will prove best of all seen face to face.

[8] The clerk, Megethius, who brought your message, has satisfactorily concluded his affairs, and carries back my respects. I fear I may be of little practical use to him, but if good wishes avail, he has mine. Through him I urgently entreat your brother and yourself frequently to quench my thirst with a stream of your most literary letters, and you must write the oftener of the two. If the difficulties of the road and the distance between us prove an obstacle to my desires, at least pray sometimes for those who ask your prayers. Honoured though I should be by your regular correspondence, your occasional prayers promise me something more than honours, they promise me salvation. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

# XV.

To the Lord Bishop Prosper A. D.478 (?) [1] You wished me to celebrate the glory of the holy Annianus, the greatest and most perfect of prelates, equal to Lupus, and no unworthy rival of Germanus; you would fain see graven on the hearts of all the faithful the memory of a character so fine, so eminent, so richly endowed with so many virtues and so many merits, to which I myself should like to add this, that he made way for such a successor as yourself. You exacted a promise from me at the same time that I would hand down for the benefit of those who come after us the history of the war with Attila, with the whole tale of the siege and assault of Orleans when the city was attacked and breached, but never laid in ruins, and the bishop's celebrated prophecy was divinely answered from above.1 [2] I actually set to work upon the book; but when I grasped the extent of my undertaking I repented of having ever begun; I therefore suffered no one else to hear a work which my own judgement already condemned. But to the first part of your request I can return a different answer: your wishes, and the merit of that great bishop make it my duty to enhance his fame without delay by every means within my power. I only ask you, as a fair creditor, to treat with laudable indulgence this promise of your reckless debtor, and in that other matter to refrain from asking what I must refrain from attempting to do. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

# XVI.

To his friend Constantius c. A. D. 478 [1] I PROMISED the illustrious Petronius to conclude this little book in a few letters; but in endeavouring to spare you, I have been very hard on him. He was to have the drudgery of revision, you the honour of the issue; the responsibility of conveying the volume to you was to be his, the pleasure of paying the homage mine. I have carried out my intention; if you will cast your practised eye over the numerous superscriptions I think you will be struck by the manner in which the pages are filled. I have reached the very margins near the umbilicus; as the Satirist says, it is time to finish my Orestes 1, even if I have to write on the other side of the parchment. [2] In this work I have not been classical, or enlisted in my service a fabulous Terpsichore, nor have I led my pen by dewy banks and mossy rocks to the well-spring of Aganippe. I only hope that what I have written may not prove rambling pointless stuff, and full of trivial commonplaces. For an accomplished reader like yourself can take no pleasure in an invertebrate, soft and enervated style; what he requires is something nervous and masculine in the antique manner. Those qualities must be left to a greater talent than mine; enough for me, if you forgive me for keeping you waiting so long.

[3] It is fortunate that our illustrious friend requested no further additions; that would have involved me in long delays, for not a single cabinet or case contains anything more worth production. This will show you that although my time of silence is still to come, I have certainly begun to think of it, and that for two reasons. If I win approval, I shall give my readers pleasure at the smallest cost to themselves; if, on the other hand, I am disapproved, their weariness will soon be over. For my style has no polished graces; it is of a positively heathen bluntness. [4] What use should I have, indeed, for an austere archaic manner, or for far-fetched terms of Salii or Sibyls, or the old Sabine Cures?1 Such things the masters for the most part avoid; they are for some flamen to expound, or some antiquated reader of the law's conundrums. My diction is dry and jejune; mine is a vocabulary of common words in too general use to claim distinction, too ready to every one's hand to find acceptance with the critical. [5] If my writing lacks eloquence and force, I can confidently say that it contains nothing which is not genuine and absolutely true to fact. Why should I insist upon the point? If my style pleases my friends, it is good enough for me. I am content with either kind of verdict: they may either be critical and tell me the truth, or partial and deceive themselves.

All I shall ask of Providence in future is that posterity may judge or be deceived in the same manner. Farewell.

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**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.