Book 9

Sidonius Apollinaris (c. AD 430–490)

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Contents

I. **1**

II. **2**

III. **3**

IV. **5**

V. **6**

VI. **7**

VII. **8**

VIII. **10**

IX. **11**

X. **15**

XI. **16**

XII. **19**

XIII. **20**

XIV. **23**

XV. **25**

XVI. **27**

I.

To his friend Firminus After A. D. 480 [1] You insist, my honoured Son, that I should exceed the existing limit of my collected letters; that I should adventure further, and refuse to content myself with the present total. Your reason in favour of adding a ninth volume is that Pliny, in whose steps you deem me to follow in this work, assigns the same term to his own collection.1 [2] I may yield to your desire; but all the same, this friendly invitation raises difficulties, and is far from promising advantage to such poor reputation as I already possess. In the first place, it is very late in the day to append this new addition to the volume already issued. Secondly, I do not know the umpire who would not hold it indecent in an author to give a single work three supplements. [3] Nor, having definitely announced the work done, should I know what excuse to make for not curbing my incorrigible loquacity, unless indeed it were this, that one cannot constrain one's friendships as one can limit one's page. For these reasons, I think you ought to stand on guard before my reputation, and make my motives clear to the inquisitive; I should like you to send me regular intelligence of the views expressed by those whose opinions I should value. [4] If after forcing me to chatter on, you yourself persevere in silence, you will have no fair ground for complaint if I pay you out in your own coin. It is incumbent on you above all others to be lenient in judging my endeavour to fulfil the task and obligation imposed upon me. Meanwhile, I will at once insert in the margin of the eighth book any fresh letter which comes into my hands.

[5] Apollinaris, all ardour in most pursuits, is utterly remiss in one; study has but a faint attraction for him, whether he reads by his own choice or by compulsion. At least, that is how it appears to me, since I count myself one of those fathers who are so eager, so ambitious, and so apprehensive about the progress of their sons that they hardly ever find anything to commend, or if they do, are hardly ever satisfied. Farewell.

II.

To the Lord Bishop Euphronius c. A. D. 472 [1] THE missive with your saintly greeting has been delivered by the priest Albiso and the Levite1 Proculus, whom I may accept as my masters in conduct, since they have proved themselves your worthy pupils. The letter does me a great honour, but it imposes a yet greater burden. Although your benediction delights me, the accompanying injunction fills me with dismay. Indeed, I am so perturbed that I cannot think even of a partial obedience. You bid me attempt too intricate a task, and much too far beyond my capacity. At a time when my powers wane towards their end, I am to essay a work which I should be mad to begin and could never hope to finish. [2] If I know your loyal heart aright, your real aim was rather to give me proof of your affection than to see my completed labours. But I shall take good care that while from Jerome, the master of exegesis, Augustine, the master of dialectic, and Origen, the master of allegory, you reap full ears of spiritual emotion and a harvest of saving doctrine, that no dry stubble shall rustle in your ears from this parched tongue of mine. As well blend the hoarse cry of the goose with the swan's music, or the sparrow's impudent chirp with the tuneful plaint of nightingales. [3] Should I not show a certain effrontery and want of proper feeling were I to approach so formidable a task----I, a novice in the Church, but a veteran, alas! in transgression----I, light in learning, but weighed down by a heavy conscience? If I were to send what I had written to be seen by other eyes, I should become the laughing-stock even of critics who never set eyes on me.

I entreat you, therefore, my Lord Bishop, not to insist on spoiling a modesty which would fain avoid publicity, or tempt me into so rash an adventure. Such is the envy of the backbiters, that a mere beginning is more sure of their censure than a successful conclusion of their applause. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

III.

To the Lord Bishop Faustus c. A.D. 477 [1] YOUR old loyalty to a friend, and your old mastery of diction are both unchanged; I admire equally the heartiness of your letters, and the perfect manner of their expression. But I think, and I am sure that you will concur with me, that at the present juncture, when the roads are no longer secure owing to the movements of the peoples, the only prudent and safe course is to abandon for the present any regular exchange of messages; we must be less assiduous correspondents; we must learn the art of keeping silence. This is a bitter deprivation, and hard to bear when a friendship is as close as ours; it is imposed upon us not by casual circumstance, but by causes at once definite, inevitable, and diverse in their origin.

[2] First among them 1 must set the examination of all letter-carriers upon the highways. Messengers may run small personal risk, since nothing can be alleged against them; but they have to put up with endless annoyance, while some vigilant official subjects them to an inquisitorial search. At the first sign of faltering in reply to questions, they are suspected of carrying in their heads instructions which cannot be found upon their persons. The sender of a letter is thus placed in an awkward position, and the bearer is liable to rough usage, especially at a time like this, when fresh disputes between rival nationalities have destroyed a treaty of long duration. [3] In the second place I set the soreness of my heart over my own private troubles, for I was taken from home with a show of great consideration, but really removed by compulsion to this distant spot, where I am broken by every kind of mental anguish, enduring all the hardships of an exile and the losses of a proscript. It is therefore by no means the right moment to ask me for finished letters, and were I to attempt them, it would be impertinence, for the exchange of a lively or elaborate correspondence should be confined to happy people; to me it seems little less than a barbarism for a man to write gaily when his spirit is vexed within him.

[4] How much better it would be for you to give the benefit of your unremitting orisons to a soul conscious of its guilt and trembling as often as it recalls the debts of a sinful career! For you are versed in the prayers of the Island brotherhood, which you transferred from the wrestling-place of the hermit congregation, and from the assembly of the monks of Lerins,1 to the city over whose church you preside, for all your episcopal rank, an abbot still in spirit, and refusing to make your new dignity a pretext for any relaxation in the rigour of the

ancient discipline. Obtain for me, then, by your most potent intercession that my portion may be in the Lord; that enrolled from henceforth among the companies of my tribesmen the Levites, I may cease to be of the earth earthly, I to whom not a yard of earth remains;2 and that I may begin to estrange myself from the guilt of this world, as I am already estranged from its riches.

[5] In the third place, and perhaps this after all is the chief reason why I have given up writing to you, I have a boundless admiration for your tropical figurative style, and for that consummately varied and perfected diction of which your last letter affords such ample evidence. Many years ago I sat a hoarse demonstrative listener when you preached either extempore, or, if occasion demanded, after careful preparation. I especially remember the week's festival of the dedication of the church at Lyons, when you were called upon by the general desire of your venerable colleagues to deliver an oration. On that occasion you proved yourself a master both of forensic and religious eloquence, and held the balance between them with such perfection that we hung upon your words with ears strained and roused emotions; you cared less to indulge our simple predilections because you knew that you had wholly satisfied our reason.

[6] There you have the cause of my present and my future silence; I could not refuse a few words without disobedience, but henceforward I shall hold my peace and learn in silence. In future the word lies with you, my Lord Bishop. It is yours to devote yourself to the teaching of sound and perfect doctrine in works destined to live; for not a man hears you in argument or exposition who does not learn to deserve the praise of others in deed no less than word. Forgive my simple letter,1 which has at least the virtue of conforming to your desires; I have myself to admit that, by comparison with yours, my style is inarticulate as a child's. [7] But there is little point in all this heavy repetition; the most foolish thing in the world is to be always deprecating one's own follies. Judgement rests with you, and if you put things to a thorough test, you will find much to laugh at, and even more to censure. I shall welcome it if your notorious kindness of heart allows you for once to abandon your dislike of being critical, and condemn such points as need correction. Only if you strike out passages here and there, shall I have the satisfaction of feeling that you approve what you leave intact. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

IV.

To the Lord Bishop Graecus A. D. 473 (?) [1] OUR traveller and bearer of mutual salutations treads a path of which he knows every yard from having to traverse over and over again the roads and tracts between our several cities. We ourselves must keep to the ideal set before us; we ought, indeed, to be more intent on it than ever, and redouble our zeal now that so many messengers are constantly upon the way, and above all, Amantius. If we fail in this, it will look as if we corresponded just because he regularly calls for letters, and not because we really wish to write them. You must think more often of the friends among whose number I venture to count myself; all of us feel no less elated by your good, than depressed by your adverse fortune. [2] Were we not moved to sympathetic tears by the mournful story of your anguish at the fate of certain brethren? Flower of the priesthood, jewel among pontiffs, mighty in learning, in righteousness mightier yet, spurn from you the threatening waves of earthly storms, for we have often heard from your own lips that the way to the promised feasts of patriarchs and the celestial nectar lies through the bitter cups of earthly sorrows. Whether he will or no, each follower of the Mediator who endured the world's contempt must follow his Lord's example. Whatever draughts of trouble the affliction of this present life sets to our lips, we shall perceive how small our burden is if we will but remember what He who calls us to His heaven once drank upon the tree. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

V.

To the Lord Bishop Julianus c. A.D. 477 [1] THOUGH we dwell further apart than either of us could wish, the distance dividing us has had less to do with the interruption of our intercourse than the fact that we live under different laws; national disagreements born of opposing interests have hindered our frequent correspondence. But now that a peace has been concluded,1 and the two peoples are to become trusty allies, our letters will be able to pass in greater numbers since they will arouse no more suspicion. [2] Unite your prayers, then, with those of your reverend brothers, that Christ may deign to prosper our handiwork, restraining the quarrels of our princes, making their wars to cease, granting to them the gift of good intention, to us peace, and to all security. Deign to hold us in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

VI.

To the Lord Bishop Ambrose After A. D. 472

[1] YOUR holiness has interceded before Christ with effect on behalf of our well-beloved friend (I will not mention his name----you will know whom I mean), the laxity of whose youth you used sometimes to lament before a few chosen witnesses of your sorrow, sometimes to bemoan in silence and alone. For he has suddenly broken off his relations with the shameless slave-girl to whose low fascination he had utterly abandoned his life; by this prompt reformation he has taken a great step in the interests of his estate, of his descendants, and of himself. [2] He dissipated his inheritance until his coffers were empty; but when he once began to consider his position, and understood how much of his patrimony the extravagance of his domestic Charybdis had swallowed up, not a moment too soon he took the bit in his teeth, shook his head, and stopping his ears, as one might say, with Ulysses' wax, he was deaf to the voice of evil, and escaped the shipwreck that follows meretricious lures. He has led to the altar a maid of high birth and ample fortune, and for that we must give him credit. [3] It would of course have been a greater glory to have abandoned the voluptuous life without taking to himself a wife; but few of, those who forsake error at the call of virtue can begin upon the highest level, and after indulging themselves in everything, cut off all indulgence at one stroke.

[4] It is now your part by assiduous prayer to obtain for the newly married couple good hope of issue; and then, when they have one or two children (perhaps even in that we concede too much), to see to it that this stealer of unlawful joys shall abstain thereafter even from lawful pleasures. At present the conduct of this bride and bridegroom is so seemly that to see them once together is enough to reveal the gulf between the honourable love of a wife and the feigned endearments of the concubine. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

VII.

To the Lord Bishop Remigius A.D. 472-4(?)

[1] ONE of our citizens of Clermont (I know the man, but forget his business, which is immaterial) went recently on a journey to Belgic Gaul, and while at Rheims so won your copyist or your bookseller by the charms of his manner or of his purse that he wormed out of him, without your consent, a complete set of your Declamations. After his triumphant return with such a splendid spoil of volumes, he insisted on presenting the whole series to us as his fellow townsmen, though we were quite ready to purchase them----a rather graceful act. All of us here who are devoted to literature were properly desirous of reading the books, and we at once began to transcribe the whole, committing to memory as much as we were able. [2] It was the universal opinion that there were few men living who could write as you do. There are few or none who before even beginning to write could arrange their subjects so well, so calculate the position of syllables, or the juxtaposition of consonant and vowel; and besides, there is none whose illustrations are so apposite, whose statements are so trustworthy, whose epithets are so appropriate, whose allusions so full of charm, whose arguments are so sound, whose sentiments carry such weight, whose diction has such a flow, whose periods come to so fulminant a conclusion. [3] The framework is always stout and firm, bound with many a delightful transition, and close caesura, but withal quite easy and smooth, and rounded to perfection;

it helps the reader's tongue to pass without obstacle, so as never to be troubled by rough divisions, or roll in stammering accents on the palate. All is fluent and ductile; it is as when the finger glides lightly over a surface of polished crystal or onyx, where there is not the slightest crack or fissure to stay its passage. [4] I have said enough. There is no orator alive whom your masterful skill would not enable you easily to surpass and leave far behind. I almost dare to suspect (forgive my audacity) that a flow of eloquence so copious and so far beyond my powers of description must sometimes make you vain. But do not think that because you shine with the twofold brilliance of your holy life and your consummate style you can therefore disregard our opinion; remember that though our authorship may be worth little, our criticism may count for much. [5] In future, then, cease to evade our judgement, from which you have nothing either mordant or aggressive to fear. For I must warn you that if you leave our barrenness unenriched by the stream of your eloquence, we

shall take our revenge by engaging the services of burglars, whose clever hands will soon despoil your roll-cases with our connivance and support. If you are imperturbable before a friendly request to-day, you will soon learn what perturbation means to-morrow, when the thieves have cleared your shelves. Deign to keep me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

VIII.

To the Lord Bishop Principius A.D. 472-474 [1] I WAS longing for a line from you when quite unexpectedly our old messenger brought me your answer; his efficiency in the present case proves him a fit and proper person to be entrusted with our further correspondence. Your second letter is a gift, or rather blessing, which I repay with my further greetings: the account is now numerically but far from qualitatively equal. [2] And since we live in spiritual communion, while our homes are remote, so that we are debarred by our situation from the pleasure of meeting, pray for me, that I may be released from the burden and travail of this present life by a holy death such as my heart desires, and that when the day of Judgement dawns and the dead are raised, I may join your throng a servitor, were it even on the terms of the Gibeonites 1. For in accordance with the divine promise, the sons of God shall come together from every nation, and if pardon be given to my grievous sin, however diverse my deserts, I shall not be separated far from the place where glory awaits you among the saints. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

IX.

To the Lord Bishop Faustus After A. D. 475 [1] You have lamented our long silence, venerable father, but while I recognize and applaud your desire that it should at last be broken, I cannot admit that any blame attaches to me. When you bade me some time back give you my news, I wrote before receiving your last communication, and my letter actually reached Riez; but though you were at Apt, you aptly escaped its perusal.1 I was most anxious, both to receive my due credit for having written, and to escape too severe a criticism when you read the missive. [2] But on this point I need say no more at present, especially as you again ask me for a letter, and one as voluminous as I can make it. I long to satisfy you; the goodwill is there, but unfortunately I have no subject for my pen. Greetings should take up little space, unless they introduce some matter of real interest; to spin them out with mere verbiage, is to deflect from the path defined by Sallust when he said that Catiline had words enough but little wisdom.2 So my vale will have to follow my ave at an exceedingly short interval. I beseech your prayers for me.

[3] What a stroke of luck! Just as I was on the point of folding up my letter, something has occurred for me to write about, and if either the pleasure or the annoyance of the event delays my protest a single moment, I will own myself deserving of the indignity to which I have been exposed. You have fallen into my hands, Great Master, I do more than triumph; I have you at my mercy, and in my captive I find one of no less stature than the anticipations of years had led me to expect. I cannot say whether you are caught against your will, but it looks like it. For if you did not mean your books to pass me without my knowledge, you certainly did nothing to prevent the passage. It aggravates the offence that in traversing Auvergne they not merely went close under my walls but almost grazed my person. [4] Were you afraid that I should be jealous? Thank God, I am less open to the charge of envy than any other; and were it otherwise, were I as guilty of this as of other defects, the hopelessness of a successful rivalry would be enough to purge me of emulation. Did you fear the frown of so severe and difficult a critic as your servant? What critic so swollen or so opinionated as not to kindle at your least ardent passages! [5] Was it your low estimate of a junior that led you to ignore and to disdain me? I hardly think it.

Was it that you thought me ignorant? I could put up with that if you mean ignorant of the art of writing, not ignorant in appreciation. I must remind you that only those who

have taken part in the games presume to pass judgement on the racing chariots. Was there any casual disagreement between us, leading you to suppose that I might decry your work? Thanks be to God, my worst enemies cannot make me out a lukewarm friend. Why waste these words? you ask. [6] Well, I will now let you have the whole story of this secretiveness which so incensed me, and of the discovery which has put me in such high spirits again. I had read those works of yours which Riochatus the priest and monk,1 and thus twice a stranger and pilgrim in this world, was taking back for you to your Bretons; for you, who may well be called Faustus to-day, since you cannot grow old, since you will always live in the mouths of men, and after your bodily death, attain immortality by your works. The venerable man made some stay in our city, waiting till the agitated main of peoples should calm down, for at that time the vast whirlwind of wars rose dreadful against us on this side and on that. All your other good gifts he freely produced; but managed to keep back, always with the most exquisite courtesy, the chief treasure he conveyed, unwilling perhaps to let me feel the contrast between your roses and my brambles.

[7] After rather more than two months, he hurriedly left us, a rumour having got abroad that he and his company had with them mysterious things of great price, carefully wrapped up from view. I went after him with horses swift enough easily to cancel the day's start he had gained; I came up with my felon, I leapt at his throat with a kiss, laughing like a man but pouncing like a wild beast; I resembled a robbed tigress that with winged feet springs like a flash upon the neck of the Parthian hunter to dash her stolen cub from his grasp.1 [8] To cut the story short, I embraced the knees of my captive friend; I stopped the horses, tied the bridles, opened his baggage, discovered the volume I sought,2 dragged it forth in triumph, and began reading away and dismembering it by making lengthy excerpts from the important chapters. I dictated as fast as I could, and the skill of my secretaries yet further abbreviated my task, for they were able to skip letters wholesale, using a system of substituted signs. The story of our parting would be an overlong tale, and after all of no great interest; our cheeks were wet with tears; we embraced and embraced again, hardly able to tear ourselves away. My exultation was justified by my safe return, laden with the spoils of loving-kindness and master of great riches for the soul.

[9] And now for my opinion of this booty. I should rather like to hold it back, in order to keep you in suspense; judgement withheld were vengeance more complete. But I despair of taking down your pride; for you are conscious of so masterly an eloquence that sheer delight in what they read wrings eulogy from your readers, whether they wish to withstand the charm or not. Listen, then, to the sentence which an injured friend now passes on your book. [10] It is a work of the most fruitful labour, varied, ardent, sublime, excellent in classification, rich in apt examples, well balanced by its form as dialogue, and by the fourfold division of its subject. There is much that is inspiring, much that is grand; here I find simplicity without clumsiness, there point not too far-fetched; grave matters are handled with ripe judgement, deep matters with proper caution; on debatable ground you take firm stand; in controversy your argument is always ready. Now persuasive, now severe, always intent to edify, you write with eloquence, with force, and with exquisite discrimination.

[11] Following you over the whole wide field traversed in so many manners, I find you easily superior to all other writers alike in conception and in execution. You must appreciate my sincerity in this the more, when you remember that I pronounce my opinion under the smart of your affront. I think your work could only be improved by one thing----your presence in person to read it, when something might yet be added by the author's own voice, his gesture, his restrained art of physical expression. [12] Endowed thus with all these intellectual and literary gifts, you have united yourself with a fair woman according to the precept of Deuteronomy.1 You saw her among the hostile squadrons; and then and there you loved her as she stood in the forefront of the adversary's battle; through all the resistance of the foe, you bore her off in the strong arm of passion. Her name is Philosophy, she it is whom you snatched by force from among the impious arts; and having shorn the locks betokening a false faith, with the eyebrows arched with pride of earthly learning, and cut away the folds of her ancient vesture, which are the folds of sad dialectic, veiling perverse and unlawful conversation, you purified her and joined her to you in a close and mystical embrace. [13] She has been your faithful follower from your early years; she was ever at your side, whether you practised your skill in the arena of the crowded city, or subdued the flesh in remote solitudes;

in the Athenaeum she was with you, and in the monastery; with you she abjured the wisdom of the world, with you proclaims that which is from above. Whoever provokes you as her lawful spouse shall soon perceive the noble range of your philosophy, and find himself confronted by the Platonic Academy of the Church of Christ. [14] He shall hear you first declare the ineffable omniscience of God and the eternity of the Holy Spirit. He shall not see you grow long hair or flaunt the pallium or staff as insignia of the philosophic state. He shall not see you pride yourself in nice apparel, indulging the exquisite's pretension, or making squalor your boast. He shall not see you betray your envy when in the gymnasia, or the Schools of the Areopagus; Speusippus is pictured for admiring eyes with bowed head, Aratus with open countenance; Zeno with contracted brows, Epicurus with unwrinkled skin, Diogenes with hirsute beard, Socrates with failing hair, Aristotle with arm freed from the mantle, Xenocrates with his contracted leg, Heraclitus with his eyes closed by tears, Democritus with lips parted in a laugh, Chrysippus counting with clenched fingers, Euclid measuring with open hands, Cleanthes biting his nails over problems both of space and number.1 [15] Far from all this, whoever challenges you shall see the Stoic, the Cynic, the Peripatetic, the Heresiarch all beaten with their own weapons and crushed by their own devices.

Their followers who dare resist Christian faith and dogma to venture a bout with you shall soon be bound hand and foot and fall headlong into the toils of their own nets. The barbed syllogisms of your logic shall hook these voluble tongues even while they seek escape; you shall noose their slippery problems in categoric coils after the fashion of the clever doctor, who, if need be, will prepare his antidote for poison from the very venom of the serpent. [16] I have said enough for the moment on your spiritual insight and on the soundness of your learning. For no one can follow in your footsteps with an equal stride, since to no other is

it given to speak better than the masters who taught him, and to make his actions better than his words. Not without reason shall you be called by those qualified to judge, most blessed above all in our generation, as one who in deed and word enjoys a great and twofold glory; who after numbering years to be counted on the right hand,1 after being the model of this century and the desire of every other, shall die honoured for his excellence in every field, leaving his possessions to his own folk, and himself to the nations of the world. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

X.

To the Lord Bishop Aprunculus After A.D. 475 (?) [1] MY letter was delivered to you by a messenger who ought to have brought me back a reply; for our brother Celestius, on his return recently from Béziers, extracted from me a document of surrender relating to my [clerk] Injuriosus. I wrote it urged by the compelling force of your modesty rather than by any inclination of my own; the least that I could do, confronted with such an attitude was to meet you halfway upon the swift feet of my respect. [2] Regard him, then, as yours by my deliberate act, but use him with generosity; indeed, I am sure you proposed nothing but the solace of your kindness. I have no further resentment against him, and write this rather as an introduction to you than as a formal dimissal for him. But I should like it to be a condition that he is to render you obedient service and assistance, and that if he stays with you he shall be regarded as neither yours nor mine; but that if he leaves you, it shall be open to both of us to treat him as a fugitive.2 Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

XI.

To the Lord Bishop Lupus A.D. 478 (?)

[1] THAT unfortunate book which you regard as sent not so much to you as through you, has inspired a letter which I in my turn regard as written not so much to me as against me.1 I cannot reply to your reproaches with an eloquence equal to yours; I rely only on the justice of my cause; how indeed am I to plead 'not guilty' when you imply the opposite? At the very outset, therefore, I frankly ask your pardon for my offence, such as it is; but I confess only to an error born of diffidence and by no means of improper pride. [2] The strictness of your judgement is no less formidable to me in literary than in moral questions, but I must admit that when I opened the volume it was the thought of the friendship you profess for me which oppressed me most. And that I think is natural; for it is human nature for a friend who suspects an injury to be severer than any one else. [3] It is true enough, as you point out, that my book is a medley packed and piled with multifarious subjects, episodes and personal facts; it would have been outrageous had I been so infatuated with my work as to imagine that no part of it would displease you.

Whatever your judgement might prove to be, it was evident that I should derogate from my loyalty, if I failed to give you at least the first sight of the volume, even though I might not formally present it. If I were lucky enough to meet with your approval, you could not accuse me of having arrogantly neglected you; if on the other hand I were less fortunate, you could not say that I had forced my work upon your notice. [4] Nor did I expect to find it very difficult to excuse the motive which saved me from possibly having to blush for myself. I imagined you to be as well aware as I myself that modesty becomes the writer of a new book better than assurance, and that timidity is far more likely to win the vote of the severe critic than a provocative spirit. On the other hand, if a man boldly announces a volume on a fresh subject, however much he may really have done to satisfy the legitimate expectation of the public, he will soon find that he will be expected to do more. Whatever strictures you may pass on the tenor of this reply, I prefer to make a clean breast of it rather than resort to disingenuous evasions. [5] Any one but myself would probably have argued somewhat after this wise: 'I never gave any one the advantage over you; no one else had received a special letter from me.

The man whom you believed to be preferred before you had to be content with one letter to his credit, and that, too, having no relation to the present matter. You on the other hand, for all your complaints at being overlooked, must have been simply exhausted by the three garrulous sheets you received; you must have been sickened by so long an immersion in empty and dull verbiage. Moreover you may not have observed that, even so, your position and your high deserts have received ample consideration; your name appears in the first superscription of the book, as befits that of the primate among our bishops. His name, on the contrary, only occurs once in a letter addressed to himself; yours is so mentioned more than once, and you are cited besides in letters addressed to other persons. [6] Remember, too, that where there is a subject likely to please you, I have encouraged you to read it, whereas the person in question can only do so by your kindness; he is probably so embarrassed by your attitude to my little gift that I should be surprised if even now he has had a real chance of perusal, while you long ago reached the stage of transcribing. I expect he will hardly regard as my holograph a copy over which you have glanced; for to an example revised by you he can never impute either excess of barbarisms or defects in punctuation.

In fine, it might appear that all rights in the book had been handed over to you, seeing that you have the use of it while you please, and can dispose of it for so long that you may be said to keep it rather in your memory than in your bookcase.' [7] Such arguments, with more of the same kind, might readily be adduced. I, however, shall waive them all, and prefer frankly to seek your pardon instead of making excuses for a problematical offence. I make even less excuse for the carelessness of the present letter, first, because I have no longer the art of fine writing, even if I attempt it; second, because, when one has got a book off one's mind, one is longing for a holiday and cannot bring oneself to elaborate what one does not care to make public.

[8] But as I rightly make a point of giving way to you in everything-----for where, indeed, is your equal to be found?----and as for ten whole lustres,1 as often as a comparison has been instituted, you have been preferred to all priests that have ever been, whether in our own time or before it, I would have you understand, that though your lamentations may shake the stars, though you call the glowing ashes of your fathers to witness my outrage to the laws of friendship, yet if there is to be any contest in mutual affection, my foot shall stand firm against yours, were it for no other reason than that to be beaten in anything is bad, but to be vanquished in loyalty an abomination. Whether you approve or no, I have right on my side in replying by this open declaration to reproaches, which for all their bitterness, are yet more to me than all the honeyed flatteries of others.

[9] I have given you as communicative a letter as you could desire. But all my correspondence with you is that; no letters of any writer-could be more so. For you have the gift of encouraging men to write with confidence. I say no more of myself; but there is not a literate, however retiring, whom you do not know how to draw out, just as the sun's rays by their absorbent power extract the moisture hidden in the bowels of the earth. So sharp are those rays, that they can penetrate not the fine sand or surface soil alone, but if there

be a concealed spring deep under some massive mountain, there too the ardent nature of the mysterious powers of heaven reveals the secret of the liquid element. In like manner, venerated father, your lucid eloquence knows admirably how to influence and draw into the light, by its subtle address, all the studious who from love of quiet, or from modesty, lie in the obscurity of dark corners, their fame yet unawakened. [10] Enough: I come back to the point; I have talked endlessly and at large, but since I have surrendered and confessed my fault, I entreat you to be placable and give me the benefit of your clemency and forgiveness. Such are your holy cheerfulness and love of others that you will derive a greater pleasure from this my written apology than you would from any positive act of reparation. Deign to hold me in remembrance, my Lord Bishop.

XII.

To his friend Oresius c. A. D. 484

[1] I HAVE just received your letter, which I may compare to the salt mined in the hills of Tarragona. The reader finds it sharp and lucid, yet none the less of a bland savour. The phraseology is charming, but the matter is also full of point. Taking small account of my present state of life, it asks me for a new poem, and this demand brings me no less trouble of mind than the admirable diction delight. At the very outset of my religious career, the art of versifying was the first thing that I renounced; gravity of deed was now my business, and if I occupied myself with such frivolous things as verses, I might well be accused of levity. [2] Besides, it is a matter of universal experience that a pursuit which has been intermitted for any time is only resumed with difficulty. Every one knows that both art and artist achieve their highest by constant practice; if the usual exercise be forgone, arm and intellect alike will grow inert. The later or the more seldom the bow is used, the more refractory it is under the hand; it is the same with the ox under his yoke and the horse with his bridle. Moreover, disinclination is not my only motive; it is accompanied by a certain timidity. After three whole Olympiads of silence,1 to begin rhyming again would be no less embarrassing than irksome. [3] But it seems almost a crime to refuse you even the most difficult things;

your warm heart is quite unused to be denied, and it would be a shame to deceive you of your confident hope. I shall therefore choose a middle path: I will compose nothing new; but if I can find any of my former letters containing poems, written before the pressure of my present duties, you shall have them. I shall merely ask you not to be unfair, and set me down as an incurable poetaster. I shall pride myself just as much on your good opinion if you deign to think of me rather as a modest than as an accomplished man. Farewell.

XIII.

To his friend Tonantius c. A. D. 481 [1] I MUST admit that your judgement on my verses has long been too flattering and appreciative: I must admit that you rank me among the elect of poets and even above many of their number. I might be inclined to listen, were not your critical acumen influenced by your friendship. Praises born of partiality, though uttered in perfect good faith, are really based on error. [2] You ask me now to send you some Asclepiads forged on the Horatian anvil, that you may keep yourself in practice by declaiming them at table. I do so, though never in my life have I been so busily engaged in writing prose.

'Long time, with hand well worn by the pen, have I written smooth hendecasyllables which you might sing more easily than choriambics, dancing on lighter foot to freer measure. But you will that our way should henceforth run by the Calabrian road, where, with reins of mighty music, Flaccus guided his lyric steeds to the melody of Pindar, while the strings were struck to the Glyconian rhythm, to the Alcaic also and the Pherecratian,1 the Lesbian and the anapaestic; in the freshness of his varied song he went, with words like violets of diverse hue about him. Hard was it for bards of old, hard for me to-day to see that the tongue, essaying the various music of verse, trips not by reason of too many written letters, and their male style which forbids luxuriant graces. Hardly may Leo himself attempt it, king of the Castalian choir; hardly he who most nearly follows him, Lampridius, though he professes prose and verse alike before his students of Bordeaux. Yet this it is which I must try for you: spare me, then, your jests. Suffer your poet to keep to the close his pledge of modesty; for nothing is less excellent than this, to end with laxity where the beginning was with rigour.'

[3] I should personally much prefer that when you divert yourself at the banquet you should confine yourself to pious histories; recite them often among your friends, and let an eager audience encourage their repetition. And if (for you are yet young) these salutary distractions but faintly appeal to you, then borrow from the Platonist of Madaura2 his formulae of festal questions; and to master them more fully, practise answering them when others propound, or yourself propound them for solution; make this your study even in leisure. [4] But as festive occasions have been mentioned, and you insist upon a poem, even one composed on another theme and for another person, I cannot hesitate to produce one longer. Take, therefore, with what grace you may, one written in Majorian's reign, when a number

of us were invited to a banquet by a common acquaintance, and I had to produce something extempore on a book by Petrus, the emperor's secretary,1 which was just out, the master of the feast delaying the first course awhile for the occasion. My friends Domnulus, Severianus, and Lampridius, summoned from their several homes to a single city,2 had also been invited, and had to write as I did. That sounds presumptuous; they wrote, of course, far better. [5] We were only granted just time for the allotting of the metres; for we had agreed, as honourable members of the poetical fraternity, that though the subject should be the same for all, the verses of each should be in a different measure, so that the unsuccessful competitors might be spared immediate mortification and subsequent jealousy of the victor. For if all is composed in the same metre, inequality of talent is much more easily detected. I recommend the enclosed to your approval, preferably at some hour of perfect relaxation. It would hardly be fair to subject it to a severe criticism when your friend was never able to give his whole mind to the composition.

* 'Come, flower of youth, called happily together. The place, the hour, the festal board, the theme, bid you extol to the skies the book which you now hear recited, now yourselves recite. It is the book of Petrus, master alike of prose and verse. Brothers, let us celebrate the pious festival of letters. Let all things ministering to delight usher out the day which now moves to its close, fair cheer, and wine and the dance. Bring out hangings of fine linen ruddy of hue; bring purple steeped with Meliboean dye in brazen vessels to enrich the fleece with purest stain. Let the fabric from a far land display the heights of Ctesiphon and of Niphates,1 and the wild beasts racing over the field, driven to madness by wounds skilfully feigned in red, from which a blood which is no blood seems to issue, as though a real dart had pierced their sides. There the Parthian fierce of mien and adroit in the backward gaze vanishes on swift steed and turns again to launch a second dart, now flying, now putting in turn to flight the wild beasts' counterfeited forms.

Let the round table be spread with linen purer than snow, and covered with laurel, with ivy and the green growths of the vine. Pile great baskets high with cytisus and crocus, starwort and cassia, privet and marigold; let sideboard and couch be gay with garlands of sweet scent. Let some hand perfumed with balsam smooth your disordered hair; let frankincense of Araby smoke to the lofty roof. Come the dark, let many a light be hung from the glittering ceiling, high in the chamber's upper space; innocent of oil and clammy grease, let each lamp's bowl yield flame from Eastern balms alone. Let servitors bear in on laden shoulders viands fit for kings, their necks bowed under silver richly chased. In patera and bowl and cauldron let nard mingle with Falernian wine; let wreaths of roses crown tripod and cup. For we shall tread where garlands sway from many an unguent-vase; in mazy rounds our languid limbs shall know disport; by step, by garb, by voice, each shall play the quivering Maenad. From her seat between two seas let Corinth send her players of the cithara trained in the best of schools 1 to mimetic dance and song; let their tuneful lingers accompany their melodious voices, the plectrum cast aside, and deftly ply the wires that leap to life beneath their touch.

Give us, too, the bronze pipe loved of the nude Satyr; give us deep-sounding flute-players for our chorus, who from cavernous mouth and full-blown cheek shall chant the loud wind into the tubes. Give us songs for the tragic buskin, for the comic soccus songs; give us eloquence of rhetors and melody of poets, of each in his several part, the best. Give us all these, yet Petrus shall surpass them all. In our hands is his book woven of prose and verse, faring swift over roughest paths and labyrinthine ways. In every kind he makes essay, in every kind approved; from this side and from that he bears the palm; even learned lips must celebrate his praise. Away with the well of Hippocrene, away with Aganippe's fount; avaunt! Apollo, maker of sweet song, with all thy train of Muses; avaunt! Minerva, arbitress of melody. Away with all the names of legend; one God alone has dowered him with these gifts.

When this man raised his voice, all sat dumb----emperor and senator, warrior, knight, and all the folk of Romulus. And still their acclamations roll through forum, temple, camp, and country, while Po and Liguria's loyal cities add their loud plaudits to the chorus. Like greetings echo through the towns of Rhone, even the wild Iberian shall imitate the Gaul. Nor shall the sound die in this region of earth; it shall press onward to the lands where Eurus reigns; Zephyr, Aquilo, and Auster shall bear it on their wings.' [6] Seeking a song for your lips, I have found one of my own. These trifles I drag into the light from the bottom of my desk, where for well-nigh twenty years they have lain for the rats and mice to gnaw: such verses as Ulysses might have found when he came home from Troy. I pray you give me gracious pardon for this distraction of an idle hour; it is surely neither false modesty nor impudence which begs you to bow before the force of precedent, and judge my small performance in the spirit with which I judged the whole book of my friend. Farewell.

* The poem is translated into German rhymed decasyllabics by Fertig, i, p. 13.

XIV.

To his friend Burgundio (No indication of date)

[1] IT doubles my own pain to learn that you too are driven to keep your bed. No fate is so hard to bear as the separation of friends through sickness, when they are quite close to each other. Unless they share one room, they cannot exchange a word of mutual comfort or offer a prayer together. Each has burden of anxiety enough on his own account, but a greater for his friend. However ill a man may be, his fears for himself vanish before the knowledge of his friend's danger. [2] But God, most affectionate son, has relieved me of my worst disquietude, since you begin to regain strength. They say you even want to get up, and what I long even more to hear, that you are strong enough to do so. I really think you must be, or you would not have begun to ask my advice again, and set me literary problems with the ardour of one perfectly recovered. Though you are only a convalescent, you seem far more inclined for some ethical discourse of Socrates, than any physical treatise of Hippocrates. Verily you deserve, if ever man did, the encouragement of Rome's applauding hands, the thunder of the Athenaeum hailing you master, till the seats shake with the clamour through every tier. [3] And were but peace ours, and the roads free, these triumphs you would attain, given the opportunity of forming yourself in the society of our senatorial youth. Of such fame and such distinction I judge you capable from the becoming speech you recently made; you delivered extempore the matter of a written discourse, with the result that the kindly acclaimed you, the supercilious marvelled, the most accomplished had no fault to find. But I ought not to embarrass your modesty by impertinent excess of praise; my eulogies are better made to third persons than to yourself. I will proceed to the real subject of my letter.

[4] The inquiry which your messenger brings is: what do I mean by recurrent verses? you want an immediate answer, with a concrete illustration. A recurrent verse is one which reads the same backwards and forwards without changing the position of a single letter, or making any alteration in the metre.1 Here is the classic example: Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor. [Here is another: Sole medere pede, ede perede melos.] [5] There is another kind in which, though the metre is unchanged, only the words are read backwards, not the several letters. A distich of my own shall illustrate the point, though I am sure I have met with many others in the course of my reading. I amused myself by composing it about a

brook which had been filled by sudden rain storms, crossing the highway with a noisy rush of waters, and overflowing all the tilled lands below.

[6] It was merely a passing flood, swollen with transient rains, and not sustained by any perennial flow from spring above. I happened to arrive by the road, and while I waited for the banks to reappear, for the moment giving up the ford, I amused myself by writing the following two verses, on the feet of which, if not on my own, I crossed the foaming torrent. 'Praecipiti modo quod decurrit tramite flumen, Tempore consumptum iam cito deficiet.' You see that, inverting the order, you get the following: 'Deficiet cito iam consumptum tempore flumen, Tramite decurrit quod modo praecipiti.'

Of course the merit all lies in the arrangement of the words; elegance you must not expect, for there is none. The example sufficiently explains, I think, what you wanted to know. [7] It now falls to you to oblige me in a similar way by following my lead, and sending me something which I in my turn request. An ideal chance is yours in the near future of speaking in public on the most notable of subjects, the glory of that Julius Caesar in praise of whom you have already written. The theme is so great that even the most exuberant of orators might doubt his power of rising to the occasion. Even if we leave out of the account all that the historian of Padua1 has written on the fame of the invincible dictator, who could hope to challenge with the living word the work of Suetonius, or Juventius Martialis,2 or the Ephemerides of Balbus? Be the enterprise reserved for your hand. [8] My friendly care it shall rather be to see that the benches are well filled with auditors, and to prepare men's ears for the coming bursts of applause.3 While you exalt the virtues of another, it shall be my part to celebrate yours. Have no fear that I shall bring an audience of ignorant or spiteful Catos, ready to cloak either defect under a pretence of critical severity. One can make allowance for honest lack of culture, but people sly enough to detect good work, and at the same time grudge it credit, are detected and discredited themselves by every man of honour.

[9] Do not, then, be apprehensive on this account; every one will lend a favouring ear and a fostering support; we shall all enjoy together the refreshing pleasure which your recitation will give us. Some will extol your fluency, more your talent, all of us your freedom from conceit. For it is laudable indeed, when a young man, I might almost say a boy, can stand forth in the open arena and be adjudged the prize on the double ground of character and talent. Farewell.

XV.

To his friend Gelasius c. A. D. 481 [1] You prove my offence against you, and I do not defend myself on the charge. In so far as no letter in this collection bears your name, I have indeed offended. But you write that you will regard the fault as venial, provided I send you something for recital at table, like the letter in prose and verse which I sent not long ago to my friend Tonantius for a similar purpose. You conclude by deploring that when I drop into poetry I never write anything but hendecasyllables, preferring that in the present case I should substitute for this trochaic facility something composed in verses of six feet. I acquiesce, only hoping that the enclosed will please you, whether you style it ode or eclogue. The composition was hard work, for when one is out of practice in a given metre, to write in it is far from easy. 'You wish, dear friend, the fierce iambic to echo through my pages with impetuous rhythm, as hitherto the trochee; the spondee with its two slow feet and its time of four, to hold the flighty dactyl in check awhile; you wish that other swiftest of all feet to resound with these, named fitly from the Pyrrhic dance, and always to be placed at the conclusion; you wish next the anapaest to bound the beginning or the end of the verse, which only in strictness deserves its name when a third long syllable follows upon two short.

An ordinary poet----for such, you know, your Sollius is----has not the skill to manage all these measures. My note is uncertain, my wandering tongue has no art to unroll from echoing mouth the long-drawn epic. That skill is rather Leo's, or his who in Latin song follows in Leo's steps, and in the Greek stands first, who descends from the Sire of the Consentii; who with lyre and tone and measure has sung, men say, by the ford of Pegasus in every form we know, and in the Greek tongue has held the high stars by Pindar's side, and ranged victorious the twin-peaked hill, second to none among the caves of Delphi. But if either bard forsake the Doric speech, and sing to the poet's lyre a Latian strain, then, Flaccus, all too feebly shalt thou wield the plectrum of Venusia, and thou, O vanquished swan of Aufidus, shalt bow thy white and tuneful neck, moaning to hear the music of the swans of Atax.

Nor these alone are skilled, albeit than the common skilled more skilful. For the rhetor Severianus had sung with a more transcending voice, and Domnulus, the subtle bard of Africa, with more elegance, and the learned Petrus with more harmonious strength, whose love of writing letters would never have stayed him from composing marvellous verse. And

ever more masterly had been the melodious music of Proculus, him of Ligurian home and race, so finishing his graceful poems as to make his country rival in men's love Mantua of the Venetian land, and himself arise the peer of Homer in his glory, or drive abreast with Maro's car. But I, whose thought and style merit contempt, how should I raise my babbling voice among these, even for your pleasure, without proof of babbling unashamed and achievement falling ever short of my ambition? Yet if even this shame suffice not to deter me, how shall I deny you? Love knows not fear: 'tis therefore I obey.'

[2] Do not, now, be critical with one who picks up a lost thread; all I ask is some indulgence for an art I rarely practise. If in future you make more such demands, you will have to smooth the path of my obedience, by giving me either a subject for my Muse, or a dance to put me in the comic vein. Farewell.

XVI.

To his friend Firminus c. A. D. 484 [1] You may remember, honoured Son, asking me to add a ninth book, specially composed for you, to the eight already issued: those addressed to Constantius, whose great qualities are known to you, his eminent capacity, his sanity in counsel, his pre-eminent gift of eloquence, by which, in the discussion of public affairs, he eclipses all other speakers on his own or on the opposite side. Herewith I fulfil my promise with punctuality, if not strictly as proposed. [2] For on my return after my diocesan visitation,1 I began going through all my mouldering old papers for any chance drafts of letters that might be among them; I worked as fast and as hard as I could, and then had them out and transcribed them with all speed. I did not allow the wintry season to interfere with my resolve of fulfilling your desire, though the copyist was hindered by the cold which prevented the ink drying on the page; the drops froze harder than the pen,1 and as the hand pressed the point on the page, they seemed to break from it rather than to flow. I have done my best to acquit my obligation before the mild Favonian breeze brings his natal showers to fertilize our twelfth month, which you call the month of Numa. [3] I must now ask you not to require of me the two incompatible virtues of perfection and rapidity; for when a book is written, as it were, to order, the author may perhaps expect credit for punctual delivery but hardly for the quality of his work.

As you profess delight with the iambics I recently sent to our very genial friend Gelasius, you too shall have your present in the shape of these little slaves of Mytilene.2 * 'Now has my bark steered its bold course on the twin seas of prose and verse, nor have I feared to ply the tiller on their sundered tides. I have lowered the yards, furled the great sails, and laid down the oar; my thwarts have run alongside, I have leapt ashore to kiss the dear-loved sands. The jealous chorus of my foes makes muttering; they snarl like furious dogs; but openly they dare say nothing; they fear the public approval which is mine. Hissings of evil tongues beat upon the poop, and shake the keel, and toss the curved sides of my boat; they fly about the mast. For I, having recked nought of the heaving storms, with the steersman's guardian art have held my prow straight and come safe to port, winner of a twofold crown. One the Roman people granted, and the purple-robed senate assigned, and with a single voice the company of the lettered, what time Nerva Trajan's forum saw arise a lasting statue to my honour, set up between the founders of the two Libraries.1 The other was mine wellnigh

two lustres after, when I received the honour of that high office which now alone maintains the rights of people and of senate.2

Heroic verse I have written, and much have I woven in lighter vein; elegiacs in six feet I have turned with twin caesura. Now, trained to ride my course in lines of eleven syllables I have gloried in a swift way; singing many a time in Sapphic metre, rarely in the impetuous iambic. Nor can I now call to mind all that once I wrote in the ardour of past youth; would that the mass of it might be buried away and withdrawn into silence! For as we come to our last years, and the goal of old age draws nearer, the deeper grows our shame, remembering the levities of our callow youth. In the dread of that remembrance, I transferred all my care to the epistolary style, that though guilty of foolishness in song I might be innocent in deed; nor be esteemed one all dissolved in pretty phrases, filling my page with tropes and idle trappings, by which the poet's empty fame might stain the austerity of the priest.

Henceforth I plunge no more into any kind of verse; be the measure light or grave, I shall not readily be drawn to produce a song again; Unless it be to sing the trials of men persecuted for the faith, and martyrs worthy of heaven, who have bought by death the reward of eternal life. First my chant should celebrate the prelate who held the throne of Toulouse,1 whom they flung headlong down from the highest steps of the Capitol. Who denied Jove and Minerva, and confessed the blessing of Christ's cross, and therefore was bound by a raging mob to the wild bull's back. That when the beast was driven to full speed over the height, his rent body was flung to earth, and the rock reddened with the pulp of his reeking brain. And after Saturninus my lyre should sing all those other guardian saints who through many tribulations have proved my helpers at need.

Their several names my pious song may not rehearse; but though they sound not from the strings, they shall ever find echo in my heart.' [4] Let me at the end drop verse for prose, and so conform to the scheme originally proposed for my book. If I closed an unmetrical work with rhyme, I should break the rule of Horace,2 and turn out as common pot what began as amphora. Farewell. * Translated into German verse by Fertig, Part iii, pp. 23-4.

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.