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TRANSLATIONS  
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THE "OCTAVIUS"  
OF  
MINUCIUS FELIX

J. H. FREESE, M.A.



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TRANSLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE  
SERIES II  
LATIN TEXTS

THE "OCTAVIUS"  
OF  
MINUCIUS FELIX





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THE OCTAVIUS OF  
MINUCIUS FELIX

*By* J. H. FREESE.

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE. London  
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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE text from which the present translation has been made is that of Waltzing (1912) in the Teubner series. In a few instances, an emendation has been adopted, where his reading seemed to admit of no satisfactory rendering. For the rearrangement of part of the matter in xxii.—xxiv. see his *Studia Minuciana*.

The amount of literature which has grown up round this extremely interesting little work, especially during the last fifty years, may almost without exaggeration be called enormous, considering the shortness of the original—about 13,000 words. Within the present limits it was impossible to give an exhaustive list of such treatises and articles, but one will be found in Waltzing's Bibliography (*see* *Intro.* § 1), which contains the names of no fewer than 150 scholars who have written on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

In preparing the translation, the variorum edition in Migne's *Patrologiæ Cursus*, and those of Holden and Léonard have been consulted throughout. Waltzing's Commentary and special Lexicon have unfortunately not been available.

<sup>1</sup> *See also* Introduction to the Teubner edition.







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## INTRODUCTION

### § I. THE TEXT

THE only MS. of the *Octavius* is a ninth-century MS. in the Paris Library (no. 1661). It was at one time in the Vatican Library, but was presented by Pope Leo X to the French King Francis I. There is an eleventh-century copy of it at Brussels. The MS. contains seven books of Arnobius' *Adversus Gentes*, the seventh book being followed by the note *Arnobii liber vii explicit incipit liber viii*. ("here the seventh book of Arnobius ends, and the eighth begins"). The copyist had confused *Octavus* and *Octavius*, and his mistake has preserved the treatise which otherwise might have been lost. While the MS. was still in the Vatican, the *editio princeps* was published at Rome by Faustus Sabæus of Brescia, Keeper of the Vatican Library, who is said to have originally found the MS. in Germany or Switzerland. In this and two subsequent editions, one by the famous Erasmus, the *Octavius* appears as the eighth book of Arnobius. But the references in Lactantius and Jerome (*see* § 2) to a certain Minucius Felix, who had written a treatise called *Octavius*, and the subject-matter of the so-called eighth book, which had little in common with Arnobius, put the learned on the right track. The mistake was discovered and rectified by the French scholar Franciscus Balduinus (François Baudouin), who published it as



an independent work (Heidelberg, 1560). Since then numerous editions have been published, of which the most important are the following: J. Wowerus (Wouwers), 1603; N. Rigaltius (Rigault), 1643; J. G. Lindner, 1760; in Migne's *Patrologiæ Cursus*, iii. (1844), with variorum notes and excursuses; H. A. Holden (1853), with commentary, the only English edition. The first really critical edition is that of C. Halm (1867), in *Corpus ecclesiasticorum Scriptorum*, ii. Since then ever-increasing attention has been devoted to the little work, especially during the last fifty years. Later editions: E. Bährens (1886); H. Boenig (1903); A. Schöne (1913); F. Léonard (Namur, 1883). But the scholar who has done most for Minucius is J. P. Waltzing, from whom we have an edition with notes and commentary (Bruges, 1909); *Lexicon Minucianum* (1909); text (1912), in the Teubner series: *Studia Minuciana* (1906); bibliography of the subject in *Musée Belge*, vi., 1902. There are English translations by D. Dalrymple (Lord Hailes), 1781, 1854; in Clark's *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*; A. A. Brodribb, "freely translated," 1903; German, by A. Bieringer, 1871; B. Dombart, 1881; French by J. P. Waltzing, 1903, A. Genoude, 1839; also Italian and Dutch translations. An English edition of the text with notes, embodying the results of the latest investigations, is a desideratum.

The following general works may also be consulted: Herzog-Hauck, *Real-encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie* (1903); O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Litteratur*, i. (1913); Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (1877); Murray's *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (1911); Teuffel's *History of Roman Literature*, ii. (1900); M. Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen*



*Litteratur*, iii. (1896); P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* (1901); G. Boissier, *La fin du paganisme* (1891); C. T. Cruttwell, *A Literary History of Early Christianity* (1893).

## § 2. THE AUTHOR

Hardly anything is known of Marcus Minucius Felix, author of the *Octavius*, and competitor with Lactantius for the title of the "Christian Cicero." Our information is derived from Lactantius and Jerome, supplemented by indications in the dialogue itself. The testimony of Lactantius (*Inst. Div.* v., 1, 21) is a somewhat lukewarm appreciation of Minucius's efforts as an apologist: "And if by chance any of the learned have devoted themselves to the study of it [Christian truth], they have shown themselves inadequate in its defence. Of those with whose writings I am acquainted, Minucius Felix was a distinguished advocate. His book, entitled *Octavius*, shows that he might have been an efficient champion of the truth, if he had given his attention entirely to the subject." Jerome (*de Viris illustribus*, 58, *Epp.* 70, 5) lays special stress on his learning: "Minucius Felix, a distinguished advocate at Rome, wrote a dialogue named *Octavius*, the subject of which is a discussion between a Christian and a heathen; another work (*On Fate*, or *Against the Astrologers*), which passes under his name, although it is the work of a man of ability, does not appear to me to be written in a corresponding style to the *Octavius*"; "I now come to the Latins. Minucius Felix, an advocate of Rome, in his treatise called *Octavius*, and in another work, *Against the Astrologers* (unless this is incorrectly ascribed to him), has left no heathen writer unexploited." In his *Commentary on*



*Isaiah* (viii. praef.) he mentions him amongst other well-known writers distinguished for their "flow of eloquence." It will be noted that the above extracts mention another work to which reference is made in the dialogue itself (36). Whether Minucius ever wrote such a work, or whether it was the production of a forger who traded on the reference to it in the dialogue, it is impossible to say ; in any case, if it ever existed it is now lost.

The information concerning the author contained in the treatise itself is meagre. It is evident that he was a man of considerable education, well read in profane literature (especially Latin), and his style, in addition to a certain legal atmosphere pervading it, shows that he had been well trained in one of the rhetorical schools. He appears to have been converted to Christianity late in life, having been preceded in that step by Octavius, his deceased friend and intimate companion of his youth, from whom the dialogue takes its name. It is evident from his own confession that before his conversion he was a bigoted heathen and he speaks quite frankly of the extra cruelties inflicted upon obstinate Christians in a sort of contemptuous pity, in order to make them confess their supposed crimes and so save their lives. He had a flourishing practice as a lawyer in Rome, but does not appear to have held any public office, at any rate not after his conversion ; he explicitly states that anything of the kind would have involved a violation of Christian principles.

As to his nationality, the French-African school of critics is strongly in favour of his being an African, like the other interlocutors of the dialogue. It is argued that no born Roman would have allowed the attacks upon the founders of Rome and the growth of the



empire to appear in a work for which he was responsible; that he is coupled with other African writers (Arnobius, Cyprian, Tertullian) by Lactantius and Jerome; that he mentions various African deities, such as Punic Juno, Baal-Saturn, and King Juba; that the Latinity smacks of Fronto and Apuleius, and that Fronto is twice cited as a compatriot; that the name occurs in African inscriptions. But the general opinion of scholars is that he was a Roman, and that his African origin is not proven.

### § 3. THE DATE

It is generally agreed that the *Octavius* was written at Rome, but the date of its composition is not settled, and in the absence of further decisive evidence, is likely to remain so.

The mention of Fronto (c. 100-170) by Minucius and of Minucius by Lactantius (c. 260-340) roughly gives the possible limits as 160-300, which most scholars narrow still further to 160-250. The meagre notices in Jerome and Lactantius are of no assistance in settling the date, and attempts to show that one of the Greek apologists of the second century, especially Athenagoras (fl. 180), served as a model are regarded as unsuccessful. But there is undoubtedly a close relationship between the *Octavius*, Tertullian's *Apologeticus* (written 197), and Cyprian's *Quod idola dii non sint* (c. 245). Cyprian's short treatise draws freely upon Minucius and Tertullian, while the resemblance between these two is so obvious that it is impossible to resist the conclusion that either Minucius copied from Tertullian or Tertullian from Minucius. A third alternative has been suggested: that both copied from a third treatise of a similar nature,



now lost. But there is no evidence of the existence of such a treatise, and it is difficult to understand how, if it had ever existed, it could have disappeared so completely without leaving any trace behind. The question therefore remains: which of the two wrote first—Minucius or Tertullian?—although its solution would only enable us to assign an approximate, not a definite, date to the composition. The *Octavius* and the *Apologeticus* contain no certain allusions to contemporary events, and a detailed comparison of the texts has led to no result. Lactantius puts Minucius before Tertullian, Jerome Tertullian before Minucius, but the nature of their testimony, in which there is probably no idea of chronological order, renders it of little value.

In early times Tertullian's claim to priority was regarded as incontrovertible, but the researches of Ebert led him to the opposite conviction. After the publication of his essay,<sup>1</sup> it was for some time considered that Minucius was first in order of time, and had the right to be considered the first Christian apologist. The mention of Fronto, on the assumption that he was alive at the time, was held to show that the *Octavius* was written between 150 and 200.

But the discovery of some inscriptions at Cirta (modern Constantine), dated 210–217, caused a revival of the controversy.<sup>2</sup> On these appears the name of one Cæcilius Natalis, a native of Cirta, and its magistrate in 210, who has been identified as the Cæcilius Natalis, who is one of the interlocutors in the *Octavius*. If this identity could be proved, the question would be solved.

<sup>1</sup> *Tertullian's Verhältnis zu Minucius Felix* (Leipzig, 1870); see also his *Allgemeine Geschichte der Lit. des Mittelalters* (1889).

<sup>2</sup> See H. Dessau in *Hermes*, xv. (1880).



The priority of Tertullian would be established beyond doubt, and the *Octavius* would be placed about the time of the death of Caracalla (217) or even later. But unfortunately, the identity cannot by any means be regarded as certain.

Harnack,<sup>1</sup> in opposition to Ebert, expresses the decided opinion that Minucius did not write in the second century. In other words, the *Octavius* cannot have been written before 197, the date of Tertullian's *Apologeticus*; therefore Minucius copied Tertullian. The following are some of his arguments. (a) Internal evidence seems to show that the *Octavius* was written at a time when Christianity had enjoyed a considerable, not spasmodic, freedom from religious persecution. This points to the period between the last persecutions under Caracalla (died 217) and the first under Decius (250). (b) The attacks upon the early rulers of Rome, their policy of aggrandizement based upon robbery and injustice, could only have been possible at a time when the empire was beginning to decay and the emperor had lost the respect of the people, certainly not during the age of the Antonines. Even if Minucius were an African, he was nevertheless a Latin and an advocate at Rome. (c) It is clear that Christianity had gained firm hold on the official world, into which it only began to make its way in the time of Commodus (died 192). (d) The language is not that of Apuleius and of the school of Fronto and Gellius of the second century (although other scholars are equally confident that it is).

Schanz<sup>2</sup> assigns the dialogue to the time of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius. His view is that it is specially

<sup>1</sup> *Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur*, ii. (1904).

<sup>2</sup> *Rheinisches Museum*, l. (1895).



written to refute the attack of Fronto on the Christians mentioned in the dialogue and during Fronto's lifetime.

Von Schultze<sup>1</sup> puts the date as far on as 300-303, but in that case it would be necessary to declare the *Idola* of Cyprian spurious.

Lastly, reference may be made to a statement in Cruttwell's *Literary History of Early Christianity* (p. 615): "A tradition of doubtful authority, but probable in itself, speaks of Minucius as a contemporary of Pope Urban of Rome." Urban was a Roman bishop (222-230) and the statement, if confirmed, would be a decisive argument in favour of a later date for the *Octavius*, but, according to Harnack, it rests on a misunderstanding.

#### § 4. THE DIALOGUE

The *Octavius* has been called a "little work of gold" and "the pearl of apologetics." The first description is justified, but this can hardly be said of the second. The reader is at once struck by the absence of reference to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity or specifically Christian dogmas. Thus, there is no allusion to the Logos, the name of Christ is not mentioned, there is no discussion of the higher mysteries of Christianity, nothing is said of revelation; there is a casual reference to the writings of the prophets and in one or two instances reminiscences of Biblical passages; the defender of Christianity uses in support of his arguments quotations, not from the Bible, but from the heathen poets and philosophers. The religion of Minucius appears to be limited to the following: (*a*) the unity of God; (*b*) resurrection of the body; (*c*) system of future rewards

<sup>1</sup> *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, vii. (1881).



and punishments. Various explanations of this striking phenomenon have been proposed : that the discipline of the Christian communities forbade the revelation of esoteric mysteries to the profane ; that Minucius was a recent convert, and consequently his knowledge of such matters was limited ; that he was in reality a heretic, not a whole-hearted believer.

As already mentioned, Schanz suggests that the *Octavius* really contains an answer to the attack upon Christianity by Fronto as represented in the speech of Cæcilius, and that the range of the argument is correspondingly limited. But it is doubtful whether Cæcilius can be regarded as reproducing the arguments of Fronto. Cæcilius appears as a semi-sceptic, whereas Fronto was a devoted adherent of the old religion.

It is more probable that the omission of much that one would have expected to find included is deliberate, and that the explanation is to be looked for in the nature of the audience whom Minucius was addressing. It will be noted that, at the conclusion of the *Octavius*, he himself admits that there are other points which he has left unconsidered, but which are necessary for a thorough understanding of the subject. The class of readers whom Minucius had in view was neither the emperor, nor the state officials, nor the lower orders, but the educated literary circle, of which Cæcilius is a representative. This circle, although posing as liberal and broad-minded in religious matters, was in reality strongly conservative the moment it came to a question of introducing new dogmas. To a class like this the spread of Christianity and the nature of its doctrines must have been especially disquieting, and there is no doubt that they were ready to attack it whenever they



had an opportunity. It is to the members of this class, well-educated men like himself, that Octavius directs his appeal, and endeavours to build a bridge over which they may pass to Christianity. This he does by arguing that there is really no fundamental disagreement between the principles of Christianity and those of the heathen philosophers (*e.g.* in regard to the unity of God), and that the former were in no way detrimental to the progress of culture and civilization. His religious attitude seems to be an attempt to reconcile reason and faith, and his Christianity is "an ethico-political monotheism, the kernel of which is practical morality" (*religiosior est ille qui iustior*, xxxii.). This being the author's object in writing his treatise, it is naturally reflected in its scope and contents; he did not consider it necessary to enter into an exposition of the higher truths of the Christian religion; in fact, considering the class whom he wished to convince, it would probably have defeated his purpose. Hence the *Octavius* cannot be considered an "apology" in the full sense of the word, but only partially; it is rather to be viewed in the light of a justification of Christianity and a plea for a reconsideration of the verdict against it, drawn up in the form most likely to appeal to the cultivated audience whom he desired to influence.

It may be added that one critic<sup>1</sup> holds that the *Octavius* was not written for the general public, but for the friends of Octavius; that it was not written with any definite purpose, apologetic or polemical, but as a memorial treatise, a kind of belated funeral oration in honour of a dear friend.

<sup>1</sup> A. Elter, *Prolegomena zu M. F.* (Bonn, 1909).



The interlocutors are three: Minucius himself, who undertakes the rôle of arbitrator, although in the event his services are not required; Cæcilius Natalis, at first the opponent of and subsequently a convert to Christianity; and Octavius, the representative of the new religion. It is impossible to determine whether Cæcilius and Octavius are real or fictitious personages. According to the dialogue, Minucius lived in Rome, Octavius in an overseas province; both were lawyers, and both were originally heathens. Octavius took the lead in embracing Christianity and was followed by Minucius. Certainly the manner in which Minucius speaks of his dead friend seems to show that he is speaking of one whom he had known and loved in real life. Some critics hold that the dialogue contains the gist, if not the words, of an actual conversation, and that the events recorded, including the conversion of Cæcilius, had their foundation in fact. Some, however, take Octavius to represent the author himself, who would naturally have been unwilling to assign the chief part in the dialogue to himself under his own name. The French scholars who regard Minucius as an African argue from the occurrence of all three names in African inscriptions that all the interlocutors were real personages and Africans; while others as decidedly proclaim them fictitious.

There is little doubt, however, as to the origin of the form in which the treatise is cast. The model is Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, Cæcilius taking the part of Cotta and Velleius, and Octavius that of Balbus. Other sources drawn upon are Cicero's *De Divinatione* and Seneca's *De Providentia* and *De Superstitione*, and there are many reminiscences of Virgil, Horace, Lucretius, and



other classical authors. That the Greek apologists were used is generally considered improbable ; the most likely is Athenagoras.

As to the language, the supporters of the pre-Tertullian theory see in it traces of the African school of Latin, as would be natural if the author were a contemporary of Fronto, while those who are in favour of a later date can see nothing of the kind. In any case, it may be said that the Latinity is on the whole good, although not altogether free from the influence of ecclesiastical Latin. The style of the introductory chapters is somewhat affected as compared with the rest.

#### § 5. THE ARGUMENT

In the Ciceronian manner the *Octavius* opens with a short introduction, giving an account of the origin of the dialogue. Minucius, who had lost an intimate friend of his youth, Octavius Januarius, has a most vivid recollection of a discussion between Octavius, who had long before embraced Christianity, and another friend, Cæcilius Natalis, who was still a heathen. During an excursion to Ostia, as they were walking along the beach, they passed a statue of Serapis, to which Cæcilius did homage in the usual manner. Octavius thereupon rebukes Minucius for not having shown Cæcilius the error of his ways.

This greatly annoys Cæcilius, who at first preserves a sulky silence, but eventually challenges Octavius to a discussion of the merits of their respective religions. Octavius accepts, and the three sit down on a jetty, Minucius between the other two as arbitrator.

Cæcilius opens the attack upon Christianity. Assuming the sceptical attitude that certainty of knowledge is



impossible, he expresses indignant surprise that ignorant, uneducated persons—such as the Christians—should venture to make a definite pronouncement upon questions of which the greatest thinkers had been unable to find the solution. There is nothing to prove the existence of a ruling providence, or of a creator of the world, which may just as well be the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms ; indeed, the indiscriminate distribution of good and evil fortune to saints and sinners alike, irrespective of their deserts, goes far to disprove the existence of a just and beneficent ruler of the universe ; it is more likely that everything is controlled by destiny. This being so, is it not better to abide by the religion of our forefathers, which gradually absorbed the cults of all other nations, by the observance of which Rome had become the mistress of the world ? The will of the gods has often been declared to mankind through the medium of auspices, oracles, and dreams, the neglect of which always brought calamity. Although the philosophers may have differed as to the nature of the gods, they all agreed that they existed. It is deplorable that ignorant men and credulous women, belonging to the dregs of the people, should have the audacity to attack a religion so honourable and long established. And what do they propose to substitute for it ? Consider their ritual and practices. They worship an ass's head, the cross, and a criminal who had expiated his crimes thereon. At the initiation of their converts they murder infants and drink their blood, and at their feasts vice of the most abominable kind is rampant. The very secrecy of these proceedings is proof that they will not bear the light of day. It is from the miserable race of the Jews that they have borrowed the idea of a one and only god, who proved



powerless to protect them against the Romans. In spite of this, they pretend that he is omnipotent and omnipresent, interfering with every human thought and action, which to a Roman seems incomprehensible. Even more foolish is their belief in the destruction of the world by fire, in the resurrection of the dead, and in a distribution of rewards and punishments at a final judgement. The world has always existed, whereas the common lot of everything that is born is death. How can they imagine that the former can suffer dissolution and come to an end, and that they are to rise again after death to immortality? Consider again the miserable condition of the Christians on earth—poverty and hunger with the prospect of death upon the cross, from which their god cannot save them. If he cannot help them here, how can he help them in another world? If such ignorant people must dabble in philosophy, let them remember the warning of Socrates: "That which is above us does not concern us." Such problems can never be solved, since they transcend the limits of human understanding. Christianity would replace the religion of our fathers by old wives' fables and eventually destroy religion altogether.

Octavius in his counter-attack first points out the contradiction between the sceptical standpoint of Cæcilius and his avowed reverence for the traditional religion. The humble condition of the Christians does not prove that they are incapable of discussing higher things. All human beings without distinction are endowed with the faculty of reason and have an equal capacity for discovering the truth. Any one who carefully examines the order of the universe, must come to the conclusion that the world has been created and is controlled by a higher authority, the only doubtful point being whether this



authority is one or many. As to this, experience has shown that a monarchical form of government is best adapted to promote the interests and happiness of mankind ; all the more is this the case with the complex of kingdoms which go to make up the universe. The unity of God, His eternity and omnipotence, have been recognized by philosophers<sup>1</sup> and poets, although their writings contain much that is absurd and inconsistent.

Next, Octavius compares the God of the Christians with the gods of the Romans. The latter were really only deified men, who were born, had children, and died, like the rest of mankind. The ridiculous ideas current regarding them had their origin in the works of the poets, especially Homer. The images which were objects of worship were mere blocks of wood and stone ; idolatry in practice was both ridiculous and abominable. The assertion that Rome owed her greatness to her gods, and that the empire was built up by a due observance of religion, is false. On the contrary, her gods were displaced by foreign ones adopted from conquered nations, and the growth of her power is one long tale of robbery and violation of justice and religion. The auspices and auguries may sometimes have hit the truth, but in most cases have proved a delusion and a snare. How then is the great and lasting influence of idolatry to be accounted for? It is due to the agency of the lost spirits called "demons." Ruined themselves, they strive to ruin others, deceiving the credulous by fictitious oracles and pretended miraculous cures. Finally, it is they who have prompted the monstrous charges against Christianity, which could only have been brought by those who were

<sup>1</sup> The account of the opinions of different philosophers is borrowed wholesale from Cicero.



themselves guilty of the crimes of which they accused others.

The holy life of the Christians is then described in glowing terms and confidence expressed in the justice and goodness of God, whose protection had only been forfeited by the Jews as a punishment for their stiff-neckedness and evil ways. As for the ideas which particularly excited the derision of Cæcilius—the destruction of the world by fire, the resurrection of the body, and future rewards and punishments—they involve no contradiction of the laws of nature, and are indeed supported by the philosophers, who learnt and reproduced them, though dimly and imperfectly, from the prophets. No doubt the heathen and evil-doers, conscious of the punishment awaiting them, are only too ready to disbelieve in a future existence. The apparently miserable lot of the Christians on earth is no proof of the neglect or inability of God to give them a share of the good things of this world. They regard earthly trials and misfortunes as a school of virtue and an incitement to heroic deeds under the eyes of their captain, God. The courage under suffering, so extolled in many of the ancient Romans, is equalled, if not surpassed, by that of the Christians—men, women, and even children. The earthly prosperity of the heathen soon passes away, but the Christians look forward to an imperishable crown and eternal happiness. They certainly refuse to take part in shows and amusements which they regard as objectionable and injurious to morality, but they are not averse from innocent and rational recreation.

Octavius then utters a warning against being misled by the scepticism of the philosophers, who in their attacks on the faults of others are really condemning



themselves. In conclusion, he proudly claims that the Christians have been successful in the search after truth, in which the philosophers had failed, and expresses the hope that heathen superstition may be rooted out and true religion preserved.

As the result of the discussion, Cæcilius declares himself defeated, but at the same time claims that his defeat is a victory—a victory over his former errors. Minucius rejoices at being thereby relieved of the thankless task of pronouncing his verdict as arbitrator. “After this we retired, all three joyful and happy: Cæcilius, because he believed; Octavius, because he was victorious; I myself, because of the conversion of the one and the victory of the other.”







## THE "OCTAVIUS" OF MINUCIUS FELIX

I. WHEN I look back and examine my recollections of Octavius, the dear and intimate friend of my youth, the charm of his character and personal affection<sup>1</sup> are so firmly rooted in my mind, that I seem, as it were, to be actually living again in the past, not merely recalling to mind what is finished and done with. The further he is removed from my earthly gaze, the more deeply is his image imprinted on my heart, nay, on my inmost feelings. And not without reason has the loss of so excellent a Christian<sup>2</sup> left behind such infinite regret; for his affection for me was so passionate that, whether we were jesting or discussing serious matters, our wills were always in perfect harmony, our likes and dislikes identical. You would have thought we had only one soul between us; he was the sole confidant of my youthful follies,<sup>3</sup> the sole partner of my errors. And when the gloom was

<sup>1</sup> *Hominis* may be objective or subjective: "my affection for O." or "his affection for me."

<sup>2</sup> *Sanctus*, like ἅγιος, is used to denote a Christian as opposed to a pagan.

<sup>3</sup> *Solus in amoribus*. *Amores* is usually taken to mean "love intrigues" (youthful follies). Others render, "he was my only bosom-friend."



dispersed, and I emerged from the depths of mental darkness into the light of truth and wisdom,<sup>1</sup> he did not reject my companionship, but, what was even more noble, took the lead. And so, when my thoughts return to all the days passed together in closest intimacy, my mind dwells with special interest upon that discourse of his, in which, by the force of his arguments, Cæcilius, who still clung to superstitious vanities, was converted to the true faith.

II. Octavius had come to Rome on business and also to see me; he had left home, wife, and children: the latter still in the age of innocence, when their broken utterances are so charming—the childish prattle, to which the halting accents of their faltering tongue lend additional sweetness. Words cannot express how eagerly and with what transports of joy I welcomed his arrival, a joy increased by the suddenness of this visit of my bosom friend.

After two days' uninterrupted enjoyment of his company, when the eager longings of our hearts were satisfied, and we had told each other of matters of mutual interest, unknown to us in consequence of our separation, we decided to pay a visit to Ostia.<sup>2</sup> This is a delightful town, where I hoped to find in sea-bathing an agreeable and beneficial treatment for certain humours from which I suffered. Owing to the vacation, legal work was slack and had made way for the vintage; and just then, after

<sup>4</sup> Like *φιλοσοφία*, *sapientia* is often used as a synonym for Christianity as true philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> Ostia, fifteen miles from Rome, was supposed to have been founded by Ancus Marcius, one of the legendary kings. During the early empire it was a flourishing town with an excellent harbour and a favourite summer resort and bathing-place, but rapidly declined after the Gothic invasion. It is now a wretched village of some 1000 inhabitants.



the heat of summer, the weather had turned cooler with the coming of autumn.

One morning at dawn we happened to be walking along the bank of the Tiber towards the sea; the gentle breeze invigorated our limbs and the walk over the sand, as it yielded beneath our soft tread, was especially delightful. Cæcilius noticed an image of Serapis<sup>1</sup> and, after the custom of the superstitious vulgar, put his hand to his mouth and kissed it.<sup>2</sup>

III. Thereupon Octavius said: "Brother Marcus, it is unworthy of an honest man to leave one who in and out of the house is your constant companion, in such blind and vulgar ignorance. On a fine day like this, how can you allow him to do homage to stones, even though they are fashioned in the likeness of the gods, anointed with oil,<sup>3</sup> and crowned with garlands? You must be aware that the shame of his error will recoil as much upon you as upon him."

While Octavius was speaking, we were half-way between Ostia and the sea, and were already nearing the open

<sup>1</sup> Serapis (Sarapis), a god of Babylonian origin, introduced into Egypt during the Roman period, in later times regarded as the ruler of the underworld and departed souls. His real name was Osor-hapi (=Osiris-Apis), that is, the dead Apis become Osiris. This Osiris-Apis was identified with a god brought from Sinope on the Euxine by Ptolemy I (323-284 B.C.), in consequence of a warning in a dream (Tacitus, *Histories*, iv. 83), to be the patron of the royal house. From Egypt the cult of Serapis spread over the whole empire. He was especially regarded as a god of healing like Æsculapius, and has much in common with Pluto and Jupiter.

<sup>2</sup> Kissing the hand was a sign of adoration and homage, probably of Oriental origin: cp. Job xxxi. 27, "My mouth hath kissed my hand." Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxviii. 25: "In adoration we put our right hand to our mouth and kiss it."

<sup>3</sup> *Gen.* xxviii. 18, "Jacob took the stone and set it up . . . and poured oil on the top of it." Such stones were objects of idolatrous worship amongst Jews and heathens; cp. Arnobius, *Adv. Gent.* i. 39.



beach, where the gentle waves, which laved the furthest stretch of sands, extended and as it were laid it out for a promenade. The sea is always restless, even when the winds are still, and although it did not reach the shore in white, foaming waves, we were highly delighted to see it curling and winding round<sup>1</sup> and about our feet, when we dipped them at the water's edge. Alternately it dashed against our feet and sported with the waves, and then, as it retired and retraced its course, sucked them back into itself.

In this manner we walked on slowly and quietly along the shore of the gently winding beach, beguiling the way with conversation, which turned upon Octavius's account of his voyage. After we had gone on for a considerable distance during the course of our conversation, we turned back and went over the same ground again. When we reached a spot where some small vessels, hauled up on land, had been placed on oak supports, high and dry above the mud, we saw some boys thoroughly enjoying themselves in a game of "ducks and drakes." This game is played as follows. A shell, rounded and polished by the constant movements of the waves, is picked up from the beach, and firmly grasped between the fingers on the flat side. The player then stoops and, bending down, throws it as far as he can along the top of the water. The missile either skims the surface, or cutting through the crest of the waves darts along, springing in the air. The boy whose shell goes furthest and oftenest jumps out of the water, claims the victory.

IV. While we were all enjoying the sight, Cæcilius alone was indifferent, and did not even smile at the

<sup>1</sup> *Tortuosus*: v. l. *torosis*, "swelling" (*lit.* muscular).



eagerness of the contest. Silent, anxious, holding aloof, he showed clearly by the expression of his face the signs of some secret grief. "What does this mean?" I said to him; "what has become of your usual vivacity? I miss the cheerfulness natural to you even on serious occasions." He replied: "I have for some time felt keenly distressed and hurt by the manner in which Octavius attacked and reproached you with carelessness, in order to support his charges of ignorance against me more strongly, though indirectly. So I will go further; the whole matter shall be thrashed out between Octavius and myself. If he wishes me to argue with him, as a member of the sect which he attacks, he will see at once that it is easier to argue as among friends than to engage in a scientific discussion. Let us sit down on that rocky mole projecting into the sea, which has been made to protect the baths; we shall be able to rest after our walk and discuss matters more earnestly." We sat down as he proposed, myself between my two friends, with one of them on each side of me. This was not a mark of respect, rank, or honour, for friends are always equal or become so; the object of the arrangement was that I, as arbitrator, should be next to both, in order to hear them better and to keep the disputants apart.

V. Then Cæcilius began as follows: "My dear Marcus, you cannot be in doubt as to the matter which we are now to investigate, since, having carefully tested both systems, you have abandoned the one and chosen the other. Nevertheless, for the present occasion your mind should be so trained that you can hold the balance evenly as an upright judge, without inclining to one side more than the other. Otherwise, your verdict will appear to be the expression of your own feelings rather than the



result of our arguments. If, then, you will take your seat as an entire stranger who knows nothing of either party, it will be easy for me to show that everything in human affairs is doubtful, uncertain, undecided, and probable rather than true.<sup>1</sup> For this reason it is the more surprising that some, weary of a thorough search after truth, should blindly give in to any opinion whatever, rather than steadfastly and diligently persevere in their investigations. Surely all must feel grieved and indignant at the thought that certain people—people, too, ignorant of learning, unlettered, and unacquainted even with the meanest arts—should pronounce definitely upon the universe and the supreme power, which, after all these ages, still forms the subject of the deliberations of the philosophers and their numerous schools. And this is only natural, since human insignificance is quite incapable of investigating things divine. It is not given us to know, and we are forbidden to examine<sup>2</sup> what is suspended above our heads in the heavens or buried deep down in the earth. We should rightly consider ourselves tolerably happy and wise, if we had a more intimate knowledge of ourselves in accordance with the maxim of the wise man of old.<sup>3</sup> But inasmuch as, abandoning ourselves to idle and senseless efforts, we overstep the limits of our insignificance and, though thrown upon earth, in our bold ambition transcend heaven and the stars themselves, at least let us not complicate our mistake by idle and terrifying fancies. Granted that, in the beginning, the germs of everything were condensed by the self-fructifying

<sup>1</sup> The Sceptics held that real knowledge or perception of things was impossible; the utmost that could be attained was "probability" in varying degrees.

<sup>2</sup> The text is corrupt here.

<sup>3</sup> "Know thyself," the maxim of Socrates.



action of nature, what God is the author of this? Granted that the members of the body of the universe have been united, arranged, and formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms,<sup>1</sup> what God is the architect? Let us admit that the stars have been lighted by fire, that the sky has been suspended aloft by the nature of its material, that the earth has been similarly secured by its own weight,<sup>2</sup> and that the sea was formed<sup>3</sup> from moisture, how does this explain this new religion, this dread, which is nothing but superstition? Man and every living creature which is born, lives, and grows, is formed by a haphazard union of elements, into which they are again separated, dissolved, and dispersed; and in like manner all things in the universe flow back to their source and return to themselves. There is no artificer, no judge, no creator of the world. Thus, when the elements of fire have united, new and ever new suns are always shining; when the vapours of earth have been given off, the mists are continually increasing. When these mists are compressed and gathered together, the clouds rise higher; when they fall, the rain pours down, the winds blow, the hail rattles; if the thunder-clouds collide, the thunder roars, the lightning glows, the thunderbolts flash and fall at random, hurl themselves upon the mountains, attack the trees, strike without distinction places sacred and profane, smite the guilty and oftentimes the pious.<sup>4</sup> What need to speak of the shifting and uncertain storms, by which all things are violently whirled along, promiscuously and in disorder? In shipwrecks, are not the destinies of good and bad

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of Epicurus.

<sup>2</sup> In the original, *sua materia* must be supplied before *fundaverit*.

<sup>3</sup> Reading *confluxerit* for *influxerit*.

<sup>4</sup> Lucretius (vi. 417) similarly attempts to refute the idea of a divine providence; so also Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 399.



mixed up, with no distinction of their merits and defects? In fires, does not death come upon innocent and guilty alike? When an expanse of the sky is tainted by plague and pestilence, do not all perish indiscriminately? In the heat and fury of battle, is it not the best and bravest that fall? Even in peaceful times, not only is vice put on a level with virtue, but is even respected, so that often one does not know whether to detest a man's depravity or to envy his good fortune. But if the world were ruled by a divine providence and by the authority of some divinity,<sup>1</sup> Phalaris<sup>2</sup> and Dionysius<sup>3</sup> would never have deserved a throne, Rutilius<sup>4</sup> and Camillus<sup>5</sup> banishment, Socrates<sup>6</sup> the draught of hemlock. Look how the fruit-trees, the corn white for harvest, and the ripe grapes are spoilt by the rain and beaten down by the hail. So either the truth, being uncertain, is hidden from us and concealed,

<sup>1</sup> For his argument the speaker here borrows from Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* (iii. 32, 79, ), who sums it up in a quotation from Ennius: "If they [the gods] cared for them [men,] it would be well with the good, and ill with the bad, which is not the case."

<sup>2</sup> Phalaris, tyrant of Agrigentum in Sicily (570-554 B.C.) He is said to have had a brazen bull constructed, in which criminals were roasted alive.

<sup>3</sup> Dionysius the Elder, tyrant of Syracuse (about 432-367 B.C.). In spite of his cruel and suspicious character, he was a capable ruler and a patron of literature and art.

<sup>4</sup> Publius Rutilius Rufus, Roman statesman and follower of the Stoics. By his conscientious administration of the province of Asia having incurred the hatred of the *publicani* (the equestrian tax-gatherers) he was accused of extortion, condemned (92 B.C.) and banished.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Furius Camillus (446-365 B.C.), one of the legendary heroes of early Rome. He took the city of Veii after a ten years' siege, but being accused of appropriating some of the booty, went into voluntary exile.

<sup>6</sup> Socrates (470-399 B.C.), the celebrated philosopher. He was accused of impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens and condemned to death by hemlock. The basis of his philosophy was self-knowledge ("Know thyself"). His demon, or familiar spirit, by which he claimed to be inspired, is supposed to represent the warnings of conscience.



or more probably fortune, not restrained by any laws, exercises its power in various dangerous emergencies.

VI. "Since, then, either fortune is blind,<sup>1</sup> or nature is uncertain, how much more respectful, how much better, is it to receive the teaching of our ancestors as the high priest<sup>2</sup> of truth, to reverence the traditional religion, to worship the gods whom your parents taught you to fear before you knew them intimately, and not to pronounce judgement upon the divinities, but to believe our forefathers who, in a still uncivilized age, when the world was only just born, were thought worthy of having the gods as their servants<sup>3</sup> or rulers! Thus it is that in every empire, province, and city each nationality observes the ritual of its own family and worships its local divinities. Thus the Eleusinians revere Ceres, the Phrygians the Great Mother, the Epidaurians Æsculapius, the Chaldæans Belus, the Syrians Astarte, the Taurians Diana, the Gauls Mercury, the Romans all the gods.<sup>4</sup> This is why the

<sup>1</sup> *Cæca*: The MS. reading is *certa* ("either fortune is sure"); but the epithet is inapplicable and does not agree with "not restrained by any laws."

<sup>2</sup> The word *antistes* means specially "the overseer of a temple," in Christian writers "a bishop." Here the term "high-priest" is used in a general sense for one who is a master of any science or art (*e.g.* a high-priest of science).

<sup>3</sup> *Famulos*: the MS. reading is *faciles* ("favourably disposed").

<sup>4</sup> Eleusis, in Attica, on the coast, about twelve miles from Athens, where the Eleusinian mysteries were celebrated in honour of Demeter (Ceres), the goddess of agriculture. The Great Mother is Cybele (Rhea), the mother of all the gods, the great nature-goddess worshipped in Phrygia in Asia Minor. At Epidaurus, in Argolis in Peloponnesus, there was a temple of Asklepios (Æsculapius), the god of healing, to which the sick resorted for the purpose of obtaining a cure. Belus (Baal, Bel) was the national divinity of various Oriental nations—Chaldeans, Phœnicians, Babylonians. Astarte, a Syro-Phœnician goddess, the Oriental counterpart of Aphrodite (Venus). At Tauri (the Crimea) human sacrifice was offered to the local goddess, whom the Greeks identified with Artemis (Diana). There were several Gallo-Roman equivalents of Hermes (Mercurius), with



power and authority of the Romans has embraced the entire world, extended its empire beyond east and west and the borders of ocean itself; in the field they exhibited valour combined with respect for the gods; they fortified their city with religious rites, with chaste maidens, with many priestly offices and titles; when besieged<sup>1</sup> and with nothing between them and captivity but the Capitol,<sup>2</sup> they still worshipped the gods whom others would have renounced as hostile, and unarmed, save with the weapons of religious faith, broke through the ranks of the Gauls, who were astounded at the audacity inspired by their reverence for the gods. Having stormed the enemy's ramparts, even in the first frenzy of victory they respected the divinities of the conquered, seeking everywhere for strange gods and adopting them as their own, and even setting up altars to unknown powers and the shades of the dead. Thus, by adopting the rites of all nations, they became entitled to rule over them. Hence the feeling of reverence for the gods continued uninterrupted and uniform, not diminishing but increasing as time went on; for the ancients were accustomed to attribute sanctity to religious ceremonies and temples in proportion to the antiquity attributed to them.

VII. "In the meantime I will venture to grant the point,<sup>3</sup> and, if I am wrong, I prefer to err in good company.<sup>4</sup> It was not without good reason that our ances-

different surnames, whose attributes in general resemble those of the Greco-Roman divinity as a god of commerce.

<sup>1</sup> By the Gauls (390 B.C.).

<sup>2</sup> Roman temple and fortress on the Capitoline mount (see Livy, v. 46).

<sup>3</sup> That there are gods.

<sup>4</sup> Or, "my mistake is not so bad as yours: it is safer and preferable, because it is to this that Rome owes her greatness."



tors so zealously observed the auguries, consulted the entrails of victims, instituted sacrifices, and dedicated temples. Look at the records of our chronicles: you will find that our forefathers admitted the rites of all religions, either by way of thanks for divine favours, or to avert the threatened wrath of the gods, or to appease their actual rage and fury. Witness the Idæan mother <sup>1</sup> who on her arrival in Italy both cleared the reputation of a Roman matron and delivered the city from the fear of the enemy. Witness the consecrated statues by the lake, representing the twin brethren on horseback just as they appeared when, mounted on their foaming and reeking steeds, in hot haste they brought the news of the victory over Perseus on the same day on which they had gained it. <sup>2</sup> Witness the renewal of the games in honour of offended Jupiter, the result of a plebeian's dream. <sup>3</sup> Witness the self-devotion of the Decii, <sup>4</sup> justified by the

<sup>1</sup> During the second Punic war (204 B.C.) it was declared by an oracle that the only way to rid the soil of the foreign invader was to transfer the statue of Cybele from Pessinus in Asia Minor to Rome. The vessel, on board of which the statue had been placed, grounded at the mouth of the Tiber, and according to the soothsayers could only be moved by a perfectly chaste woman. A certain matron, Claudia Quinta, who had been accused of immorality, offered her services. As soon as she pulled the rope, the vessel followed her. She thus saved the state and her own reputation.

<sup>2</sup> Perseus, the last King of Macedonia, was decisively defeated by the Romans at Pydna in Macedonia (168 B.C.). The news of the victory was brought to Rome as soon as it had been won by two horsemen identified with Castor and Pollux. These two heroes were seen on other occasions in similar circumstances, notably at the battle of Lake Regillus. The lake is Juturna, in the Forum near the Temple of Castor.

<sup>3</sup> Jupiter, displeased at an incident that occurred during the Circus games, appeared in a dream to a plebeian named Titus Latinus, ordering him to inform the consuls that the games must be repeated. Latinus neglected to do so, and was punished by the loss of his son and a severe illness. He then carried out the god's order and was immediately restored to health.

<sup>4</sup> The Decii (Publius Decius Mus, father and son) devoted them-



event. Witness also Curtius,<sup>1</sup> who filled up the deep and yawning gulf with the bulk of himself and his horse, while the people assisted by throwing in gifts of grain and valuables in his honour.<sup>2</sup> More often, indeed, than we wished, neglect of the auspices has borne witness to the presence of the gods. Thus Allia<sup>3</sup> is a name of ill omen; thus the attack of Claudius and Junius<sup>4</sup> on the Carthaginians was no battle, but a disastrous shipwreck; Flaminius despised the auguries, with the result that Lake Trasimenus<sup>5</sup> was swollen and dyed with Roman blood; Crassus<sup>6</sup> mocked at and justly incurred the curses of the Furies<sup>7</sup> with the result that we had to reconquer our standards from the Parthians. I omit numerous

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selves to death, the father in the war against the Latins (340 B.C.), the son at the battle of Sentinum in Umbria during the third Samnite war (295 B.C.).

<sup>1</sup> When a great chasm appeared in the Forum (362 B.C.), the soothsayers declared it would never fill up until Rome's most precious possession was thrown into it. Thereupon Marcus Curtius, declaring that nothing was more precious than arms and valour, mounted on his horse and, fully armed, leaped into the gulf, which immediately closed. On the spot a lake was formed, which was called Lacus Curtius.

<sup>2</sup> According to Livy, vii 6, 5.

<sup>3</sup> A small branch of the Tiber, where the Romans were defeated by the Gauls (390 B.C.). The disaster was attributed to Sulpicius, the Roman commander, who sacrificed on the day after the ides of the month, which was considered unlucky.

<sup>4</sup> Publius Claudius Pulcher and Lucius Junius Pullus were consuls during the first Punic war in 249 B.C. The former was completely defeated in an attack on the Carthaginians in the harbour of Drepana, the latter at Pachynum, both in Sicily. In both cases defeat was attributed to the neglect of religious observances.

<sup>5</sup> A lake in Etruria, where the Romans were defeated by the Carthaginians under Hannibal (217 B.C.).

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Licinius Crassus, the triumvir, was defeated by the Parthians at Carrhæ in Mesopotamia (53 B.C.). There is supposed to be a reference to the Parthian campaigns of Verus (161-163). The standards, however, had been recovered in the time of Augustus.

<sup>7</sup> Or (reading *dirarum*, not *Dirarum*) "the announcement of sinister portents" (cp. Cicero, *De Div.* i. 16, 35).



instances in ancient history ; I say nothing about the songs of the poets on the birth, gifts, and favours of the gods ; I also pass over oracular predictions of the destinies of the world, lest the history of antiquity should seem to you too full of legend. Look at the temples and shrines of the gods, the protection and ornament of the Roman state ; they are rather worthy of honour by reason of their divine inhabitants, ever present indwellers, than rich in worship, decorations, and votive gifts.<sup>1</sup> Hence it is that our seers, full of and as it were mingled with the god, anticipate the future, give warning of dangers, heal the sick, encourage the afflicted, help the unfortunate, console the suffering, assist the toilers. Even when at rest we see, hear, and recognize those gods whom in the daytime we impiously deny, refuse to acknowledge and forswear.

VIII. "Accordingly, since all peoples are firmly convinced that there are immortal gods, although their nature and origin are undecided, I cannot think there is any one so audacious and so swollen with impious pretensions to wisdom as to endeavour to destroy or weaken so ancient, useful, and salutary a religion. Certainly Theodorus of Cyrene<sup>3</sup> and previous to him Diagoras of Melos,<sup>2</sup> called Atheos by the ancients, both asserted that there were no gods, a statement which, if believed, would have utterly destroyed the feeling of awe and veneration by which human actions are governed ; but they will never secure much influence for their impious doctrines under the name and authority of their sham philosophy. Protagoras of

<sup>1</sup> The images were regarded, not as gods, but as the dwelling-places or sanctuaries of the gods. Acts xvii. 24 : "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

<sup>2</sup> Well-known atheists.



Abdera,<sup>1</sup> who discussed the question of the godhead rather as a philosopher than as an atheist, was banished by the Athenians and his writings publicly burnt. Is it not then deplorable that an attack should be made upon the gods by certain fellows—you must excuse my expressing with some freedom how strongly I feel in regard to the cause I have taken up—certain fellows, I repeat, belonging to a party whose case is hopeless, proscribed, and desperate?<sup>2</sup> Having gathered together from the lowest dregs of the people a number of ignorant men and credulous women always ready to believe anything, they have formed a rabble of impious conspirators; at their nocturnal gatherings, solemn fasts,<sup>3</sup> and barbarous meals the bond of union is not any sacred rite but crime.<sup>4</sup> It is a people<sup>5</sup> that lurks in darkness and shuns the light, silent in public, talkative in corners; they despise our temples as tombs,<sup>6</sup> insult our gods, ridicule our ceremonies, and, in need of pity themselves, profess (if allowed) to pity our priests; half-naked themselves, they contemptuously refuse offices and dignities.<sup>7</sup> Marvellous folly and incredible audacity! They despise the torments that are before their eyes, but they fear those that are uncertain and in the future; they are afraid of dying after death,

<sup>1</sup> One of the most famous of the Greek sophists (professors of wisdom), an older contemporary of Socrates.

<sup>2</sup> The epithet is applied to the Christians, as endowed with the courage of despair and ready to sacrifice even their lives for their faith (cp. Tertullian, *Apol.* 50).

<sup>3</sup> The watches of the soldiers of Christ, usually held on Wednesday and Friday.

<sup>4</sup> The younger Pliny, who tells us a good deal about the Christians during the reign of Trajan, flatly contradicts this.

<sup>5</sup> Or, "sect."

<sup>6</sup> For the reason of this see Lactantius, *De Spect.* xiii. The body of the Christian church was not used as a place of burial till long after Constantine.

<sup>7</sup> *Purpuras*, the purple garments worn by kings and magistrates.



but have no fear of death itself. Thus treacherous hope quiets their alarm by the comforting assurance of a life hereafter.

IX. "Ill weeds grow apace, and these vicious habits are spreading day by day, and these abominable secret haunts where these impious wretches hold their meetings are increasing in number all over the world.<sup>1</sup> These execrable conspirators must be utterly rooted out. They recognize one another by secret signs and marks; they love one another after the briefest acquaintance; a kind of religion of sensuality prevails amongst them; they call themselves promiscuously brothers and sisters, and under the cloak of these names are guilty of the most horrible offences. Thus their vain and foolish superstition glories in its crimes. Were these charges untrue, rumour, which is ever shrewd, would never spread such scandalous reports about them, such as I should be ashamed to mention. I am told that, under the influence of some foolish belief, they worship as sacred the head of the lowest of animals—the ass.<sup>2</sup> A religion worthy of the morality from which it sprang! . . . . Again, to say that a man who had suffered capital punishment for a crime and the death-dealing wood of

<sup>1</sup> Religious societies were always regarded with suspicion, as possibly formed with political motives or the design of attacking the government. The spread of Christianity is appealed to by Arnobius as a strong argument in its favour.

<sup>2</sup> No satisfactory account of the origin of this ridiculous story has been given. According to Tertullian (*Apol.* 16), an enemy of Christianity exhibited in Carthage a picture representing a god with ass's ears, holding a book with the inscription "Onokoietes [*the meaning of which is doubtful*], the God of the Christians." In 1856 a rude sketch travestying the Crucifixion, was found on the Palatine Hill. A man's body with an ass's head and outstretched arms is fastened to a cross. A smaller figure uplifts his hand in token of worship; underneath is the inscription: "Alexamenos worships his God." The tale was first told of the Jews, who were called Asinarii.



the cross are objects of their veneration, is to assign fitting altars to abandoned wretches, and to assert that they worship what they deserve to worship. The details of the initiation of novices are as horrible as they are well known.<sup>1</sup> An infant, covered with dough to deceive the unwary, is brought to the would-be novice, who, misled by the coating of dough and encouraged to deal what are apparently harmless blows, secretly stabs it to death. Then—shame on them!—they thirstily lick up the child's blood and eagerly divide his limbs; this victim is their bond of union, complicity in the crime is their pledge of mutual silence. Such rites are more abominable than any acts of sacrilege. What takes place at their banquets<sup>2</sup> is also well known; it is everywhere talked about, as is attested by a speech of our countryman of Cirta.<sup>3</sup> On a fixed day they assemble together, children, sisters, mothers, people of both sexes and of all ages. After much feasting, a dog, fastened to the lamp, is encouraged by some pieces of meat thrown to it to spring violently beyond the length of its chain. The lamp, which would have been an inconvenient witness, is overturned and extinguished; after this riot and indecency reign supreme.

X. "I purposely omit much; what I have already said is too much, and all or most of it is shown to be true

<sup>1</sup> The charge is vigorously refuted by Tertullian, *Apol.* 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> An account of the objects of the Christian *agapai* is given by Tertullian, *Apol.* 39. Pliny himself testifies to the harmlessness of their meetings and proceedings.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Cornelius Fronto, of Cirta in Numidia, rhetorician and jurist (2nd century A.D.). He was a great favourite of Hadrian and held the highest offices of state. It was not until 1815 that any considerable portion of his writings was discovered, chiefly consisting of correspondence with members of the imperial family. The speech referred to (*Adversus Christianos*) is lost. The epithet *noster* might also mean "belonging to our party," *i.e.* a heathen.



by the very atmosphere of secrecy which surrounds this impious religion. Why do they make such efforts to hide and conceal whatever it is that they worship? honourable acts always welcome publicity, only crimes delight in secrecy. Why have they no altars, no temples, no well-known images? <sup>1</sup> Why do they never speak in public, <sup>2</sup> never meet freely, unless it be that the hidden object of their worship is either criminal or disgraceful? But whence, who, or where is that one god, solitary, forsaken, whom no free people or kingdom, nor even Roman superstition has acknowledged? Only the miserable race of the Jews also worships one god, but at least openly, with temples, altars, victims and ceremonies. Yet their god is so weak and powerless that he and his people are prisoners of the Romans. <sup>3</sup> And what monstrous absurdities the Christians invent! According to them, that god of theirs, whom they can neither see nor show to others, carefully investigates all men's characters, <sup>4</sup> acts, even their words and secret thoughts, since he is present everywhere and always on the move. According to them, he is a nuisance, restless, shamelessly curious, being present at man's every act and wandering from place to place. But if he is occupied with the whole he cannot attend to details, and if he is engaged with details he cannot do his duty to the whole.

XI. "Further, Christians threaten the whole world and the universe, together with the hosts of heaven, with destruction by fire, and profess to believe in its future

<sup>1</sup> This charge is dealt with at length in Arnobius, *Adv. Nat.* 6, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* vii. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Romanis hominibus*. The MS. has *nominibus*, for which Halm reads *numinibus* ("deities").

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* i. 20. 54.



ruin.<sup>1</sup> As if the eternal order of things, established by the divine laws of nature, could be disturbed, the bond of all the elements broken, the framework of heaven taken to pieces, and that mass, by which it is enclosed and surrounded, undermined! Not content with this insane idea, they improve on it by adding certain old wives' fables. They assert that they are born again after death when they are nothing but dust and ashes, and, strangely confiding, believe each other's lies; you would think that they had already come to life again. A twofold evil and a double folly! While threatening the heavens and the stars with destruction, whereas we leave them as we found them, they promise themselves, on the other hand, eternal life when dead and extinct, the inevitable sequel of birth! Hence it is easy to understand why they curse our funeral pyres and condemn cremation; just as if every body, although withdrawn from the flames, were not reduced to dust as the years and ages roll on, just as if it makes any difference whether our bodies are torn to pieces by wild beasts, swallowed up in the sea, covered with earth, or destroyed by fire. Any kind of burial must be a punishment to them, if they have any feeling after death; if they have not, cremation must be regarded as a beneficent remedy in the rapidity of its effect. Self-deceived, they promise themselves, as the elect, the blessings of eternal life after death; the rest of the world, as evil-doers, are doomed to eternal punishment. I could say much more on this, but I am in a hurry to conclude my speech. I need not labour the point that it is they themselves who are the evil-doers, I have already proved it; although, even

<sup>1</sup> Not only Christians but many heathen thinkers held the same belief (*e.g.* the Stoics).



if I were to admit that they are good and honest men, I know that most people are of opinion—and in this you agree—that guilt or innocence is the work of fate. While some consider fate responsible for all our actions, you attribute them to God; so that the members of your sect do not favour it of their own accord, but as the elect of God.<sup>1</sup> Thus you imagine an unjust judge who, while punishing men for an action which is due to fate, spares those who follow their own will.

“However, I should like to ask whether we are to rise again with or without bodies? <sup>2</sup> If the former, with what bodies,—with the old or new ones? Without bodies? but this, so far as I can judge, would mean no life, no mind, no soul.<sup>3</sup> With the old bodies? but these would have been dissolved long ago. With new ones?—then it is a case of the birth of a new man, not of the renovation of the old. And yet, although so much time has elapsed and countless ages have passed, is there a single trustworthy instance of a man having returned from the dead like Protesilaus,<sup>4</sup> if only for a few hours? All these figments of a disordered brain, these senseless consolations invented by lying poets to lend a charm to their verse, to your shame you have hashed up in your excessive credulity in honour of your god.

XII. “Not even does the experience of the present convince you how deceptive are these empty hopes and

<sup>1</sup> Romans viii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians xv. 35: “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”

<sup>3</sup> Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* i. 12, 30.

<sup>4</sup> A Thessalian hero, the first of the Greeks to set foot on Trojan soil in the Trojan war. He was slain, as an oracle had predicted. His wife, Laodamia, obtained permission for him to return to earth for a few hours. He then died again and Laodamia almost immediately followed him.



useless promises. Miserable wretches, you can guess, from what happens to you during life, what awaits you in death. Look : some of you—the greater, the better part, as you assert—suffer from want, cold, toil, and hunger ; and your god permits it, or pretends not to see it ; he either will not or cannot help his people ; hence he is either powerless or unjust.<sup>1</sup> You, who dream of immortality after death, when unnerved by severe illness,<sup>2</sup> consumed by fever, racked by pain, can you not yet understand your condition ? Do you not yet recognize your frailty ? Against your will, miserable wretch, you are convicted of weakness but will not admit it.

“ But to pass over things common to all, consider again what awaits you—threats, punishment, torture, crosses no longer objects of worship but instruments of suffering, fires which you both anticipate and dread. Where is that god of yours, who is able to help those who come to life again, but not the living ? Do not the Romans, without the help of your god, rule, govern, and possess the whole world, and hold sway over yourselves ? But you, in the meantime, in your suspense and anxiety abstain from legitimate amusements ; you never visit the shows,<sup>3</sup> never join the processions, never attend the public banquets.<sup>4</sup> You express abhorrence of the sacred games, of meat already offered in sacrifice, of libations poured upon the altars. Thus you show your

<sup>1</sup> A frequent heathen argument.

<sup>2</sup> *Periculo* might also be rendered simply “peril.” Some editors read *querquero* : “when shaken by ague.”

<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *De Spect.* 24 : One of the chief proofs that a man is a Christian is his repudiation of the shows ; *Apol.* 38. The fact that Tertullian's essay *On the Shows* was purposely written to dissuade Christians from attending them, indicates that some of them did so.

<sup>4</sup> In honour of the emperor, or to celebrate some great military success.



fear of the very gods whom you deny! You never crown your heads with garlands, nor grace your bodies with perfumes; you reserve unguents for funerals, you even refuse to lay wreaths on the grave,<sup>1</sup> pale and trembling wretches, who deserve to be pitied—but by our gods. Therefore, if you have any sense, any feeling of shame, give up prying into the quarters of the sky, the destinies and secrets of the universe; for ignorant, uneducated, rude, uncultivated people, to whom it has not been given to understand human affairs and who are still less qualified to discuss things divine,—for such it is sufficient to look at what is before their eyes.

XIII. “If, however, any one of you desires to philosophize, if he is capable of it, let him, if he can, imitate the example of Socrates, the prince of wisdom. Whenever that illustrious man was asked about heavenly things, he answered, as is well known: ‘That which is above us has nothing to do with us.’<sup>2</sup> Justly, therefore, the oracle paid a tribute to his remarkable wisdom. He himself clearly perceived that he was put before all other men by the oracle, not because he had found out everything, but because he had learnt that he knew nothing; the height of wisdom is the confession of ignorance. This was the source of the prudent scepticism in most important questions which distinguished Arcesilas,<sup>3</sup> and later

<sup>1</sup> The Christians did this to avoid any practices similar to those of the heathen. Later they made use of flowers to decorate the graves and sprinkled perfumes over them.

<sup>2</sup> Cæcilius’ sceptical interpretation of these words misrepresents Socrates’ meaning. The oracle which proclaimed him the wisest of men ran: “Sophocles is wise, Euripides is wise, but Socrates is wisest of all.”

<sup>3</sup> Arcesilas (about 315–240 B.C.), Greek philosopher, founder of the so-called Middle Academy. He is said to have taught that we can know nothing, not even the fact that we know nothing.



Carneades<sup>1</sup> and several Academicians<sup>2</sup>; this attitude enables the ignorant to philosophize with caution, the learned with ostentation. Is not the hesitation of Simonides<sup>3</sup> the lyric poet worthy of the admiration and imitation of all?

"When the tyrant<sup>4</sup> Hiero asked him what he thought about the gods and their nature, he first asked for a day to consider; the next day he put off his answer for two days more, and then, in spite of the hints given him, asked for another two days. At last, when Hiero asked the reason of his long delay, he answered: 'The more carefully and deliberately I examine the matter, the more obscure does the truth appear.' I also am of opinion that things which are doubtful should be left as they are; and, since so many distinguished men are unable to make up their minds, we must not hastily and rashly take one side or the other, lest an old wives' superstition should be introduced or religion be entirely destroyed."

XIV. Having finished his speech, Cæcilius, beaming with joy (for the vehemence of his outburst had soothed

Probability is the utmost that can be attained, and this is sufficient as a practical rule of life.

<sup>1</sup> Carneades (214-129 B.C.), Greek philosopher, founder of the so-called New Academy. Like Arcesilas, he denied the possibility of knowledge and admitted probability, of which he distinguished three degrees.

<sup>2</sup> The name given to the followers of Plato, who are generally divided into three schools, called the Old, Middle, and New Academies. The Middle Academy developed a sceptical tendency, further emphasized in the New.

<sup>3</sup> Simonides of Ceos (556-468 B.C.), celebrated Greek lyric poet. During the last part of his life he was attached to the court of Hiero, despot of Syracuse.

<sup>4</sup> The word does not necessarily imply cruelty or injustice, when used of the Greek "tyrants," many of whom were wise and beneficent rulers. It means one who exercises arbitrary or despotic power.



his indignant excitement), turned to Octavius and asked : " Has Octavius, one of the tribe of Plautus, the best of bakers <sup>1</sup> but the worst of philosophers, anything to say in reply to this ? "

" Stop jeering at him," I interrupted ; " you have no right to vaunt your carefully arranged speech, before the matter has been more fully discussed on both sides, especially as the aim of your argument is not glory, but truth. Certainly I have been greatly delighted by your varied and subtle arguments, but I am more deeply impressed—not in reference to the present discussion, but to argument in general—by the feeling that, in most cases, our attitude towards even the clearest truth is affected by the orator's talents and the power of his eloquence. This, it is well known, is due to the hearers' easy nature ; they allow their minds to be diverted from attention to things by the allurements of words ; they assent without discrimination to all that is said, being unable to distinguish the true from the false, and they are unaware that what seems incredible may contain a truth and what is probable may be false. And so, the more they believe the asseverations of others, the more frequently they are refuted by more skilful debaters : thus, being continually the dupes of their own rashness, they shift the blame and the responsibility for their own judgement and complain of the uncertainty of things ; they prefer to condemn everything and to leave all in doubt rather than express a decided opinion upon things that always prove deceptive. Therefore we must beware

<sup>1</sup> The general allusion is to the poverty and insignificance of the Christians. Plautus, the great Latin comedy writer, is said to have worked for a miller. Instead of *pistorum* ("bakers") others read *Christianorum*, or *ictorum* (= *jurisconsultorum*), in allusion to Octavius's profession.



of becoming possessed with hatred of all speeches whatever, which would cause numbers of simple-minded persons to be carried away by execration and hatred of all mankind. For those who are careless and credulous are deceived by those whom they thought to be good ; by a similar kind of mistake they regard all with suspicion, and fear as dishonourable those whom they might have considered most worthy. This is the reason of our anxiety. Every matter is capable of discussion from two points of view. On the one side is truth, though generally difficult to find ; on the other a wonderful acuteness, which sometimes by its copious language apes the certainty of an undisputed proof. We must therefore consider each point by itself as carefully as we can, so that while duly appreciating subtlety of argument, we may at the same time be able to pick up, approve, and adopt what is right."

XV. "You are deviating from the duty of a conscientious judge," said Cæcilius ; "it is very wrong of you to weaken the force of my pleading by interposing so weighty an argument, since it is for Octavius to refute each point, at present untouched and not yet mooted, if he can." "As for your charge," I answered, "unless I am mistaken, my words were spoken in the general interest. My idea was that we should examine everything most carefully and base our judgement not on bombastic eloquence but on the solid foundation of facts. But, as you justly complain, our attention must no longer be diverted ; let us hear the answer of our friend Januarius,<sup>1</sup> who is eager to speak, in perfect silence."

XVI. Then said Octavius : "I will reply to the best of my ability ; at the same time you must help me to

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* Octavius.



wash away bitter and disgraceful abuse with the water of truth.

“I will not deny that at first the opinion of my friend Natalis seemed so hesitating, vague, undecided and uncertain, that I could not make out whether it was upset by his own shrewdness, or wavered through error. For his opinion varies ; at one time he declares his belief in the existence of the gods, at another disputes it, with the result that the indefiniteness of his argument makes the purport of my reply even more indefinite and ill-founded. But I do not wish to believe—indeed, I do not believe—that there is any craftiness in Natalis ; subtlety and trickery are far removed from his simple character. What then ? Just as a man who does not know the right road, when as is often the case it divides into several, is perplexed and anxious, not venturing to choose one or to try all ; in like manner, if a man has no fixed criterion of truth, whenever an ill-founded suggestion is brought to his notice, his opinions, always hesitating, disappear altogether. And so it is no wonder that Cæcilius is often tossed about, excited, and wavering in the midst of contradictions and inconsistencies. To prevent this going farther, I will refute and disprove his arguments, however varied they are, by the confirmation and establishment of a single truth ; thus he will be freed from all further doubt and hesitation.

“And since my brother has given vent to his feelings and declares that he is vexed, angry, indignant, and grieved that certain uneducated, poor, and inexperienced people should discuss heavenly things, he must not forget that all human beings, without distinction of age, sex, or rank, are born capable of reason and able to understand ; that they do not obtain wisdom by chance, but



that it is implanted in them by nature. Even the philosophers themselves, or any other scientific discoverers whose names have been handed down, were considered common, ignorant, and half-naked, before their keenness of intellect brought lustre on their name. Indeed, the rich are so taken up with their wealth that they are in the habit of thinking more of gold than of heaven; it is our poor disciples who have both found wisdom and have handed down its teaching to others. Hence it is clear that talent is neither to be obtained by wealth nor acquired by study, but is created within us at the time when the mind itself is formed. And so there is no reason to be grieved or indignant, if any one, whoever he be, examines things divine and expresses his opinion;<sup>1</sup> it is not the authority of the disputant, but the truth contained in the disputation that needs examination. The less learned the language, the clearer the argument, since it is not disguised by bombastic eloquence or charm of style, but is supported, in its true character, by the rule of truth.

XVII. "I do not reject the principle which Cæcilius has endeavoured to establish as one of great importance—namely, that man ought thoroughly to examine and acquire a knowledge of himself, his nature, his origin, and his destination; whether he is a compound of elements, a skilful arrangement of atoms, or, preferably, created, formed, and animated by God. But it is just this that we cannot investigate and bring to light without an examination of the universe. All things are so closely connected, combined, and linked together, that it is impossible to understand the nature of man without thoroughly examining the nature of the deity, just as it is

<sup>1</sup> Reading *quæ sentiat proferat*.



impossible successfully to administer affairs of state without a knowledge of this state that is common to all—the world. Above all we should remember in what respect we chiefly differ from the beasts of the field; they, ever bending forward with heads towards the ground, are adapted to look for nothing but their food; we, with looks erect and eyes lifted to heaven,<sup>1</sup> endowed with speech and reason, whereby we recognize, feel, and imitate God, neither ought to nor can we ignore the heavenly brightness that thrusts itself before our eyes and senses. It would be extremely like sacrilege to look on the ground for that which can only be found on high.

“Hence I am the more convinced that those who maintain that the arrangement of the entire universe is not the perfected work of divine intelligence, but a mere ball, the result of the fortuitous adherence of fragments of matter, are themselves devoid of sense and understanding, even of the power of sight. Lift up your eyes to heaven, examine what is below and around you; what can be clearer, more certain, more obvious than that there exists a supreme being endowed with the highest intelligence, by whom the whole of nature is inspired, moved, nourished, and governed? <sup>2</sup>

“Look at the sky itself—its vast expanse, its rapid revolution, whether studded with stars by night or illuminated by the sun by day; you will at once understand how wonderful, how divine is the equilibrium maintained by the supreme ruler of the universe. Consider also how the course of the sun makes the year, how the moon, by

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Metam.* i. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Almost word for word from Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* ii. 2. Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* ii. 5) takes for granted what is here proved.



its increase, wane, and disappearance brings round the month. I need only mention the successive recurrence of darkness and light, to provide the alternate renewal of work and rest. I must leave the astrologers to speak at greater length about the stars, their influence on the course of navigation, how they usher in the time for ploughing and harvest. The creation, development, and arrangement of all these things not only needed a supreme architect and perfect intelligence, but they cannot even be felt, perceived, and understood without a supreme effort of reason and understanding.

“What, again, about the order of the seasons of the year and its fruits, marked by constancy amidst variety? Do not spring with its flowers, summer with its harvests, autumn with its ripe and delicious fruits, winter so necessary for the growth of the olives<sup>1</sup>—do not all alike bear witness to their author and creator? This order would be soon upset, unless it were maintained by a supreme intelligence. Further, what foresight is shown in the insertion of the medium temperature of spring and autumn, so that we may not be nipped with cold by a perpetual winter nor scorched with heat by a perpetual summer; and the transition from one season to another, as the year retraces its course, is hardly noticed and does no harm. Look at the sea, it is limited by the boundary fixed by the shore.<sup>2</sup> See how all the plants draw life from the bowels of the earth. Gaze upon the ocean, its alternate ebb and flow. Consider the springs with their inexhaustible supply of water.

<sup>1</sup> *Olivitas* = the olive-vintage, or the time for gathering the olives (generally the beginning of December).

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah v. 22: “Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it.”



Observe the rivers, ever flowing in their regular course. What shall I say of the apt arrangement of the steep mountains, of the winding hills, of the outstretched plains? What of the various means of defence against each other possessed by animals? Some are armed with horns, others protected by teeth, others shod with hoofs, others furnished with sharp stings; some are protected by their swiftness of foot or soaring pinions. The very beauty of our form declares the workmanship of God; our upright attitude, uplifted countenance, our eyes set in the top of the face as in a watchtower, and all our other organs of sense in their allotted positions, as in a fortress.<sup>1</sup>

XVIII. "It would take too long to go through all the details. There is no single member of the human body which is not either necessary or ornamental; and it is even more surprising that, although we all have the same form, each one of us has different features; thus we all seem alike, while in reality we are all found to be unlike each other.

"What is the meaning of birth? is not the desire of procreation implanted in us by God, so that the mother's breast may be full of milk as the offspring matures, and that the tender fruit may grow up nourished by its copious flow?

"But God takes thought not only for the universe but for each of its parts. Britain lacks sunshine, but is refreshed by the warmth of the sea that surrounds it;<sup>2</sup> the river Nile moderates the drought of Egypt; the

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* ii. 56.

<sup>2</sup> This was the general opinion of the ancients: Strabo, iv. 5, 2: "The climate is rather rainy than snowy; even when the weather is fine there is always a certain amount of mist, so that during the day the sun is only visible about noon for three or four hours." Tacitus, *Agricola*, 12: "Rain is frequent and the sky lowering, although the cold is not excessive."



Euphrates compensates Mesopotamia for the want of rain ; the Indus is said both to sow and water the East.<sup>1</sup> If you entered a house and found it carefully kept, properly arranged, and well furnished, you would certainly believe that it had an owner, far superior to all those fine things, who looked after it. It is the same in the case of this house called the universe. When you see providence, order, and law prevailing in heaven and earth, believe that there is a ruler and author of the universe, more beautiful even than the stars and the different parts of the world.

“But perhaps, since there is no doubt about the existence of a providence, you think you ought to inquire whether the heavenly kingdom is governed by a single ruler or according to the will of several. The solution of the question presents little difficulty to one who considers the earthly kingdoms, which are modelled on the celestial. When has an imperial partnership ever begun in good faith or been dissolved without bloodshed? I say nothing about the Persians, who selected their ruler by omens drawn from the neighing of horses ;<sup>2</sup> I pass over the story of the Theban pair,<sup>3</sup> now long forgotten. The story of the twins,<sup>4</sup> fighting for a kingdom of shepherds and huts, is well known. The wars between father-in-law and son-in-law<sup>5</sup> spread all over the world, and the

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* ii. 52, 130.

<sup>2</sup> The story is told of the elevation of Darius Hystaspes to the throne (Herodotus, iii. 84 ; Justin, i. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Eteocles and Polynices. to whom their father Œdipus had left the throne of Thebes on condition that they reigned alternately for a year. Eteocles, having broken the agreement, was attacked by his brother (the expedition of the Seven against Thebes). Both the brothers fell in single combat with each other.

<sup>4</sup> Romulus and Remus.

<sup>5</sup> Pompey and Cæsar.



fortunes of so mighty an empire had not room for two rulers.

“Consider other instances. The bees have only one king, the flocks only one head, the herds only one leader. Can you believe that in heaven the supreme power is divided, and that the entire majesty of that true, divine authority is broken up? It is obvious that God, the father of all, has neither beginning nor end; he who gives existence to all, has given himself eternal life; before the world was created he was a world in himself. Whatsoever things there are he calls into being by his word, arranges them by his wisdom, and perfects them by his might.

“He is invisible, for he is too bright for us to look upon. He is impalpable, for he is too pure for us to touch.<sup>1</sup> He is incomprehensible, for he is beyond our ken,—infinite, immense, and his real greatness is known to himself alone. Our mind is too limited to understand him; therefore we can only form a just estimate of him, by calling him ‘inestimable.’ I will frankly state my opinion: the man who thinks that he knows the greatness of God, depreciates it; he who does not desire to depreciate it, is ignorant of it. Nor need you seek a name for God; God is his name.<sup>2</sup> Names are only necessary where a large number of persons have to be distinguished individually by special marks and designations; for God, who is alone, the name God is all-sufficient. If I should speak of him as father, you would think of him as an earthly father; if as king, you would imagine him as a king of this world; if as lord, you would certainly understand him to be mortal. Take

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 17.

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, vi. 65.



away all additional names and you will behold his splendour. On this point all agree with me. When the common people stretch out their hands to heaven, they say nothing but 'God' and 'God is great,' or 'God is true,' 'if God grant.' Is that the natural<sup>1</sup> language of the people or a form of words used by the Christian in confessing his faith? Even those who are in favour of Jupiter as their supreme lord, are only mistaken in the name; they agree with us that there is a single undivided authority.

XIX. "I also find the poets<sup>2</sup> proclaiming one father of gods and men, and that the mind of man varies according to the day which the father of all has appointed for him.<sup>3</sup> What can be clearer, truer, or more apposite than what Maro of Mantua says?<sup>4</sup> 'In the beginning heaven and earth' and the other parts of the world 'are nourished by a spirit within and moved by a pervading mind, whence come the race of man, flocks and herds,' and all other living things. In another passage<sup>5</sup> he calls that mind and breath God. These are his words: 'God pervades all lands, the tracts of the sea, and high heaven, whence come the race of man, flocks and herds, fire and water.' What else do we also declare God to be but mind, intelligence, and spirit?

"If you like, let us review the teaching of the philosophers.<sup>6</sup> You will find that, although their language

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* i. 16, 43. In other words the idea of God is an "innate" idea.

<sup>2</sup> Ennius and Homer. Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* ii. 2, 4

<sup>3</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, xviii. 135, 136, translated by Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, v. 8: "Tales sunt hominum mentes, quales pater ipse Jupiter auctiferas lustravit lumine terras."

<sup>4</sup> *Æneid*, vi. 724.

<sup>5</sup> *Georgics*, iv. 221; *Æneid*, i. 743.

<sup>6</sup> The following account of the theories of the early philosophers is taken from Cicero (*Nat. Deor.* i. 10), in many cases word for word.



varies, they are essentially at one and in agreement as to this one point. I omit those ignorant men of old<sup>1</sup> who earned the name of Wise Men from their sayings. Let Thales of Miletus come first, who was the first to discuss heavenly things. That same Thales held water to be the first principle of all things, God being the mind which formed everything from it. [This idea of water and spirit is too lofty and sublime to have been invented by man, but must have been suggested to him by God.<sup>2</sup>] So you see that the opinion of the first of philosophers is in complete agreement with our own. Next Anaximenes, and after him Diogenes of Apollonia, teach that the infinite and boundless air is God; here, again, they agree as to the existence of a divinity. According to Anaxagoras, God is the arrangement and movement of an infinite intelligence;<sup>3</sup> the god of Pythagoras is also a mind pervading and diffused throughout the entire universe, from which the life of all living creatures is derived. It is well known that Xenophanes held God to be the infinite All, combined with intelligence; that Antisthenes<sup>4</sup> maintained that the gods of different peoples were many, but that there was only one supreme god of nature. Speusippus recognized as god a certain vital force, by which everything is governed. Does not Democritus, although the originator of the atomic theory, generally give the name of god to nature, which sends forth images of things, and to intelligence? Strato also calls nature God. Even the well-known Epicurus, who

<sup>1</sup> The so-called Seven Sages, or wise men of Greece.

<sup>2</sup> Some editors bracket this passage as a gloss.

<sup>3</sup> The ordinary reading here translated is unsatisfactory. Reading *opus* for *deus*, the meaning will be: "the arrangement and movement (of the universe) is the work of an infinite intelligence."

<sup>4</sup> *Nat. Deor.* i. 13, 32.



pretends that the gods are either idle or non-existent, sets nature above them. Aristotle, although he frequently contradicts himself, assigns supreme power to one; at one time he calls mind god, at another the world, at another he subordinates the world to god.<sup>1</sup> Heraclides of Pontus also, though not always consistent, ascribes a divine intellect to the world. Theophrastus, too, varies, at one time investing the world with supreme authority, at another the divine mind. Zeno, Chrysippus, and Cleanthes, similarly inconsistent, all three hark back to the idea of the unity of providence. Cleanthes at one time argues that mind, at another that soul, at another that æther, but, generally, that reason is god. His master Zeno considers the beginning of all things to be natural and divine law, but sometimes æther, sometimes reason; further, by explaining Juno as the air, Jupiter as the sky, Neptune as the sea, Vulcan as fire, and by similarly demonstrating that the other gods of the vulgar were only natural elements, he vigorously attacks and refutes a common error. Chrysippus says almost the same: believing that god is a divine force, nature endowed with reason, the universe, or the necessity of fate, he follows Zeno in his physiological interpretation of the poems of Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus. Diogenes the Babylonian follows the same line in discussing and explaining the birth of Jupiter, the origin of Minerva, and other similar incidents, which he regards as the names of things, not of gods. Xenophon, the follower of Socrates, asserts that the form of the true god is invisible and therefore should not be looked for;<sup>2</sup> Ariston the Stoic that he is absolutely incomprehensible.<sup>3</sup> Both of them,

<sup>1</sup> *Nat. Deor.* i. 13, 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 12, 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 14, 37.



though they despaired of understanding it, were conscious of the majesty of God. Plato speaks more plainly, both in substance and expression, concerning god; his language would be quite divine, were it not sometimes debased by an alloy of political bias. Thus, in the *Timæus*<sup>1</sup> Plato's god is by his very name the author of the world, the creator of the soul, the maker of all things in heaven and earth, whose great and extraordinary power makes it difficult to find him; and even if he were found, it would be impossible to speak of him to all men. This is almost exactly what we say; we both know God and call him the Father of all things, but never speak of him publicly unless we are asked.

XX. "I have now stated the opinions of nearly all the most distinguished philosophers. They describe one god under different names, so that one might think either that the present-day Christians are philosophers or that the early philosophers were Christians.

"But if the world is ruled by providence and governed by the will of a single god, we ought not to allow the ignorant men of antiquity, delighted or captivated by their fables, to hurry us into the mistake of agreeing with them; they are refuted by the opinions of their own philosophers, supported by the authority of reason and antiquity. Our ancestors were so ready to believe any lies, that they even accepted without thinking such monstrous prodigies as Scylla with many bodies, Chimæra of many shapes, Hydra ever growing again from its fruitful wounds, Centaurs like horse and rider grown together. All the fictions of tradition were eagerly listened to. What of

<sup>1</sup> 28 c, 29 A; cp. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticon*, vi. 68; Lactantius, *De Ira*, 11, 13; Tertullian, *Apol.* 46, 9; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7, 42.



those old wives' fables, of men being changed into birds and beasts, into trees and flowers? If such things had ever happened, they would happen now; but since they cannot happen now, they have never happened. Our ancestors were similarly mistaken in regard to the gods; thoughtless, credulous, uneducated, simple-minded, they were ready to believe anything. Their religious worship of their kings, their desire of seeing them in the form of images after their death, their eagerness to keep the memory of them alive in statues, caused what had originally been intended as a means of consolation to become objects of worship. Finally: before the world was thrown open to commerce, before the ritual and customs of the different nations were intermingled, each people revered its founder, or a famous commander, or a modest queen superior to her sex, or the inventor of some art or public boon, or a citizen<sup>1</sup> worthy of remembrance; in this manner both the dead were rewarded and an example was given to posterity.

XXI. "Read the writings of historians or philosophers; you will find it is as I say. Euhemerus<sup>2</sup> maintains that men were deified as the reward of their services in war or peace; he records the day of their birth, the place where they were born and buried, and locates them in different districts: Jupiter in Dicte, Apollo in Delphi, Isis in Pharos, Ceres in Eleusis.<sup>3</sup> Prodicus<sup>4</sup> speaks of men

<sup>1</sup> Another reading is *ut*—that is, "revered . . . as a citizen worthy of remembrance."

<sup>2</sup> Euhemerus of Messina (c. 300 B.C.), belonging to the Cyrenaic school of philosophy, gave a rationalistic and anthropomorphic explanation of ancient mythology.

<sup>3</sup> Dicte in Crete; Delphi at the foot of Mount Parnassus, the home of the famous oracle of Apollo; Pharos, an island opposite Alexandria; Eleusis, near Athens, where the Eleusinian mysteries were celebrated.

<sup>4</sup> *Nat. Deor.* i. 42, 118.



admitted amongst the gods, who, as the result of their travels, conferred great blessings upon mankind by the discovery of new fruits. Persæus<sup>1</sup> pursues the same line of argument, giving the same names to the fruits discovered and their discoverers, just as the comic poet says, 'Venus without Bacchus and Ceres is cold.'<sup>2</sup> The famous Alexander the Great of Macedon, in a remarkable letter<sup>3</sup> to his mother, asserts that the secret of men made gods was revealed to him by a priest<sup>4</sup> who was afraid of his power; he makes Vulcan<sup>5</sup> supreme, and next the family of Jupiter.<sup>6</sup> Saturn, the head of this large family, according to all the ancient Greek and Roman writers, was a man.<sup>7</sup> The historians Nepos<sup>8</sup> and Cassius<sup>9</sup> are aware of this, Thallus<sup>10</sup> and Diodorus<sup>11</sup> say the same. This Saturn, a fugitive from Crete in fear of his son's rage, came to Italy, where he was hospitably received by Janus. In return, being a paltry Greek, though a man of some culture, he taught those untutored rustics many useful arts, such as writing, coinage, and the manufacture of various implements. He preferred that

<sup>1</sup> *Nat. Deor.* i. 15, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Terence, *Eunuchus*, iv. 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> This letter, referred to by St. Augustine (*De Civ. Dei*, viii. 5 and 27) and other Christian writers, is now regarded as apocryphal. Some modern authorities consider that it was a forgery intended to assist the spread of Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> According to Augustine, the priest's name was Leo.

<sup>5</sup> Phtha of Egyptian mythology (see *Nat. Deor.* iii. 22).

<sup>6</sup> See Waltzing's *Studia Minuciana* for the altered position of the matter in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Compare the passage in Tertullian (*Apol.* 10).

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius Nepos (1st century B.C.), the author of the well-known *Lives* of illustrious men.

<sup>9</sup> Cassius Hemina, Roman annalist, lived during the time of the third Punic war.

<sup>10</sup> Thallus, author of a history of Syria, lived about the same time as Cassius Hemina.

<sup>11</sup> Diodorus Siculus (1st century B.C.), author of a voluminous work called a *Historical Library*.



his retreat should be called Latium, since it had afforded him a safe hiding-place,<sup>1</sup> and he and Janus have both handed down their name to posterity, the one in the city Saturnia, the other in the Janiculum.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, then, he who was a fugitive and in hiding was a man, the son of a man and the father of a man ; he was only said to be the son of Earth and Heaven, because the Italians did not know who his parents were, just as to this day we speak of those who unexpectedly present themselves as if they were sent down from heaven, but call those who are obscure and of ignoble birth, 'sons of earth.'

"After the expulsion of Saturn, his son Jupiter reigned in Crete, had sons there, and died there ; the cave of Jupiter can still be seen, his grave is still shown, and his human nature is proved by the sacrifices offered him.

"It would be a waste of time to go through all his descendants and to set forth the entire lineage of that family, since the mortal nature that was established in the case of their first parents was communicated to the rest by the mere order of succession. But perhaps you make gods of them after their death, just as Romulus was deified by the perjury of Proculus,<sup>3</sup> Juba by the will of the Moors,<sup>4</sup> and all the other deified kings who are placed amongst the gods rather to do honour to their reign than as a confirmation of their divine nature. In fact, the name is bestowed upon them against their

<sup>1</sup> From *latere*, to lie hid. Etymologically, the word really means "the broad, flat land."

<sup>2</sup> A long ridge on the right bank of the Tiber, the highest of the hills of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> Proculus, a Roman senator, who declared on oath that he had seen Romulus admitted amongst the gods, and that he had expressed the desire to be worshipped as Quirinus (Livy, i. 16)

<sup>4</sup> Juba the Second (died about A.D. 19), King of Numidia and subsequently of Mauretania. He was a man of considerable culture and the author of several historical and other works.



will; they would rather continue to be men, they are afraid of becoming gods, and in spite of their age do not wish to be deified. The dead cannot become gods, since a god cannot die; nor can any who are born, since everything that is born dies; but that alone is divine, which has neither beginning nor end. For if gods were once born why are they not born now? Can it be that Jupiter is too old, that Juno has become barren, that Minerva has grown grey before she has had a child? Is it not more probable that the supposed generation of gods has come to an end, because fables of this kind are no longer believed? Moreover, if the gods could have children but could not die, the number of gods would exceed that of men; in that case heaven could not contain them, nor air hold them, nor earth support them. This proves that those gods were men, of whom we read and know that they were born and died.

XXII. "No one can doubt, then, that the common people will supplicate and publicly worship the consecrated images of such men, as long as the imagination and understanding of the ignorant is led astray by artistic beauty of style, blinded by the glitter of gold, deadened by the sheen of silver and the whiteness of ivory. But if one calls to mind the instruments and machines used in fashioning every statue, he will feel ashamed of being afraid of the material on which a workman has exercised his ingenuity to make it into a god. For the god that is made of wood, perhaps a piece of a funeral pile or a gallows, is hung up, hewn, chipped, and planed; the god of gold<sup>1</sup> or silver is melted down from a dirty vessel, as was often done by a king of Egypt,<sup>2</sup> beaten with hammers

<sup>1</sup> Reading *aureus* for *aereus*.

<sup>2</sup> Amasis (see Herodotus, ii. 172).



and fashioned on the anvil ; the god of stone is hewn, carved and polished by some vile wretch, and is no more aware of the disgraceful nature of his birth<sup>1</sup> than of the honour paid him by your veneration. But perhaps you may say, the stone, wood, or silver is not yet a god : when, then, does it become one ? It is cast, fashioned, and carved, but is not yet a god ; it is soldered, put together, and set up, but still it is not a god ; it is bedecked, consecrated, and supplicated ; then at last it is a god, since man willed it to be so and has declared it holy.

“How much juster is the estimate of your gods shown in the natural instincts of dumb animals ! Mice, swallows, hawks, knowing that they cannot feel, peck them, tread on them, perch upon them, and, unless driven away, build nests even in the mouth of your god ; spiders spin their web over his face and suspend their threads from his head. You wipe them, clean them, scrape them ; thus, those whom you have yourselves made are both protected and dreaded by you.<sup>2</sup> Not one of you remembers that he ought to know God before he worships him ; rashly eager to obey your elders, you prefer to assent to the errors of others rather than trust yourself, while knowing nothing about that which you dread. Thus in gold and silver is avarice consecrated ; thus the form of useless statues has been confirmed ; thus Roman superstition has originated. If you examine their rites, how many are ridiculous, how many even pitiable ! Some run about naked during the cruel winter,<sup>3</sup> others walk about with felt caps on their heads,

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.

<sup>2</sup> Arnobius (*Adv. Gentes*, vi. 16) employs the same argument.

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the festival of Lupercalia (February 15), at which the priests, called Luperci, ran about naked, striking those whom they met with thongs as an antidote to sterility.



carry round old shields,<sup>1</sup> beat drums, carry the gods from street to street, asking alms.<sup>2</sup> Certain shrines may only be entered once a year,<sup>3</sup> some it is forbidden to enter at all;<sup>4</sup> to some, men are refused admission, and women are excluded from certain rites;<sup>5</sup> at certain ceremonies even the presence of a slave is a crime that calls for atonement. Some shrines are crowned by a woman who has had only one husband, others by one who has had several, and in some instances a woman who has on several occasions been guilty of adultery<sup>6</sup> is religiously sought for. Would not the man who offers libations of his own blood and makes his wounds an occasion for supplication, be better without any religion at all than with such a religion as that?<sup>7</sup> Do not those who thus mutilate themselves insult the god whom they hope to propitiate? If God wanted eunuchs, he would create them, not have them made. It is easy to understand how half-insane, foolish, and wrong-headed persons fall into such absurdities, and how those who go astray from the truth find mutual support in their very numbers. In fact, the large number of madmen is the excuse for the general madness.

XXIII. "Lastly, consider the sacred rites and the

<sup>1</sup> The Salii (priests of Mars), wearing conical caps (*apices*), carried round the sacred shields (*ancilia*) which were supposed to have fallen from heaven.

<sup>2</sup> The priests of Cybele, called Galli, went through the streets, beating upon drums made of asses' skins, carrying the image of the goddess and asking alms.

<sup>3</sup> Such as the temple of Ceres and Proserpine in Arcadia, and that of Dindymene (Cybele) at Thebes.

<sup>4</sup> The temple of Neptune at Mantinea was said to have always been shut.

<sup>5</sup> Men were not admitted to the rites of Bona Dea, Vesta, and Ceres, nor women to those of Hercules.

<sup>6</sup> *Adulteria* may mean simply "marriages."

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the priests of Bellona and Cybele.



mysteries themselves. You will find that the history of these wretched gods is one of tragic ends, deaths and burials, sorrow and lamentation. Isis,<sup>1</sup> with her Cynocephalus and shaven priests, laments and wails, seeking her son ; her wretched votaries beat their breasts and imitate the grief of the unhappy mother ; soon, after the little one has been found, Isis rejoices, the priests exult, Cynocephalus as the finder glories in his achievement. Thus, year in, year out, they always lose what they find or find what they lose. Is it not absurd to weep for what one ought to worship or to worship what one ought to weep for ? Yet these rites, of Egyptian origin, are now practised in Rome,<sup>2</sup> where you can play the fool with the swallow and rattle of Isis, and at the tomb of your Serapis or Osiris,<sup>3</sup> which is empty now that his limbs have been scattered abroad.<sup>4</sup>

"Ceres, with a lighted torch, girdled with snakes, full of care and anxiety, searches for her daughter Libera,<sup>5</sup> who was carried off during her wandering and dishonoured ; this is the meaning of the Eleusinian mysteries. And what are the rites of Jupiter ? A goat is his nurse ;<sup>6</sup> the child is removed, to prevent his being devoured by his

<sup>1</sup> The story of Isis represents her at one time as searching for her husband, Osiris, slain by Tryphon, at another for her son Horus or Harpocraton. She is assisted by Anubis with the dog's head (Cynocephalus) and by the priests with shaved heads (Isiaci) ; cp. Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* i. 21).

<sup>2</sup> The worship of Serapis met with considerable opposition in Rome ; after it had been prohibited and the altars broken, it was, after varying fortunes, restored by Augustus.

<sup>3</sup> Serapis or Osiris are alternative names.

<sup>4</sup> This passage is corrupt, and its position in the text is not clear. Isis is said to have been represented with a swallow, as a bird suitable for mournful occasions. Others take *hirundo* to mean a "serpent."

<sup>5</sup> Proserpine, who was carried off to the underworld by Pluto while gathering flowers at Enna in Sicily.

<sup>6</sup> Amalthea.



greedy father ;<sup>1</sup> the tinkling cymbals of the Corybantes<sup>2</sup> are loudly beaten, that the father may not hear the child's cries. . . . Again, do not the very form and appearance of your gods show their ridiculous and disgraceful nature ? Vulcan is lame and feeble ; Apollo beardless in spite of his years, while Æsculapius, although the son of the ever youthful Apollo, is full-bearded ; Neptune has grey eyes, Minerva blue, Juno those of an ox ; Mercury has wings on his feet, Pan hoofs, Saturn fetters. Janus has two faces, so that he appears to be walking backwards ; Diana as a huntress has her dress girt up high, at Ephesus she is represented with a number of swelling breasts,<sup>3</sup> as Trivia<sup>4</sup> she is a dreadful being with three heads and many hands. Even your Jupiter himself is sometimes represented as beardless, in other places as bearded ; when he is called Hammon<sup>5</sup> he has horns, as Capitolinus<sup>6</sup> he wields the thunderbolt, as Latiaris<sup>7</sup> he is covered with blood, as Feretrius he is no longer heard of.<sup>8</sup> Not to waste time over all these Jupiters, I will merely say that he has as many monstrous forms as names. Erigone hanged herself, that she might shine amongst the stars as

<sup>1</sup> Saturn.

<sup>2</sup> The Corybantes were the priests of Rhea Cybele, the Great Mother.

<sup>3</sup> *Uberibus*. The MS. reading *verubus* has been explained as "iron rods by which the statue was fixed in its position."

<sup>4</sup> Her temples were erected at a place where "three ways" met.

<sup>5</sup> Hammon was an Egyptian (or Libyan) deity, worshipped in the form of a ram, identified with Jupiter.

<sup>6</sup> God of the Capitol.

<sup>7</sup> During the *feriæ Latinæ* (the festival of the allied Latins on the Alban Hill), a criminal was sacrificed on the altar of Jupiter Latiaris.

<sup>8</sup> Feretrius means the subduer of enemies (*ferire*, to strike). The MS. reading, here translated, is obscure. Various alterations have been suggested : *donis abditur*, "is covered with gifts" ; *manu jacitur*, "is hurled by the hand," with reference to a stone called Jupiter Lapis ; *non aditur*, "is no longer visited."



the Virgin ;<sup>1</sup> Castor and Pollux die alternately that both may live ; Æsculapius is struck by lightning<sup>2</sup> that he may rise a god ; Hercules is consumed by fire on Mount Oeta,<sup>3</sup> to divest himself of his mortal nature.

XXIV. "All these fables and delusions we learn from ignorant parents and—what is worse—improve upon them as the result of our own training and studies, especially the works of the poets, whose authority has been exceedingly prejudicial to the cause of truth. For this reason Plato was quite right to exclude the famous poet Homer, whom he had loaded with praise and garlands, from the model state set up by him in his dialogue the *Republic*.<sup>4</sup> For it was Homer in particular who, in his story of the Trojan war, made your gods take part in human affairs and actions (although certainly he was only joking), set pairs of them fighting, represented Venus wounded, Mars fettered, wounded, and put to flight. He tells us how Jupiter was set free by Briareus, who prevented his being bound by the rest of the gods ; how he wept for his son Sarpedon with tears of blood, since he could not save him from death.<sup>5</sup> According to another poet,<sup>6</sup> Hercules has to carry away dung<sup>7</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Erigone, daughter of Icarius, King of Sparta, who hanged herself out of grief at the death of her father. She was afterwards placed among the constellations as Virgo.

<sup>2</sup> Pluto accused him of wrongfully practising his art and depriving him of the dead by his great medical skill.

<sup>3</sup> In Thessaly.

<sup>4</sup> "If Homer were to visit our city and show a desire to sing his poems to us, we should venerate him as a holy, wonderful, and agreeable poet ; but, after having poured perfumes over his head and crowned him with a garland of wool, we would drive him out of our state and send him to another city" (iii. 398).

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 14 ; see *Iliad*, i. 399 ; v. 330, 385 ; xvi. 459.

<sup>6</sup> Ovid, *Met.* ix. 187.

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the cleansing of the stables of Augeas.



Apollo tends the flocks of Admetus;<sup>1</sup> Neptune built walls for Laomedon, and the unlucky builder received no pay for his work.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, again,<sup>3</sup> we read of the forging of the thunderbolt of Jove and the arms of Æneas on an anvil, although the sky, thunder, and lightning were in existence long before Jupiter was born in Crete, and a Cyclops could no more imitate the flashes of the real thunderbolt than Jupiter could help fearing it. Why need I speak of Mars and Venus caught in open adultery,<sup>4</sup> and the shameful passion of Jupiter for Ganymede which received divine sanction?<sup>5</sup> All these stories have been put forward to provide a certain justification for human vices. By these and similar, even more attractive, fictions and lies the minds of boys are corrupted; they grow up to the prime of life with the same stories deeply rooted in their minds, and reach old age—miserable wretches that they are!—still of the same opinion, although the truth is easy to find, if only they will seek for it.

XXV. "But, according to you, it was just this superstition that gave the Romans their empire, increased it, and set it on a firm footing, since their strength lay not so much in their valour as in their religion and dutiful conduct towards the gods. Everybody knows that Roman justice, so remarkable and world-renowned, came into being while the infant empire was still in its cradle!<sup>6</sup> At the very outset, were not the Romans drawn together by crime? Was not the growth of their power due to the immunity afforded by dread of their cruelty? The original Romans gathered together in an asylum, to

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, ii. 765.

<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Æneid*, viii. 423.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid, *Metam.* x. 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* xxi. 443.

<sup>5</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, viii. 266.

<sup>6</sup> This sentence is ironical.



which had flocked numbers of desperate men, criminals, lewd fellows, cut-throats, and traitors; and Romulus himself, their leader and commander, to surpass his people in crime, killed his own brother. Such were the first beginnings of this religious state! Soon afterwards, they carried off, ridiculed, and violated young women from other states, already betrothed and promised to a husband, and even married women—an unparalleled insult.<sup>1</sup> To crown all, they made war upon their own fathers-in-law and shed the blood of relatives. What could have been more impious, more audacious, more disgraceful than this shameless crime? The result was, that the other kings and later rulers, like Romulus, made it their common practice to drive out their neighbours from their territory, to overthrow the states nearest to them together with their temples and altars, to drive them into captivity, to grow greater by robbing others and by their own crimes.

“Thus, all the territory that the Romans now hold, cultivate, and occupy, has been acquired by barefaced theft; the temples have all been built with the proceeds of the spoils of war, the destruction of cities, the murder of priests, the plundering of the gods. It is an insult and a mockery to serve the gods of the conquered, to take them captive and, after defeating them, to offer them homage; to worship what one has taken by main force, is to consecrate sacrilege, not gods. Thus the Roman triumphs always involved offences against religion; all trophies won from other nations were so many robberies from the gods. The truth is, that the Romans owed their greatness not to piety but to sacrilege that went unpunished; for they could not have looked

<sup>1</sup> The rape of the Sabine women.



for assistance in their wars from the gods against whom they had taken up arms, but whom they did not begin to worship until they had triumphed over them. But what can those gods of yours do for the Romans, seeing that they were powerless to defend their own people against your arms?

"We know the native gods of Rome: Romulus, Picus, Tiberinus, Consus, Pilumnus, Volumnus<sup>1</sup>; Cloacina<sup>2</sup> was invented and her worship introduced by Tatius; Pavor (Fear) and Pallor (Paleness) by Hostilius<sup>3</sup>; soon afterwards Febris<sup>4</sup> was deified by some one unknown; such is the foster-mother<sup>5</sup> of this city—superstition, diseases, and infirmities. Surely Acca Larentia<sup>6</sup> and Flora,<sup>7</sup> two shameful harlots, must be reckoned amongst the diseases as well as amongst the deities of the Romans.

"Of course,<sup>8</sup> it was these gods who overcame the resistance of the gods worshipped by other nations, and

<sup>1</sup> Picus (woodpecker), son of Saturn, King of the Italian Aborigines, changed by Circe into a woodpecker because he refused her advances. Tiberinus, the deified river Tiber. Consus, an old Italian god of earth and agriculture, sometimes called Neptunus Equester; he also was the suggester of secret plans and of good counsel. Pilumnus (woodpecker), guardian deity of married people and children. Volumnus (well-wisher, from *volo*), the protector of children newly born.

<sup>2</sup> Cloacina (more correctly Cluacina), the purifier, an epithet of Venus, at whose statue the Romans purified themselves after the Sabine war. The spelling Cloacina is due to a mistaken etymology from *cloaca*, her statue being said to have been found in the great sewer at Rome by Tatius, King of the Sabines (Livy, i. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Tullus Hostilius, the third legendary king of Rome.

<sup>4</sup> The personification of Fever. The Romans were very fond of deifying such abstractions.

<sup>5</sup> *Alumna* must here be used in an active sense.

<sup>6</sup> The nurse of Romulus.

<sup>7</sup> The goddess of Flowers, whose festivals were often marked by great licentiousness.

<sup>8</sup> Ironical.



enlarged the Roman Empire ; for Thracian Mars, Cretan Jupiter, Argive Samian or Phœnician Juno, Tauric Diana, the Idæan mother,<sup>1</sup> or those Egyptian gods (or rather monsters) certainly never assisted you against their own worshippers.

"But perhaps your maidens were more chaste, your priests holier. Have not many of the Vestals been punished for immorality, while others have escaped by mere good luck ? Are not your temples haunts of vice, managed by the priests ? And yet, before the Romans existed, by divine dispensation Assyrians, Medes, Persians, even Greeks and Egyptians long ruled over mighty empires, although they had no priests, Arval brethren,<sup>2</sup> Salii,<sup>3</sup> Vestals, or Augurs, no chickens shut up in a cage,<sup>4</sup> by whose acceptance or rejection of their food the destinies of the state were decided.

XXVI. "I now come to those auspices and auguries, of which you have so laboriously collected examples to prove that neglect of them always brings regret, their observance good fortune. No doubt<sup>5</sup> Claudius and Flaminius and Junius<sup>6</sup> lost their armies because they did not think it worth while to wait until the chickens began to feed greedily. How about Regulus ?<sup>7</sup> did he not observe the auguries, and yet was taken prisoner ? Mancinus showed due respect for religion, and yet was given up to the enemy and sent under the yoke.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cybele.

<sup>2</sup> Twelve priests who every year went round the fields and prayed for fertility. Some fragments of their songs, which have been preserved, belong to the earliest records of the Latin language.

<sup>3</sup> Salii (the leapers), priests of Mars.

<sup>4</sup> The sacred chickens (*pulli*) kept for taking the auspices.

<sup>5</sup> Ironical.

<sup>6</sup> See notes on ch. vii.

<sup>7</sup> M. Atilius Regulus, taken prisoner and tortured by the Carthaginians in the first Punic war (Horace, *Odes*, iii. 5).

<sup>8</sup> C. Hostilius Mancinus (consul 137 B.C.), defeated before



Paulus also found the chickens very greedy, but was defeated at Cannæ with the greater part of his army.<sup>1</sup> Gaius Cæsar,<sup>2</sup> although the auguries and auspices were against his crossing to Africa before winter, paid no attention to them; the result was that his voyage was more favourable and his victory speedier.

"And what and how much shall I tell you about oracles? Amphiaraus<sup>3</sup> predicted what was to happen after his death, but did not know that he would be betrayed by his wife for the sake of a necklace. The blind Tiresias,<sup>4</sup> who could not see the present, saw the future. Ennius invented the answers of the Pythian Apollo about Pyrrhus,<sup>5</sup> although the god had long before that ceased to deliver oracles in verse; for his cautious and ambiguous oracle was no longer credited when men began to be better educated and less credulous. Demosthenes also, being aware that the oracular responses were mere inventions, complained that the Pythian priestess was 'a philippiser.'<sup>6</sup>

"Sometimes, however, auspices or oracles have hit the truth, and amidst a host of lies chance may seem to have

Numantia in Spain, concluded a treaty, but the Romans refused to ratify it and handed him over to the enemy, who generously released him.

<sup>1</sup> Lucius Æmilius Paulus, defeated by Hannibal in a battle near Cannæ.

<sup>2</sup> Gaius Julius Cæsar, the great general and statesman.

<sup>3</sup> A famous soothsayer who, having been warned by the gods that he would lose his life if he took part in the expedition of the Seven against Thebes, hid himself to escape death. But his wife Eriphyle, tempted by the offer of a gold necklace, betrayed his hiding-place. Amphiaraus was compelled to march against Thebes, and was swallowed up in the earth.

<sup>4</sup> A celebrated Theban soothsayer.

<sup>5</sup> This well-known oracle ran: *Aio te Aeacida Romanos vincere posse*, which might mean "I declare that you, O Pyrrhus, can conquer the Romans" or "that the Romans can conquer you."

<sup>6</sup> *i. e.* favoured Philip of Macedon.



played the part of design. Nevertheless, I will attempt to unearth and bring into the light of day the source of that error and perverseness, the origin of all the present obscurity.

"There exist certain wandering, unclean spirits,<sup>1</sup> who have lost their heavenly activities from being weighed down by earthly passions and disorders. So then these spirits, burdened with sin and steeped in vice, who have sacrificed their original simplicity, being themselves lost, unceasingly strive to destroy others, as a consolation for their own misfortune; depraved themselves, they strive to communicate error and depravity to others; estranged from God, they strive to alienate others by the introduction of vicious forms of religion. Poets<sup>2</sup> know these spirits as "demons," philosophers discuss their existence, and Socrates recognized it by avoiding or pursuing a certain course of action in accordance with the will and command of the demon who was always by his side.<sup>3</sup> The magi also are not only aware of the existence of demons, but all their pretended miracles are the work of these spirits; by their inspiration and influence they perform jugglers' tricks, causing things which do not exist to appear and things which do exist to disappear. Hostanes,<sup>4</sup> the chief of these magi by reason of his eloquence and performances, renders to the true god the homage that he deserves; he also recognizes that

<sup>1</sup> See also Tertullian, *Apol.* 22; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *e. g.* Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 122.

<sup>3</sup> For the "demon" of Socrates, see Plato, *Apology*, 19, p. 31 D; Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, 17. According to Plato, the demon only exercised powers of dissuasion, not of persuasion. On the subject generally, see the exhaustive article "Demons and Spirits" in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*.

<sup>4</sup> The first writer on the art of magic. He lived in the time of Xerxes, whom he accompanied on his expedition to Greece.



the angels, that is, servants and messengers, guard the throne of God<sup>1</sup> and stand by his side to worship, terrified and trembling at a sign or look from their master. Hostanes has also told us of earthly demons, wandering spirits, the enemies of mankind. Does not Plato, who thought it hard to find God, find it easy to tell of angels and demons? Does he not, in the dialogue *Symposium*,<sup>2</sup> even attempt to define their nature? He assumes that it is a substance midway between mortal and immortal substance, that is, between body and spirit, an admixture or compound of the heaviness of earth and the lightness of heaven; from this, he tells us, love is fashioned, penetrates the human heart, excites the senses, creates the passions, and inspires the ardour of desire.

XXVII. "Now these unclean spirits, the demons, as the magi and philosophers have shown, conceal themselves in statues and consecrated images, and by their spiritual influence acquire the authority of a present divinity. At one time they inspire the soothsayers, at another take up their abode in the temples, sometimes animate the fibres of the victims' entrails, direct the flight of birds, control the lots, compose oracles, enveloped in a mist of untruth. For they both deceive and are deceived; being ignorant of the pure truth, to their own destruction they are afraid to confess that which they do know. Thus they weigh down men's minds and draw them from heaven, call them away from the true god to material things, disturb their lives and trouble their sleep; stealthily creeping into men's bodies, thanks to their rarefied and subtle nature, they counterfeit diseases,

<sup>1</sup> Reading *dei sedem tueri eiusque* . . . Halm gives *dei sed veri, eius* . . . "messengers of God, but the true god . . ."

<sup>2</sup> 202 E.



terrify the imagination, rack the limbs, to compel men to worship them ; then, sated with the fumes from the altars and the slaughter of beasts, they undo what they have tied themselves, so as to appear to have effected a cure. They are also responsible for the madmen, whom you see running out into the streets, themselves soothsayers of a kind but without a temple, raging, ranting, whirling round in the dance ;<sup>1</sup> there is the same demoniacal possession, but the object of the frenzy is different. Similarly, they are the origin of such stories as you recently mentioned—Jupiter's demand in a dream for the renewal of his games, the appearance of Castor and Pollux on horseback, the boat following the matron's girdle.<sup>2</sup> To all these things, as most of you are aware, the demons themselves plead guilty, when they are driven out of our bodies by the compelling force of our words and the fervour of our speech. Saturn, Serapis, Jupiter, and whatsoever demons you worship, when overcome by pain confess what they are ; they certainly would not lie and bring disgrace upon themselves, especially when any of you were present. You may believe their own testimony that they are demons, when they confess the truth about themselves ; for when adjured by the only true god, against their will, poor wretches, they quake with fear in men's bodies, and either come forth at once or gradually disappear, according as the faith of the sufferer assists or the grace of the healer inspires. Thus they avoid the company of Christians, whom they formerly attacked from a distance in their meetings with your assistance. Again, since it is

<sup>1</sup> Lucan, *Pharsalia*, v. 169 ; Apuleius, *Metam.* viii. 27 ; compare the dancing dervishes of the East.

<sup>2</sup> See ch. vii.



natural to hate those whom you fear and, if possible, to assail those whom you hate,<sup>1</sup> they make their way into the minds of the ignorant and implant hatred of us secretly by the agency of fear. Thus they take possession of men's souls and block up their hearts, so that they may begin to hate us before they know us; for they are afraid that, when they do know us, they may either be inclined to imitate us or at least unable to condemn us.<sup>2</sup>

XXVIII. "How unfair it is to pass judgement, as you do, upon what is unknown and unexamined, you can judge from our own confession. For we were once the same as you; blind and ignorant, our opinions were once the same as yours. We believed that the Christians worshipped monsters, ate the flesh of infants, and practised incest at their feasts. We did not understand that these tales were always being spread abroad by the demons, without examination or proof; we did not remember that, during all this time, no one came forward to betray the secret, although he would not only have been forgiven but also rewarded for his information. Christianity is so far from being an evil, that its followers, when accused, show neither shame nor fear; their one regret is that they have not become Christians sooner. We, however, when undertaking the defence and advocacy of certain sacrilegious and incestuous persons, even of parricides, did not think that Christians ought to be given a hearing at all. Sometimes, out of pity for them, we treated them with even greater cruelty, torturing them to force them to deny their faith, so as to save their lives. In their case the practice of torture was reversed; it was employed not to elicit the truth, but to compel people to lie. If any one, weaker than his neighbours,

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De Off.* ii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.*



crushed and overwhelmed by suffering, abjured his faith, we looked upon him with favour, as if in renouncing the name<sup>1</sup> he had atoned for all his crimes. Do you understand that we once thought and acted as you do now? whereas, if reason and not the prompting of a demon had controlled our decision, Christians should rather have been forced, not to disavow their faith, but to confess their incests, their sinful rites, their sacrifice of children. It is with these and such-like fables that these same demons have filled the ears of the ignorant to our prejudice, to excite horror and indignation against us. And no wonder; since rumour, which ever feeds on the lies that are spread about but is put an end to by the manifestation of the truth, is equally the work of demons; it is they who propagate and keep alive false reports.

“This is the origin of the story which you say you have heard—our deification of an ass’s head. Who would be so foolish as to worship such a thing? or even still more foolish and believe it—except yourselves, who keep whole asses as sacred in your stables together with your or their Epona,<sup>2</sup> and piously decorate them in company with Isis,<sup>3</sup> who sacrifice oxen and sheep and worship their heads, and set up as gods beings half-goats, half-men,<sup>4</sup> or with dogs’ and lions’ faces?<sup>5</sup> Do you not, like the Egyptians, worship and feed the bull Apis?<sup>6</sup> Nor do

<sup>1</sup> That is, of a Christian.

<sup>2</sup> Epona, the goddess of horses and asses; see Tertullian, *Apol.* 16.

<sup>3</sup> Reading *decoratis*. There are various readings: MS. *devoratis*, “you eat cakes made in the form of an ass, together with imitations of Isis”; *devotatis*, “you consecrate.”

<sup>4</sup> Pan and the Satyrs.

<sup>5</sup> Oriental divinities such as Anubis, Mithras: see Tertullian, *Apol.* 16.

<sup>6</sup> The sacred Ox, which was kept in a temple at Memphis. It



you condemn their rites instituted in honour of serpents, crocodiles, and other beasts, birds, and fishes, the penalty for killing any one of which gods is death.<sup>1</sup> Again, like these same Egyptians, you are guilty of certain shameful acts of which you accuse us. These and the like infamous practices we may not even hear described; many of us think it a disgrace to speak of them even in our own defence. You falsely allege that acts are committed by modest, clean-living persons, such as we should deem incredible, if your own acts did not demonstrate their possibility.

XXIX. "As to the worship of a criminal and his cross with which you charge our religion, you are far from the truth in thinking either that a criminal deserved, or that a mortal had the power, to be believed to be a god. Truly, the man deserves pity who rests all his hopes on a mere mortal, with whose death all his power of rendering assistance is at an end! The Egyptians certainly select one of themselves as an object of worship, court his favour alone, consult him about everything, sacrifice victims to him.<sup>2</sup> But this man, whom others regard as a god, is certainly only a man in his own eyes, whether he will or no; for even if he can dupe another person's conscience he cannot deceive his own. Even kings and princes are not only hailed as great and elect, names to which they have a right, but are falsely called gods by disgraceful flatterers; whereas honour would be the truest homage to a famous man, and affection the

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was said to be an incarnation of Osiris. When twenty-five years old, he drowned himself in the Nile, and another representative was provided.

<sup>1</sup> Under the empire many Egyptian and Oriental cults made their way into Italy and the empire.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Præp. Ev.* iii. 4.



most agreeable tribute that could be offered to the worthiest. Thus they invoke the godhead of these men, offer up supplication at their images, implore the aid of their genius (that is, their demon), and it is more dangerous to swear falsely by the genius of the emperor than by that of Jupiter.

"We neither worship crosses nor wish for them. Certainly, you, who consecrate gods of wood, may perhaps worship wooden crosses as parts of your gods. For what are your standards, banners, and ensigns but gilded and decorated crosses? Your trophies of victory not only present the appearance of a simple cross but also that of one crucified. Certainly, we see the sign of the cross represented in a natural manner on a ship, when it rides over the waves with swelling sails or glides along gently with outspread oars : again, when a yoke is set up, it is like the sign of the cross, and in like manner when a man with outstretched hands worships God with a pure heart. Thus, there is either some natural explanation of the sign of the cross or it embodies the form of your religion.

XXX. "I should like to meet<sup>1</sup> the man who says or believes that initiation into Christianity is accompanied by the murder of an infant and the drinking of its blood. Do you think it possible that so tender, so small a body could receive such fatal wounds, that any one could have the heart to kill one just born, hardly entered upon life, and shed and drink its fresh young blood? No one can believe this unless he himself were capable of doing so. I see your newly born sons exposed by you to wild beasts and birds of prey, or cruelly strangled to death. There

<sup>1</sup> *Convenire* as a legal term = to bring an action against ; here, to have an explanation with.



are also women among you who, by taking certain drugs, destroy the beginnings of the future human being while it is still in the womb and are guilty of infanticide before they are mothers.

"These practices have certainly come down to you from your gods ; for Saturn did not expose his children, but devoured them. Not without reason, therefore, in certain parts of Africa, children were sacrificed to him by their parents, their cries being stifled with kisses and caresses, to prevent the sacrifice of a victim in tears.<sup>1</sup> The Taurians of Pontus<sup>2</sup> and the Egyptian King Busiris<sup>3</sup> were in the habit of sacrificing strangers ; the Gauls offered human, or rather inhuman, victims to Mercury ;<sup>4</sup> the Romans buried alive a Greek and Gallic man and woman by way of sacrifice,<sup>5</sup> and even at the present day the worship of Jupiter Latiaris<sup>6</sup> is accompanied by homicide, and, as is worthy of the son of Saturn, he battens on the blood of the evil-doer and the criminal. I believe that it was he who inspired Catiline<sup>7</sup> to enter into a league of blood with the conspirators ; that it was due to him that the rites of Bellona<sup>8</sup> were steeped in draughts of human gore, and that human blood was used to cure epilepsy,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saturn is here identified with Baal or Moloch.

<sup>2</sup> The inhabitants of the Tauric Chersonese, the modern Crimea, who sacrificed shipwrecked strangers to Artemis.

<sup>3</sup> A fabulous king of Egypt, who sacrificed strangers, and was himself slain by Hercules.

<sup>4</sup> Under the name of Teutates.

<sup>5</sup> Under the empire, the practice still existed of burying a man and a woman of the country with which the Romans were at war (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxviii. 12 ; Livy, xxii. 57).

<sup>6</sup> See ch. xxiii.

<sup>7</sup> L. Sergius Catilina, the notorious revolutionary.

<sup>8</sup> The goddess of war. Her priests gashed their arms and legs and poured their blood upon the altar while sacrificing to her.

<sup>9</sup> *Comitialis morbus* : so called because if a case occurred during the meeting of a public assembly it was at once dissolved.



a remedy worse than the disease. Such people resemble those who devour wild beasts from the arena, smeared and stained with blood or fattened with the limbs and entrails of men. We are not allowed either to see or hear of homicide, and we are so averse from bloodshed that we even abstain from the blood of those animals which serve us for food.

XXXI. "The story of our incestuous banquet is a monstrous lie, invented by a league of demons to injure us, in order that our reputation for chastity might be sullied by charges of infamous and disgusting practices, and that, before they had learnt the truth, men might be driven to shun us owing to the terror inspired by unutterable suggestions. Thus also your friend Fronto<sup>1</sup> has not given evidence as one who affirms a thing, but has scattered abuse broadcast like a public speaker; for such practices rather originated amongst people like yourselves. In Persia, a man is allowed to marry his mother, in Egypt and Athens his sister. Your histories and tragedies, which you eagerly read and listen to, treat incest as something to be proud of; hence it is that you worship incestuous gods, united to mother, daughter, and sister. Not without reason, then, is incest often detected amongst you, but always permitted. We, on the other hand, show our modesty not only outwardly but inwardly; we willingly cleave to one marriage-tie; in the desire to have children, we have only one wife—or else none. Our banquets are conducted not only with modesty, but also with sobriety; we indulge in no luxurious feasts, nor spin out our meals in drinking, but temper our gaiety with seriousness. Our language is pure, our body even more so, and most of us practise perpetual

<sup>1</sup> See ch. ix.



virginity without boasting of it ; so far from our having any desire for incest, even a chaste and legitimate union calls forth a blush of shame.

"Nor, again, are we composed of the lowest dregs of the people, even if we refuse your offices and dignities ; nor do we belong to any faction, if we recognize only one virtue,<sup>1</sup> and are as quiet when assembled together as by ourselves ; nor are we talkative in corners,<sup>2</sup> if you are either ashamed or afraid to listen to us in public.

"The fact that our number is increasing daily, is no proof of error, but evidence of merit ; for when men live an honourable life, their own friends remain constant and are joined by others. Lastly, we easily recognize each other, not by external marks, as you imagine, but by the stamp of innocence and modesty ; we love one another (which annoys you), since we do not know how to hate ; we call ourselves brethren (which excites your ill-will), as being children of one and the same father, God, as showing the same faith, as coheirs of the same hope.<sup>3</sup> Whereas you, on the contrary, do not recognize each other, give way to outbursts of mutual hatred, and only acknowledge any ties of brotherhood when leagued together for murder.

XXXII. "Further, do you think that we wish to conceal the objects of our worship, because we have neither temples nor altars ? By what image am I to represent God, since, rightly considered, man himself is the image of God ? What temple am I to erect to him, since the whole

<sup>1</sup> (Or omitting *bonum* as a gloss), "if we are all of one mind" ; cp. Philippians ii. 2 ; Romans xv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> "i. e. you cannot reproach us for meeting in secret, if . . ."

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter iii. 7 ; Romans viii. 17.



of this world, which has been fashioned by him, is unable to contain him? Am I to confine such might and majesty within the limits of a small temple, while I myself, a mere man, have a more spacious dwelling-place? Is not the mind a better place of dedication, the heart a better place for his consecration? Am I to offer to God the sacrifices and victims which he has provided for our use, and reject his gifts? This would be ungrateful, since the most acceptable sacrifice is a good heart, a clean spirit. Therefore, the man who practises innocence, offers prayer to God; he who practises justice, offers libation to him; he who abstains from wrongdoing, propitiates him; the man who rescues another from danger, sacrifices the most excellent victim. These are our sacrifices, these are our rites; he who is most just amongst us is the most religious.

“But, you say, we neither see nor show to others the God whom we worship. This is just the reason why we believe in him; although we cannot see him, we feel that he exists. In his works and in all the changes of the universe we behold his ever-present influence, when it thunders and lightens, when the thunderbolt falls, when the sky is clear. You need not wonder if you do not see God; the wind and blasts drive, shake, and agitate everything, but the wind and blasts are not visible to us. Again, we cannot even look into the sun, which is the origin of vision; our powers of sight are impaired by its rays, our eyes are weakened by gazing at it, and, if we look at it too long, we are unable to see at all. Could you endure the sight of the creator of the sun himself, the source of light, you who turn away from his lightnings and hide yourself from his thunderbolts? Do you expect to look upon God with the eyes of the flesh, when you



can neither behold nor grasp your own soul, by which you are quickened and speak ?<sup>1</sup>

“ But again, you say, God is ignorant of man’s actions ; he who is seated in heaven can neither visit all nor know each one. You are wrong, O man, you are mistaken ; God is everywhere near, since all things in heaven and earth and all things outside the limits of the world are full of him ; he is everywhere not only near us, but everywhere within us. Look again at the sun ; although stationary in heaven, its light is shed over every land ; present everywhere alike, it mingles with all, and its brightness is never dimmed. God, the creator and examiner of all things, from whom nothing can be hid, must with far greater reason be present in the darkness, be present in our thoughts, which are as it were a second darkness ! We not only act under his inspection, but—I had almost said—live with him.<sup>2</sup>

XXXIII. “ And let us not flatter ourselves as to our numbers ; to ourselves we seem many, but to God very few. We separate peoples and nations ; God looks upon the entire world as one family. Kings learn the condition of their empire from various official reports of ministers, but God has no need of such information ;<sup>3</sup> we live not only under his eyes, but in his bosom.

“ In the case of the Jews, you assert that their worship of only one God with altars and temples and the most scrupulous observances profited them nothing. It would show ignorance and be a great mistake on your part, either having forgotten or never having known their past, to remember only their present history. For they,

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Pro Milone*, 84.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvii. 28 : “ In him we live and move and have our being.”

<sup>3</sup> Or, “ such informers,” *indicia* being = *indices*.



too, had learnt to know<sup>1</sup> our God, for he is the god of all ; and as long as they worshipped him with a pure heart, in innocence and piety, as long as they obeyed his salutary precepts, their numbers, at first few, increased enormously ; once poor, they became rich ; once slaves, they became kings ; few in numbers and unarmed they overwhelmed armed hosts, and pursued them as they fled, at the bidding of God and with the assistance of the elements.<sup>2</sup> Read their writings again, either (passing over ancient authors) the works of Flavius Josephus,<sup>3</sup> or, if you prefer Romans, consult the remarks of Antonius Julianus<sup>4</sup> on the Jews ; you will find that their ill fortune was due to their own perversity, that nothing happened to them which had not been foretold as the consequence of persisting in their obstinacy. Thus you will understand that they deserted God before they were deserted by him ; that they have not been taken captive with their god, as you impiously put it, but have been handed over by God, as deserters from his teaching, to the mercy of their enemies

XXXIV. "Again, as to the destruction of the world by fire, it is a mistake of the vulgar either to find it difficult to believe or to disbelieve altogether that fire can suddenly fall from heaven."<sup>5</sup> Who among the philosophers has any doubt or is ignorant that all things that are born die ; that all things that are made perish ; that the

<sup>1</sup> Reading *expertī sunt*.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua x. ; Judges vii.

<sup>3</sup> The well-known historian, who flourished during the reign of Vespasian.

<sup>4</sup> His identity is doubtful : (1) a famous rhetorician of the time of Hadrian ; (2) the governor of Judæa at the time of the siege of Jerusalem, mentioned by Josephus.

<sup>5</sup> No satisfactory emendation or version of the text has been suggested.



heavens and all that is therein, as they once came into existence, will be devoured by fire, if the water of the sea or of the springs ceases to nourish them?<sup>1</sup> The Stoics firmly maintain that, when the supply of moisture is exhausted, the whole world will be consumed by fire; the Epicureans also hold the same opinion about the conflagration of the elements and the destruction of the world.<sup>2</sup> Plato<sup>3</sup> tells us that the different parts of the world are alternately overwhelmed by flood and fire; and although he asserts that the universe itself was fashioned eternal and indissoluble, he adds that it can be dissolved and ended, but only by God who created it. So it would be nothing wonderful, if this vast structure should be destroyed by him who erected it.

“You see that the arguments of the philosophers are the same as our own; although it is not *we* who have followed in their footsteps, but *they* who have given us a shadowy imitation, a garbled truth taken from the divine predictions of the prophets. Similarly, your most famous philosophers, Pythagoras first<sup>4</sup> and especially Plato,<sup>5</sup> have handed down an account of the dogma of the resurrection in a corrupt and mutilated form; according to them, after the dissolution of the body only the soul abides for ever and often passes into fresh bodies. A further distortion of the truth is that the souls of men return to the bodies of cattle, birds, and beasts: such an idea rather deserves the ridicule of a buffoon than the serious consideration of a philosopher. However, in view of the

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* ii. 46, iii. 14. The text of the whole passage is corrupt.

<sup>2</sup> Lucretius, v. 407.

<sup>3</sup> *Timæus*, 22 C.

<sup>4</sup> Known as the author of the theory of the transmigration of souls.

<sup>5</sup> *Republic*, 620 D.



subject before us, it is enough that even in this your philosophers are in agreement with us to a certain extent. Besides, who is so foolish or so stupid as to venture to dispute that, as man could be originally made by God, so he can be afterwards remade by him? that man is nothing after death, as he was nothing before birth? that as he could be born from nothing, so he can be remade from nothing? Besides, it is easier to renew what has once existed than to call it into existence. Do you believe that whenever anything is withdrawn from our feeble eyes, it is looked upon by God as permanently lost? The body, whether it is reduced to dust, is resolved into vapour, becomes a heap of ashes, or vanishes in smoke, is no longer visible to us, but it still exists for God, who preserves its elements. Nor are we, as you imagine, afraid of any injury from the manner of burial, but we practise the old and better custom of interment.

“Consider again how, as a consolation for us, the entire kingdom of nature foreshadows the resurrection. The sun sinks and rises again, the stars disappear and return: flowers die and revive: trees decay and again put forth leaves: seeds do not come up again until they rot. The body in the grave is like a tree in winter; both conceal their new life under an apparent dryness. Why are you so anxious that it should revive and return during the cruel winter? The body also has its spring, which we must wait for.

“I am aware that most men, conscious of what they deserve, hope rather than believe that they will not exist after death; they prefer total annihilation to resurrection with punishments to follow. Their error is aggravated by the immunity enjoyed by them in the world and by



the infinite patience of God, whose judgement the slower it is the juster it is.

XXXV. "And yet, in the writings of the learned<sup>1</sup> and the works of the poets,<sup>2</sup> we are reminded of the river of fire,<sup>3</sup> of the heat of the Stygian Lake with its nine circles prepared as an eternal punishment, known from the revelations of demons and the oracles of the prophets. Hence also it is that the poets represent King Jupiter himself swearing solemnly by the burning shores of Styx and its black abyss ; aware of the punishment destined for him and his votaries, he shudders.<sup>4</sup> And these torments are unending and unlimited ; the fire, as if endowed with intelligence, consumes and renovates men's limbs, devours and at the same feeds them. As the lightning flash strikes the body and does not consume it, as the fires of Ætna, Vesuvius, and other volcanoes burn without being exhausted, so that avenging fire does not devour the bodies on which it feeds, but is nourished by forms which, though mangled, are still unconsumed. No one, except an atheist, can have any doubt that those who are ignorant of God deserve to be tortured for their impiety and injustice, since it is as great a crime to be ignorant of the father and lord of all as to insult him. And although ignorance of God is enough to deserve punishment, just as knowledge of him is an aid to pardon, yet, if we Christians be compared with you, although the training of some is inferior to yours, on the whole we shall be found far better. You prohibit adultery and yet commit it ; we are born to be the husbands of our own wives alone ; you punish crimes

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Phædo*, 112 D.

<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Æneid*, vi. 323 ; *Odyssey*, v. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Pyriphlegethon.

<sup>4</sup> *Iliad*, xiv. 271 ; *Odyssey*, v. 185 ; Virgil, *Æneid*, vi. 323.



when committed, which amongst us it is a sin even to think of; you are afraid of witnesses, we are afraid of conscience alone, which is always with us; lastly, the prisons are crowded with your followers, while they do not contain a single Christian, unless he be a renegade or one whose religion is his crime.

XXXVI. "Nor should any one either seek consolation or excuse his lot by an appeal to fate; granting that one's lot depends on fortune, yet the mind is free; so that it is a man's action, not his position that is judged. For what else is fate but what God has 'said' about each of us? Since he has a foreknowledge of our character, he can also determine the destinies of individuals according to their qualities and deserts. Thus, in our case it is not our nativity that is punished, but our natural disposition that bears the penalty. I will say no more about fate; if in the circumstances it is not sufficient, we will discuss the matter more fully and at greater length on another occasion.<sup>1</sup> Further, as to the charge that most of us are paupers, this is no shame, but our glory; for as the mind is enervated by luxury, so it is strengthened by frugality. And yet who can be poor if he wants nothing, if he does not long for what is another's, if he is rich in the sight of God?<sup>2</sup> That man rather is poor who, though he has great possessions, desires more. But I will tell you what I think; no one can be as poor as he was born. Birds live without possessing anything of their own, cattle obtain pasture daily; and yet they are all created for our use, and we possess all if we do not desire it.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as

<sup>1</sup> In his treatise *De Fato*; see Introduction § 2.

<sup>2</sup> Or, "rich in God," that is in the possession of his favour.

<sup>3</sup> That is, "They are all ours, although we do not long for them."



a man, when walking, makes the greater progress the more lightly he is burdened, so in this journey of life the man who lightens his burden by poverty is happier than one who groans beneath the weight of riches. And yet, if we thought it useful, we might ask for wealth from God ; certainly he to whom all belongs could grant us a share of it. But we prefer to despise wealth than to possess it ; we rather desire innocence and demand patience ; we would rather be virtuous than extravagant.

“ Our consciousness and endurance of the infirmities of our human frame are no punishment, but warfare. Courage is strengthened by infirmities and calamity is frequently the school of valour ; lastly, our powers, both mental and bodily, are impaired by lack of exercise. Thus all your heroes, whom you commend as examples, became famous and renowned through their misfortunes. And so God is neither unable to help us nor does he disdain to do so, since he is the ruler of all and loves his people ; he thoroughly examines each one in adversity, weighs each man’s disposition in the balance of peril, tests his character even unto death, convinced that nothing can be lost for him. Thus, as gold is tried by fire, so we are tested by dangers.

XXXVII. “ What a beautiful sight for God to see,<sup>1</sup> when the Christian wrestles with pain, braves threats, punishment and torture, scornfully derides<sup>2</sup> the din at his execution and the horrible sight of the executioner ; when he uplifts the banner of freedom against kings and princes, yielding to God alone, to whom he belongs ; when, in triumph and victorious, he mocks the judge who has pronounced sentence against him. For he is the conqueror who has

<sup>1</sup> Imitated from Seneca, *De Prov.* 2.

<sup>2</sup> Reading *insultat*.



obtained what he desires. Where is the soldier who does not face danger more boldly under the eyes of his commander? For no one obtains a reward before he has been tested. And yet a general cannot give what he does not possess; he cannot prolong life, although he can reward service. But the soldier of God is neither abandoned in trouble nor destroyed by death. Thus the Christian may appear miserable, but cannot be proved so. You yourselves extol to the skies men sorely tried by misfortune, such as Mucius Scævola,<sup>1</sup> who, when he had made a mistake in his attempt on the king, would have perished in the midst of the enemy, had he not sacrificed his right hand. And how many of our community have suffered, without a groan, the loss not only of their right hand but the destruction of their whole body by fire, although they had it in their power to obtain their release? Need I compare *men* with Mucius, Aquilius,<sup>2</sup> and Regulus? Why, even our lads and women, in their inspired endurance of suffering, laugh to scorn crucifixion, tortures, wild beasts, and all the terrors of punishment. And you, poor wretches, you cannot understand that there is no one who would desire to undergo punishment without reason or could endure torture without the help of God.

"But perhaps you are deceived by the fact that many who know not God possess wealth in abundance, are full

<sup>1</sup> Livy, ii. 12. When threatened by Porsena, Scævola thrust his right hand into a blazing fire and held it there till it was burnt off. This so impressed Porsena that he let Mucius go free. The incident was often represented in the arena, the part of Mucius being taken by a condemned criminal, preferably a Christian.

<sup>2</sup> Manius Aquilius Nepos (consul 101 B.C.), sent to Asia to restore to the throne the kings deposed by Mithradates. He was betrayed into the hands of the latter, and, after being led about on the back of an ass, was put to death by molten gold poured down his throat.



of honours, and enjoy great authority. These unhappy men are uplifted the higher, that their fall may be greater.<sup>1</sup> They are like victims fattened for punishment or crowned for sacrifice. So it is that some are raised to the throne and absolute power, in order that their profligate minds, in the unrestrained exercise of their authority, may freely barter away their natural character. For without the knowledge of God what happiness can be lasting, since this is death?<sup>2</sup> Like a dream it slips away, before we can grasp it. Are you a king? You yourself feel as much fear as you inspire in others; however numerous your body-guard, you are left alone to face danger. Are you rich? It is dangerous to trust fortune, and great store of provisions for the brief journey of life is not a help, but a burden. Are you proud of your fasces<sup>3</sup> and purple? It is a vain error of man and an empty show of rank to shine in purple, while the mind is vile. Are you blessed with noble ancestors? Do you boast of your parents? But we are all born equal; it is virtue alone that distinguishes us.

"So then we, whose reputation depends upon our decent mode of life, rightly abstain from evil pleasures, from your processions and spectacles, which we know are derived from your religious rites, and whose pernicious allurements we condemn. At the curule games,<sup>4</sup> who can help being horrified at the frenzy of the brawling populace and, at the gladiatorial shows, at the training

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, x, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Cum mors sit*: this may mean (a) ignorance of God is equivalent to death; (b) since death always awaits us and so our earthly happiness cannot last. Others omit *mors* and read *cum sit somnio similis*, "since it [happiness] is like a dream."

<sup>3</sup> The bundle of rods and an axe, carried before the chief magistrate.

<sup>4</sup> The games in the circus.



for murder? On the stage, even, there is the same frenzy, while the range of vice is even wider. At one time the actor describes or exemplifies adultery, at another an effeminate player inspires the passion he portrays; he dishonours your gods by investing them with every vice—adultery, love-sick sighs, and hatred; in his pretended grief he calls forth your tears by his senseless nods and gestures. Thus, in real life, you clamour for a man's death; on the stage you weep at it.

XXXVIII. "As for our contempt for the sacrificial remains and the wine that has already been used in libations, it is no confession of fear but a declaration of true independence. For although everything that is created, as being the imperishable gift of God, is proof against corruption, we abstain from your offerings, lest any one may think that we acknowledge the demons to whom libations are poured or are ashamed of our own religion.

"Who doubts that we are fond of the flowers of spring, when we pluck the early rose, lily, and any other flower of delightful scent and colour? for we use them free and loose or wear them round our necks as delicate garlands. You must excuse us for not crowning our heads; we are in the habit of inhaling the sweet perfume of a flower, not of using the back of the head or the hair as a means of conveying it.<sup>1</sup> Nor do we crown our dead. In regard to this, I am the more surprised at your applying a torch to one who still feels, or offering a garland to one who does not, since those who are happy need no flowers, while those who are unhappy take no pleasure in them. On the other hand, we arrange our funerals as simply as our lives; we place no fading garland upon the grave, but await from God an undying crown of immortal

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 42.



flowers ; quiet, modest, confident in the generosity of our God, we enliven our hope of future happiness by faith in his ever-present majesty. Thus we feel assured of our resurrection in blessedness and live in contemplation of the future.

"Now let Socrates see to it,<sup>1</sup> the buffoon of Athens, who confessed that he knew nothing, although he boasted of the support of a spirit of lies ; let Arcesilas, Carneades, Pyrrho,<sup>2</sup> and all the host of Academicians argue the matter ; let Simonides shelve the question for ever. We despise the superciliousness of the philosophers, whom we know as corrupters and adulterers, tyrants, and always ready to declaim against vices that are really their own. We do not show our wisdom in our dress but in our heart ; we do not proclaim great things but live them ; and are proud of having obtained what philosophers have sought with their utmost efforts but have failed to find. Why should we be ungrateful, why should we be dissatisfied, seeing that the truth about the godhead has attained maturity in our times ? Let us enjoy our happiness and avoid excess<sup>3</sup> in our opinions ; let superstition be restrained, let impiety be driven out, let true religion be preserved."<sup>4</sup>

XXXIX. After Octavius had finished, for some time we remained in amazed silence, with our eyes intently fixed upon him ; as for myself, I was lost in overwhelming admiration at the skill with which he backed up his principles, which can be more easily felt than expressed in words, by a wealth of argument, examples, and

<sup>1</sup> *i. e.* "Let Socrates undertake to answer us" (see ch. xiii.). The term "Attic buffoon" was applied to Socrates by Zeno (Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* i. 34).

<sup>2</sup> Pyrrho, the founder of the most thoroughgoing sceptical school.

<sup>3</sup> "Let us be neither superstitious nor heathen."

<sup>4</sup> A rare use of *reservetur*.



quotation from authorities ; at the manner in which he repelled the attacks of the ill-disposed with their own weapons, namely those of the philosophers, and demonstrated that the truth was not only easy to discover but also agreeable.

XL. While I was silently turning over these things in my mind, Cæcilius burst out : "I congratulate my friend Octavius most heartily, but I also congratulate myself, nor need I wait for the verdict. I too, in like manner, am victorious : for even if it seems audacious, I also claim a victory. As he has gained the victory over me, so have I triumphed over error. As to the main questions, in regard to Providence and God I accept your belief ; I recognize the purity of your sect, which is henceforth my own. Even now there remain certain points, which although no obstacle to the truth, must be discussed to make my instruction complete. But as the sun is already setting, we will deal with these points to-morrow ; they will not detain us long, since we are agreed upon the general issues."

"As for myself," said I, "I rejoice the more heartily on behalf of all of us, that Octavius has also conquered for my benefit, since I am relieved of the very disagreeable duty of giving a verdict. I cannot, however, adequately reward his merits by praising him in words ; the testimony of one man by himself carries little weight ; Octavius possesses an excellent gift of God, which inspired him when he spoke and assisted him to win his case."

After this we retired, all three joyful and happy : Cæcilius because he believed, Octavius because he was victorious, and I myself because of the conversion of the one and the victory of the other.



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