

THE WORKS OF DIONYSIUS

DIONYSIUS

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1. A COMMENTARY ON THE BEGINNING OF ECCLESIASTES.(2)

CHAP. I.

VER. I. "The words of the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem."

In like manner also Matthew calls the Lord the son of David.(3)

3. "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?"

For what man is there who, although he may have become rich by toiling after the objects of this earth, has been able to make himself three cubits in stature, if he is naturally only of two cubits in stature? Or who, if blind, has by these means recovered his sight? Therefore we ought to direct our toils to a goal beyond the sun: for thither, too, do the exertions of the virtues reach.

4. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (unto the age).

Yes, unto the age,(4) but not unto the ages.(5)

16. "I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

17. I knew parables and science: that this indeed is also the spirit's choice.(6)

18. For in multitude of wisdom is multitude of knowledge: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth grief."

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I was vainly puffed up, and increased wisdom; not the wisdom which God has given, but that wisdom of which Paul says, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."⁽⁷⁾ For in

this Solomon had also an experience surpassing prudence, and above the measure of all the ancients. Consequently he shows the vanity of it, as what follows in like manner demonstrates: "And my heart uttered⁽⁸⁾ many things: I knew wisdom, and knowledge, and parables, and sciences." But this was not the genuine wisdom or knowledge, but that which, as Paul says, puffeth up. He spake, moreover, as it is written,⁽⁹⁾ three thousand parables. But these were not parables of a spiritual kind, but only such as fit the common polity of men; as, for instance, utterances about animals or medicines. For which reason he has added in a tone of raillery, "I knew that this also is the spirit's choice." He speaks also of the multitude of knowledge, not the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, but that which the prince of this world works, and which he conveys to men in order to overreach their souls, with officious questions as to the measures of heaven, the position of earth, the bounds of the sea. But he says also, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." For they search even into things deeper than these, inquiring, for example, what necessity there is for fire to go upward, and for water to go downward; and when they have learned that it is because the one is light and the other heavy, they do but increase sorrow: for the question still remains, Why might it not be the very reverse?

CHAP. II.

Ver. I. "I said in mine heart, Go to now, make trial as in mirth, and behold in good. And this, too, is vanity."

For it was for the sake of trial, and in accordance with what comes by the loftier and the severe life, that he entered into pleasure, And he makes mention of the mirth, which men call so. And he says, "in good," referring to what men call good things, which are not capable of giving life to their possessor. and which make the man who engages in them vain like themselves.

2. "I said of laughter, It is mad;⁽¹⁾ and of mirth, What doest thou?"

Laughter has a twofold madness; because madness begets laughter, and does not allow the sorrowing for sins; and also because a man of that sort is possessed with madness,⁽²⁾ in the confusing of seasons, and places, and persons. For he flees from those who sorrow. "And to mirth, What doest thou?" Why dost thou repair to those who are not at liberty to be merry? Why to the drunken, and the avaricious, and the rapacious? And why this phrase, "as wine?"³ Because wine makes the heart merry; and it acts upon the poor in spirit. The flesh, however, also makes the heart merry, when it acts in a regular and moderate fashion.

3. "And my heart directed me in wisdom, and to overcome in mirth, until I should know what is that good thing to the sons of men which they shall do under the sun for the number of the days of their life."

Being directed, he says, by wisdom, I overcame pleasures in mirth. Moreover, for me the aim of knowledge was to occupy myself with nothing vain, but to find the good; for if a person finds that, he does not miss the discernment also of the profitable. The sufficient is also the opportune,⁽⁴⁾ and is commensurate with the length of life.

4. "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards.

5. I made me gardens and orchards.

6. I made me pools of water, that by these I

might rear woods producing trees.

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7. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had large possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me.
8. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces. I gat me men—singers and women—singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as cups and the cupbearer.
9. And I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.
10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any pleasure."

You see how he reckons up a multitude of houses and fields, and the other things which he mentions, and then finds nothing profitable in them. For neither was he any better in soul by

reason of these things, nor by their means did he gain friendship with God. Necessarily he is led to speak also of the true riches and the abiding property. Being minded, therefore, to show what kinds of possessions remain with the possessor, and continue steadily and maintain themselves for him, he adds: "Also my wisdom remained with me." For this alone remains, and all these other things, which he has already reckoned up, flee away and depart. Wisdom, therefore, remained with me, and I remained in virtue of it. For those other things fall, and also cause the fall of the very persons who run after them. But, with the intention of instituting a comparison between wisdom and those things which are held to be good among men, he adds these words, "And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them," and so forth; whereby he describes as evil, not only those toils which they endure who toil in gratifying themselves with pleasures, but those, too, which by necessity and constraint men have to sustain for their maintenance day by day, labouring at their different occupations in the sweat of their faces. For the labour, he says, is great; but the art(5) by the labour is temporary, adding(6) nothing serviceable among things that please. Wherefore there is no profit. For where there is no excellence there is no profit. With reason, therefore, are the objects of such solicitude but vanity, and the spirit's choice. Now this name of "spirit" he gives to the "soul." For choice is a quality, not a motion.(7) And David says: "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit."(8) And in good truth "did my wisdom remain with me," for it made me know and understand, so as to enable me to speak of all that is not advantageous(9) under the sun. If, therefore, we desire the righteously profitable, if we seek the truly advantageous, if in is our aim to be incorruptible, let us engage those labours which reach beyond the sun. For in these there is no vanity, and there is not the choice of a spirit at once inane and hurried hither and thither to no purpose.

12. "And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what man is there that shall come after counsel in all those things which it has done?"(10)

He means the wisdom which comes from God, and which also remained with him. And by madness and folly he designates all the labours of men, and the vain and silly pleasure they have in them. Distinguishing these, therefore, and their measure, and blessing the true wisdom, he has added: "For what man is there that shall come after counsel?" For this counsel instructs us in the wisdom that is such indeed, and gifts us with deliverance from madness and folly.

13. "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as much as light excelleth darkness."

He does not say this in the way of comparison. For things which are contrary to each other, and mutually destructive, cannot be compared. But his decision was, that the one is to be chosen, and the other avoided. To like effect is the saying, "Men loved darkness rather than light."(1) For the term "rather" in that passage expresses the choice of the person loving, and not the comparison of the objects themselves.

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14. "The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness."

That man always inclines earthward, he means, and has the ruling faculty(2) darkened. It is true, indeed, that we men have all of us our eyes in our head, if we speak of the mere disposition of the body. But he speaks here of the eyes of the mind. For as the eyes of the swine do not turn naturally up towards heaven, just because it is made by nature to have an inclination toward the belly; so the mind of the man who has once been enervated by pleasures is not easily diverted from the tendency thus assumed, because he has not "respect unto all the commandments of the Lord.(3) Again: Christ is the head of the Church."(4) And they, therefore, are the wise who walk in His way; for He Himself has said, "I am the way."(5) On this account, then, it becomes the wise man always to keep the eyes of his mind directed toward Christ Himself, in order that he may do nothing out of measure, neither being lifted up in heart in the time of prosperity, nor becoming negligent in the day of adversity: "for His judgments are a great deep,"(6) as you will learn more exactly from what is to follow.

14. "And I perceived myself also that one event happeneth to them all.

15. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?"

The run of the discourse in what follows deals with those who are of a mean spirit as regards this present life, and in whose judgment the article of death and all the anomalous pains of the body are a kind of dreaded evil, and who on this account hold that there is no profit in a life of virtue, because there is no difference made in ills like these between the wise man and the fool. He speaks consequently of these as the words of a madness inclining to utter senselessness; whence he also adds this sentence, "For the fool talks over-much;"(7) and by the "fool" here he means himself, and every one who reasons in that way. Accordingly he condemns this absurd way of thinking. And for the same reason he has given utterance to such sentiments in the fears of his heart; and dreading the righteous condemnation of those who are to be heard, he solves the difficulty in its pressure by his own reflections. For this word, "Why was I then wise?" was the word of a man in doubt and difficulty whether what is expended on wisdom is done well or to no purpose; and whether there is no difference between the wise man and the fool in point of advantage, seeing that the former is involved equally with the latter in the same sufferings which happen in this present world. And for this reason he says, "I spoke over-largely(8) in my heart," in thinking that there is no difference between the wise man and the fool.

16. "For there is no remembrance of the wise equally with the fool for ever."

For the events that happen in this life are all transitory, be they even the painful incidents, of which he says, "As all things now are consigned to oblivion."(9) For after a short space has passed by, all the things that befall men in this life perish in forgetfulness. Yea, the very persons to whom these things have happened are not remembered all in like manner, even although they may have gone through like chances in life. For they are not remembered for these, but only for what they may have evinced of wisdom or folly, virtue or vice. The memories of such are not extinguished (equally) among men in consequence of the changes of lot befalling them. Wherefore he has added this: "And how shall the wise man die along with the fool? The death of sinners, indeed, is evil: yet the memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked is extinguished."(10)

22. "For that falls to man in all his labour."

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In truth, to those who occupy their minds with the distractions of life, life becomes a painful thing, which, as it were, wounds the heart with its goads, that is, with the lustful desires of increase. And sorrowful also is the solicitude connected with covetousness: it does not so much gratify those who are successful in it, as it pains those who are unsuccessful; while the day is spent in laborious anxieties, and the night puts sleep to flight from the eyes, with the cares of making gain. Vain, therefore, is the zeal of the man who looks to these things.

24. "And there is nothing good for a man, but what he eats and

drinks, and what will show to his soul good in his labour. This also I saw, that

it is from the hand of God.

25. For who eats and drinks from his own resources?"(1) That the discourse does not deal now with material meats, he will show by what follows; namely, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting."(2) And so in the present passage he proceeds to add: "And (what) will show to his soul good in its labour." And surely mere material meats and drinks are not the soul's good. For the flesh, when luxuriously nurtured, wars against the soul, and rises in revolt against the spirit. And how should not intemperate eatings and drinkings also be contrary to God?(3) He speaks, therefore, of things mystical. For no one shall partake of the spiritual table, but one who is called by Him, and who has listened to the wisdom which says, "Take and eat."(4)

CHAP. III.

Ver. 3. "There is a time to kill, and a time to heal."

To "kill," in the case of him who perpetrates unpardonable transgression; and to "heal," in the case of him who can show a wound that will bear remedy.

4. "A time to weep, and a time to laugh."

A time to weep, when it is the time of suffering; as when the Lord also says, "Verily I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament."(5) But to laugh, as concerns the resurrection: "For your sorrow," He says, "shall be turned into joy."(6)

4. "A time to mourn, and a time to dance."

When one thinks of the death which the transgression of Adam brought on us, it is a time to mourn; but it is a time to hold festal gatherings when we call to mind the resurrection from the dead which we expect through the new Adam.(7)

6. "A time to keep, and a time to cast away."

A time to keep the Scripture against the unworthy, and a time to put it forth for the worthy. Or, again: Before the incarnation it was a time to keep the letter of the law; but it was a time to cast it away when the truth came in its flower.

7. "A time to keep silence, and a time to speak."

A time to speak, when there are hearers who receive the word; but a time to keep silence, when the hearers pervert the word; as Paul says: "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject."(8)

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10. "I have seen, then, the travail which God hath given to the sons

of men to be exercised in it.

11. Everything that He hath made is beautiful in its time: and He

hath set the whole world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning and to the end."

And this is true. For no one is able to comprehend the works of God altogether. Moreover, the world is the work of God. No one, then, can find out as to this world what is its space from the beginning and unto the end, that is to say, the period appointed for it, and the limits before determined unto it; forasmuch as God has set the whole world as a realm of ignorance in our hearts. And thus one says: "Declare to me the shortness of my days." (9) In this manner, and for our profit, the end of this world (age) that is to say, this present life is a thing of which we are ignorant.

II. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE. AN INTERPRETATION.

CHAP. XXII. 42–48.

Ver. 42. "Father, if Thou be willing to remove(10) this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done."

But let these things be enough to say on the subject of the will. This word, however, "Let the cup pass," does not mean, Let it not come near me, or approach me. (11) For what can "pass from Him," certainly must first come nigh Him; and what does pass thus from Him, must be by Him. For if it does not reach Him, it cannot pass from Him. For He takes to Himself the person of man, as having been made man. Wherefore also on this occasion He deprecates the doing of the inferior, which is His own, and begs that the superior should be done, which is His Father's, to wit, the divine will; which again, however, in respect of the divinity, is one and the same will in Himself and in the Father. For it was the Father's will that He should pass through every trial (temptation); and the Father Himself in a marvellous manner brought Him on this course, not indeed with the trial itself as His goal, nor in order simply that He might enter into that, but in order that He might prove Himself to be above the trial, and also beyond it. (12) And surely it is the fact, that the Saviour asks neither what is impossible, nor what is impracticable, nor what is contrary to the will of the Father. It is something possible; for I Mark makes mention of His saying, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee." (1) And they are possible if He wills them; for Luke tells us that He said, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove(2) this cup from me." The Holy Spirit, therefore, apportioned among the evangelists, makes up the full account of our Sav-iour's whole disposition by the expressions of these several narrators together. He does not, then, ask of the Father what the Father wills not. For the words, "If Thou be willing," were demonstrative of subjection and docility? not of ignorance or hesitancy. For this reason, the other scripture says, "All things are possible unto Thee." And Matthew again admirably describes the submission and humility(4) when he says, "If it be possible." For unless I adapt the sense in this way,(5) some will perhaps assign an impious signification to this expression, "If it be possible;" as if there were anything impossible for God to do, except that only which He does not will to do. But ... being straightway strengthened in His humanity by His ancestral(6) divinity, he urges the safer petition, and desires no longer that should be the case, but that it might be accomplished in accordance with the Father's good pleasure, in glory, in constancy, and in fulness. For John, who has given us the record of the sublimest and divinest of the Saviour's words and deeds, heard Him speak thus: "And the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (7) Now, to drink the cup was to discharge the ministry and the whole economy of trial with fortitude, to follow and fulfil the Father's determination, and to surmount all apprehensions. And the exclamation, "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" was in due accordance with the requests He had previously made: Why is it that death has been in conjunction with me

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all along up till now, and that I bear not yet the cup? This I judge to have been the Saviour's meaning in this concise utterance.

And He certainly spake truth then. Nevertheless He was not forsaken. But He drank out the cup at once, as His plea had implied, and then passed away.(8) And the vinegar which was handed to Him seems to me to have been a symbolical thing. For the turned wine(9) indicated very well the quick turning(10) and change which He sustained, when He passed from His passion to impassibility, and from death to deathlessness, and from the position of one judged to that of one judging, and from subjection under the despot's power to the exercise of kingly dominion. And the sponge, as I think, signified the complete transfusion(11) of the Holy Spirit that was realized in Him. And the reed symbolized the royal sceptre and the divine law. And the hyssop expressed that quickening and saving resurrection of His, by which He has also brought health to us.(12)

43. "And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

44. And being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

The phrase, "a sweat of blood," is a current parabolic expression used of persons in intense pain and distress; as also of one in bitter grief people say that the man "weeps tears of blood." For in using the expression, "as it were great drops of blood," he does not declare the drops of sweat to have been actually drops of blood.(13) For he would not then have said that these drops of sweat were like blood. For such is the force of the expression, "as it were great drops." But rather with the object of making it plain that the Lord's body was not bedewed with any kind of subtle moisture which had only the show and appearance of actuality, but that it was really suffused all over with sweat in the shape of large thick drops, he has taken the great drops of blood as an illustration of what was the case with Him. And accordingly, as by the intensity of the supplication and the severe agony, so also by the dense and excessive sweat, he made the facts patent, that the Saviour was man by nature and in reality, and not in mere semblance and appearance, and that He was subject to all the innocent sensibilities natural to men. Nevertheless the words, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again,"(14) show that His passion was a voluntary thing; and besides that, they indicate that the life which is laid down and taken again is one thing, and the divinity which lays that down and takes it again is another.

He says, "one thing and another," not as making a partition into two persons, but as showing the distinction between the two natures.(15)

And as, by voluntarily enduring the death in the flesh, He implanted incorruptibility in it; so also, by taking to Himself of His own free-will the passion of our servitude,(1) He set in it the seeds of constancy and courage, whereby He has nerved those who believe on Him for the mighty conflicts belonging to their witness-bearing. Thus, also, those drops of sweat flowed from Him in a marvellous way like great drops of blood, in order that He might, as it were, drain off(2) and empty the fountain of the fear which is proper to our nature. For unless this had been done with a mystical import, He certainly would not, even had He been(3) the most timorous and ignoble of men, have been bedewed in this unnatural way with drops of sweat like drops of blood under the mere force of His agony.

Of like import is also the sentence in the narrative which tells us that an angel stood by the Saviour and strengthened Him. For this, too, bore also on the economy entered into on our behalf. For those who are appointed to engage in the sacred exertions of conflicts on account of piety, have the angels from heaven to assist them. And the prayer, "Father, remove the cup," He uttered probably not as if He feared the death itself, but with the view of challenging the devil by these words to erect the cross for Him. With words of deceit that personality deluded Adam; with the words of divinity, then, let the deceiver himself now be deluded. Howbeit assuredly the will of

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the Son is not one thing, and the will of the Father another.(4) For He who wills what the Father wills, is found to have the Father's will. It is in a figure, therefore, that He says, "not my will, but Thine." For it is not that He wishes the cup to be removed, but that He refers to the Father's will the right issue of His passion, and honours thereby the Father as the First.(5) For if the fathers(6) style one's disposition gnome,(7) and if such disposition relates also to what is in consideration hidden as if by settled purpose, how say some that the Lord, who is above all these things, bears a gnomonic will?(8) Manifestly that can be only by defect of reason.

45. "And when He rose from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow;

46. And said unto them, Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

For in the most general sense it holds good that it is apparently not possible for any man to remain altogether without experience of ill. For, as one says, the whole world lieth in wickedness;"(10) and again, "The most of the days of man are labour and trouble."(11) But you will perhaps say, What difference is there between being tempted, and falling or entering into temptation? Well, if one is overcome of evil and he will be overcome unless he struggles against it himself, and unless God protects him with His shield that man has entered into temptation, and is in it, and is brought under it like one that is led captive. But if one withstands and endures, that man is indeed tempted; but he has not entered into temptation, or fallen into it. Thus Jesus was led up of the Spirit, not indeed to enter into temptation, but to be tempted of the devil.(12) And Abraham, again, did not enter into temptation, neither did God lead him into temptation, but He tempted (tried) him; yet He did not drive him into temptation. The Lord Himself, moreover, tempted (tried) the disciples. Thus the wicked one, when he tempts us, draws us into the temptations, as dealing himself with the temptations of evil. But God, when He tempts (tries), adduces the temptations (trials) as one untempted of evil. For God, it is said, "cannot be tempted of evil."(13) The devil, therefore, drives us on by violence, drawing us to destruction; but God leads us by hand, training us for our salvation.

47. "And while He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus, and kissed Him.

48. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

How wonderful this endurance of evil by the Lord, who even kissed the traitor, and spake words softer even than the kiss! For He did not say, O thou abominable, yea, utterly abominable traitor, is this the return you make to us for so great kindness? But, somehow, He says simply "Judas," using the proper name, which was the address that would be used by one who commiserated a person, or who wished to call him back, rather than of one in anger. And He did not say, "thy Master, the Lord, thy benefactor;" but He said simply, "the Son of man," that is, the tender and meek one: as if He meant to say, Even supposing that I was not your Master, or Lord, or benefactor, dost thou still betray one so guilelessly and so tenderly affected towards thee, as even to kiss thee in the hour of thy treachery, and that, too, when the kiss was the signal for thy treachery? Blessed art Thou, O Lord! How great is this example of the endurance of evil that Thou hast shown us in Thine own person! how great, too, the pattern of lowliness! Howbeit, the Lord has given us this example, to show us that we ought not to give up offering our good counsel to our brethren, even should nothing remarkable be effected by our words.

For as incurable wounds are wounds which cannot be remedied either by severe applications, or by those which may act more pleasantly upon them;(1) so(2) the soul, when it is once carried captive, and gives itself up to any kind of(3) wickedness, and refuses to consider what is really profitable for it, although a myriad counsels should echo in it, takes no good to itself. But just as if the sense of hearing were dead within it, it receives no benefit

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from exhortations addressed to it; not because it cannot, but only because it will not. This was what happened in the case of Judas. And yet Christ, although He knew all these things beforehand, did not at any time, from the beginning on to the end, omit to do all in the way of counsel that depended on Him. And inasmuch as we know that such was His practice, we ought also unceasingly to endeavour to set those right⁽⁴⁾ who prove careless, even although no actual good may seem to be effected by that counsel.

III. ON LUKE XXII. 42, ETC.(5)

But let these things be enough to say on the subject of the will. This word, however, "Let the cup pass," does not mean, Let it not come near me, or approach me. For what can pass from Him must certainly first come nigh Him, and what does thus pass from Him must be by Him. For if it does not reach Him, it cannot pass from Him. Accordingly, as if He now felt it to be present, He began to be in pain, and to be troubled, and to be sore amazed, and to be in an agony. And as if it was at hand and placed before Him, He does not merely say "the cup," but He indicates it by the word "this." Therefore, as what passes from one is something which neither has no approach nor is permanently settled with one, so the Saviour's first request is that the temptation which has come softly and plainly upon Him, and associated itself lightly with Him, may be turned aside. And this is the first form of that freedom from falling into temptation, which He also counsels the weaker disciples to make the subject of their prayers; that, namely, which concerns the approach of temptation: for it must needs be that offences come, but yet those to whom they come ought not to fall into the temptation. But the most perfect mode in which this freedom from entering into temptation is exhibited, is what He expresses in His second request, when He says not merely, "Not as I will," but also, "but as Thou wilt." For with God there is no temptation in evil; but He wills to give us good exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think. That His will, therefore, is the perfect will, the Beloved Himself knew; and often does He say that He has come to do that will, and not His own will, that is to say, the will of men. For He takes to Himself the person of men, as having been made man. Wherefore also on this occasion He deprecates the doing of the inferior, which is His own, and begs that the superior should be done, which is His Father's, to wit, the divine will, which again, however, in respect of the divinity, is one and the same will in Himself and in His Father. For it was the Father's will that He should pass through every trial (temptation), and the Father Himself in a marvellous manner brought Him on this course; not indeed, with the trial itself as His goal, nor in order simply that He might enter into that, but in order that He might prove Himself to be above the trial, and also beyond it. And surely it is the fact that the Saviour asks neither what is impossible, nor what is impracticable, nor what is contrary to the will of the Father. It is something possible, for Mark makes mention of His saying, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee;" and they are possible if He wills them, for Luke tells us that He said, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me." The Holy Spirit therefore, apportioned among the evangelists, makes up the full account of our Saviour's whole disposition by the expressions of these several narrators together. He does not then ask of the Father what the Father wills not. For the words, "if Thou be willing," were demonstrative of subjection and docility, not of ignorance or hesitancy. And just as when we make any request that may be accordant with his judgment, at the hand of father or ruler or any one of those whom we respect, we are accustomed to use the address, though not certainly as if we were in doubt about it, "if you please;" so the Saviour also said, "if Thou be willing:" not that He thought that He willed something different, and thereafter learned the fact, but that He understood exactly God's willingness to remove the cup from Him, and as doing so also apprehended justly that what He wills is also possible unto Him. For this reason the other scripture says, "All things are possible unto Thee." And Matthew again admirably describes the submission and the humility, when he says, "if it be possible." For unless we adapt the sense in this way, some will perhaps assign an impious signification to this expression "if it be possible," as if there were anything impossible for God to do, except that only which He does not will to do. Therefore the request which He made was nothing independent, nor one which pleased Himself only, or opposed His Father's will, but one also in conformity with the mind of God. And yet some one may say that He is overborne and changes His mind, and asks presently something different from what He asked before, and holds no longer by His own will, but introduces His Father's will. Well, such truly is the case. Nevertheless He does not by any means make any change from one side to another; but He embraces another way, and a different method of carrying out one and the same transaction, which is also a thing

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agreeable to both; choosing, to wit, in place of the mode which is the inferior, and which appears unsatisfying also to Himself, the superior and more, admirable mode marked out by the Father. For no doubt He did pray that the cup might pass from Him; but He says also, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." He longs painfully, on the one hand, for its passing from Him, but (He knows that) it is better as the Father wills. For He does not utter a petition for its not passing away now, instead of one for its removal; but when its withdrawal is now before His view, He chooses rather that this should be ordered as the Father wills. For there is a twofold kind, of withdrawal: there is one in the instance of an object that has shown itself and reached another, and is gone at once on being followed by it or on outrunning it, as is the case with racers when they graze each other in passing; and there is another in the instance of an object that has sojourned and tarried with another, and sat down by it, as in the case of a marauding band or a camp, and that after a time withdraws on being conquered, and on gaining the opposite of a success. For if they prevail they do not retire, but carry off with them those whom they have reduced; but if they prove unable to win the mastery, they withdraw themselves in disgrace. Now it was after the former similitude that He wished that the cup might come into His hands, and promptly pass from Him again very readily and quickly; but as soon as He spake thus, being at once strengthened in His humanity by the Father's divinity, He urges the safer petition, and desires no longer that should be the case, but that it might be accomplished in accordance with the Father's good pleasure, in glory, in constancy, and in fulness. For John, who has given us the record of the sublimest and divinest of the Saviour's words and deeds, heard Him speak thus: "Act the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Now, to drink the cup was to discharge the ministry and the whole economy of trial with fortitude, to follow and fulfil the Father's determination, and to surmount all apprehensions; and, indeed, in the very prayer which He uttered He showed that He was leaving these (apprehensions) behind Him. For of two objects, either may be said to be removed from the other: the object that remains may be said to be removed from the one that goes away, and the one that goes away may be said to be removed from the one that remains. Besides, Matthew has indicated most clearly that He did indeed pray that the cup might pass from Him, but yet that His request was that this should take place not as He willed, but as the Father willed it. The words given by Mark and Luke, again, ought to be introduced in their proper connection. For Mark says, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt;" and Luke says, "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done." He did then express Himself to that effect, and He did desire that His passion might abate and reach its end speedily. But it was the Father's will at the same time that He should carry out His conflict in a manner demanding sustained effort,(2) and in sufficient measure. Accordingly He (the Father) adduced all that assailed Him. But of the missiles that were hurled against Him, some were shivered in pieces, and others were dashed back as with invulnerable arms of steel, or rather as from the stern and immoveable rock. Blows, spittings, scourgings, death, and the lifting up in that death,(3) all came upon Him; and when all these were gone through, He became silent and endured in patience unto the end, as if He suffered nothing, or was already dead. But when His death was being prolonged, and when it was now overmastering Him, if we may so speak, beyond His utmost strength, He cried out to His Father, "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" And this exclamation was in due accordance with the requests He had previously made: Why is it that death has been in such close conjunction with me all along up till now, and Thou dost not yet bear the cup past me?(4) Have I not drunk it already, and drained it? But if not, my dread is that I may be utterly consumed by its continuous pressure;(5) and that is what would befall me, wert Thou to forsake me: then would the fulfilment abide, but I would pass away, and

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be made of none effect.(1) Now, then, I entreat Thee, let my baptism be finished, for indeed I have been straitened greatly until it should be accomplished. This I judge to have been the Saviour's meaning in this concise utterance. And He certainly spake truth then. Nevertheless He was not forsaken. Albeit He drank out the cup at once, as His plea had implied, and then passed away. And the vinegar which was handed to Him seems to me to have been a symbolical thing. For the turned wine indicated very well the quick turning and change which He sustained when He passed from His passion to impassibility, and from death to deathlessness, and from the position of one judged to that of one judging, and from subjection under the despot's power to the exercise of kingly dominion. And the sponge, as I think, signified the complete transfusion of the Holy Spirit that was realized in Him. And the reed symbolized the royal sceptre and the divine law. And the hyssop expressed that quickening and saving

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resurrection of His by which He has also brought health to us.(2) But we have gone through these matters in sufficient detail on Matthew and John. With the permission of God, we shall speak also of the account given by Mark. But at present we shall keep to what follows in our passage.

IV. AN EXPOSITION OF LUKE XXII. 46, ETC.(3)

This prayer He also offered up Himself, falling repeatedly on His face; and on both occasions He urged His request for not entering into temptation: both when He prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and when He said, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." For He spoke of not entering into temptation, and He made that His prayer; but He did not ask that He should have no trial whatsoever in these circumstances, or(4) that no manner of hardship should ever befall Him. For in the most general application it holds good, that it does not appear to be possible for any man to remain altogether without experience of ill: for, as one says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness;"(5) and again, "The most of the days of man are labour and trouble,"(6) as men themselves also admit. Short is our life, and full of sorrow. Howbeit it was not meet that He should bid them pray directly that that curse might not be fulfilled, which is expressed thus: "Cursed is the ground in thy works: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;"(7)

or thus, "Earth thou art, and unto earth shall thou return."(8) For which reason the Holy Scriptures, that indicate in many various ways the dire distressfulness of life, designate it as a valley of weeping. And most of all indeed is this world a scene of pain to the saints, to whom He addresses this word, and He cannot lie in uttering it: "In the world ye shall have tribulation."(9) And to the same effect also He says by the prophet, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous."(10) But I suppose that He refers to this entering not into temptation, when He speaks in the prophet's words of being delivered out of the afflictions. For He adds, "The Lord will deliver him out of them all." And this is just in accordance with the Saviour's word, whereby He promises that they will overcome their afflictions, and that they will participate in that victory which He has won for them. For after saying, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," He added, "But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And again, He taught them to pray that they might not fall into temptation, when He said, "And lead us not into temptation;" which means, "Suffer us not to fall into temptation." And to show that this did not imply they should not be tempted, but really that they should be delivered from the evil, He added, "But deliver us from evil." But perhaps you will say, What difference is there between being tempted, and falling or entering into temptation? Well, if one is overcome of evil and he will be overcome unless he struggles against it himself, and unless God protects him with His shield that man has entered into temptation, and is in it, and is brought under it like one that is led captive. But if one withstands and endures, that man is indeed tempted; but he has not entered into temptation, or fallen under it. Thus Jesus was led up of the Spirit, not indeed to enter into temptation, but "to be tempted of the devil."(11) And Abraham, again, did not enter into temptation, neither did God lead him into temptation, but He tempted (tried) him; yet He did not drive him into temptation. The Lord Himself, moreover, tempted (tried) the disciples. And thus the wicked one, when he tempts us, draws us into the temptations, as dealing himself with the temptations of evil; but God, when He tempts (tries), adduces the temptations as one untempted of evil. For God, it is said, "cannot be tempted of evil."(12) The devil, therefore, drives us on by violence, drawing us to destruction; but God leads us by the hand, training us for our salvation.

V. ON JOHN VIII. 12.(1)

Now this word "I am" expresses His eternal subsistence. For if He is the reflection of the eternal light, He must also be eternal Himself. For if the light subsists for ever, it is evident that the reflection also subsists for ever. And that this light subsists, is known only by its shining; neither can there be a light that does not give light. We come back, therefore, to our illustrations. If there is day, there is light; and if there is no such thing, the sun certainly cannot be present.(2) If, therefore, the sun had been eternal, there would also have been endless day. Now, however, as it is not so, the day begins when the sun rises, and it ends when the sun sets. But God is eternal light, having neither beginning nor end. And along with Him there is the reflection, also without beginning, and

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everlasting. The Father, then, being eternal, the Son is also eternal, being light of light; and if God is the light, Christ is the reflection; and if God is also a Spirit, as it is written, "God is a Spirit," Christ, again, is called analogously Spirit.(3)

VI. OF THE ONE SUBSTANCE.(4)

The plant that springs from the root is something distinct from that whence it grows up; and yet it is of one nature with it. And the river which flows from the fountain is something distinct from the fountain. For we cannot call either the river a fountain, or the fountain a river. Nevertheless we allow that they are both one according to nature, and also one in substance; and we admit that the fountain may be conceived of as father, and that the river is what is begotten of the fountain.(5)

VII. ON THE RECEPTION OF THE LAPSED TO PENITENCE.(6)

But now we are doing the opposite. For whereas Christ, who is the good Shepherd, goes in quest of one who wanders, lost among the mountains, and calls him back when he flees from Him, and is at pains to take him up on His shoulders when He has found him, we, on the contrary, harshly spurn such a one even when He approaches us. Yet let us not consult so miserably for ourselves, and let us not in this way be driving the sword against ourselves. For when people set themselves either to do evil or to do good to others, what they do is certainly not confined to the carrying out of their will on those others; but just as they attach themselves to iniquity or to goodness, they will themselves become possessed either by divine virtues or by unbridled passions. And the former will become the followers and comrades of the good angels; and both in this world and in the other, with the enjoyment of perfect peace and immunity from all ills, they will fulfil the most blessed destinies unto all eternity, and in God's fellowship they will be for ever (in possession of) the supremest good. But these latter will fall away at once from the peace of God and from peace with themselves, and both in this world and after death they will abide with the spirits of blood-guiltiness.(7) Wherefore let us not thrust from us those who seek a penitent return; but let us receive them gladly, and number them once more with the steadfast, and make up again what is defective in them.