

The Wisdom Of The Desert

Part 1, Section A: The Treasures of the Spiritual Life

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Preface.

THESE little booklets are neither a critical examination of the earlier Egyptian monastic literature nor an historical account of the movement. It is nothing more than an attempt to appreciate the religious spirit of the first Christian monks.

I do not know of any other similar attempt, though an exceedingly interesting study of the hermit life will be found in E. Lucius' *Das Mönchische Leben des vierten und fünften Jahrhunderts in der Beleuchtung seiner Vertreter und Gönner*.

The collection of stories and sayings, which I have translated, sometimes very freely, must be regarded merely as an anthology culled from the "meadows" of the literature of the desert life. There is much more which is worthy of a place in our devotional literature, and which, I hope, may, in the future be arranged and translated by men more fitted for the task than I am. I acknowledge gratefully the assistance I have received from two friends — Miss Bloxham and the Rev. C. S. Collins — whose sympathy with things that are high and holy has been a constant help to me in my work.

I have further to acknowledge the very great kindness of Father Andrew, S.D.C., who designed the drawings, which both adorn this volume and interpret the spirit of the hermits' teaching. [These drawings, in the 1904 editions, are not included in these reprints.]

After the Manuscript of this book was in the publishers' hands, I received, through the kindness of Professor Zöckler, of Greifswald, a copy of his recently published *Die Tugendlehre des Christentums*. The work is of great importance for anyone engaged in the study of the ethics of monasticism, but I have not felt myself obliged to modify anything I have written. Professor Zöckler's point of view and his object are entirely different from mine. He is scientific; I hope only to suggest devotional thought.

In the course of my Introduction, I alluded to the want of a critical study of the *Apophthegmata*. I am now informed by Dom E. C. Butler, O.S.B., the great Benedictine monk, that such a work is being prepared by Abbé Nau, and will soon be published in the *Patrologia Orientalis* by Firmin-Didot (Paris).

J. O. H. Westport, Ireland, 1904.

Chapter 1. The Hidden Treasure.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field;
the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof

goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.

– Saint Matthew 13:44.

He that finds Jesus finds a good treasure,
yea, a Good above all good.

– The Imitation of Christ, 2, 8.

1. How the hermit Macedonius witnessed that it is not strange to do for the sake of possessing the Lord what men do willingly for smaller gains.

A certain captain of soldiers, who took a great delight in hunting, once came in search of wild animals, to the desolate mountain where Macedonius dwelt.

He was prepared for hunting, having brought with him men and dogs.

As he went over the mountain, he saw, far off a man. Being surprised that anyone should be in a place so desolate, he asked who it might be. One told him that it was the hermit Macedonius.

The captain, who was a pious man, leaped from his horse and ran to meet the hermit.

When he came to him he asked, “What are you doing in such a barren place as this is?”

The hermit in his turn asked, “And you? What have you come here to do?”

The captain answered him, “I have come to hunt.”

Then said Macedonius, “I also am a huntsman. I am hunting for my God. I yearn to capture Him. My desire is to enjoy Him. I shall not cease from this my hunting.”

2. A word of Saint Basil to one who was unwilling to sell all that he had in order to buy the field wherein the treasure is.

A certain Syncletius, a senator, renounced the world. He divided his property among the poor, but kept back some of it for his own use.

To him Saint Basil said, “Truly you have spoiled a senator, but you have not made a monk.”

3. A word of the abbot Arsenius, him who left the emperor’s court for the desert, seeking God; and resigned his wealth that he might take the hidden treasure.

“If we seek God, He will appear to us. If we hold Him fast, He will remain with us.”

4. The word of one who knew how good a thing it is to know of nothing in the world, but to know of Jesus.

The abbot Allois said “Except a man say in his heart, ‘I and God are alone in the world,’ he will not find peace.”

5. How the enticements of the world have no power to lure back again the soul that has once possessed Jesus.

The abbot John said:

“There was an exceedingly beautiful woman who dwelt in a certain city, and she had a multitude of lovers. A great man, one of the nobles of the city, came to her and said, ‘Promise that you will be mine and I will wed you.’

She gladly promised, and being his wife went to dwell with him in his palace. Afterwards her other lovers came seeking her and found her not. When they heard that she had become the nobleman's wife, they said one to another, 'If we go up to the door of the palace, it will be plain that we are seeking her, then, without doubt, we shall be punished. Let us go to the back of the house and whistle to her, as we used to do when she was free. When she hears our whistling she will certainly come down to us.'

They did as they had planned, and the woman heard their whistling. Hating greatly even to hear them, she went into the inner parts of the house and shut the door upon herself.

Now this woman is the soul of a man. Her husband, the nobleman, is Christ. The palace is the eternal mansion of the heavens. They who whistle for her are the demons."

6. A comparison of one who desires to attain the eternal treasure to an archer who turns his eyes away from everything except his mark.

A man will despise all things present as being transitory when he has securely fixed the gaze of his mind on those things, which are immovable and eternal. Already he enjoys, in contemplation, the blessedness of his future life. It is as when one desires to strike some mighty prize — the prize is virtue — virtue, which is far off on high, and seems but a small mark to shoot at. The archer strains his eyesight while he aims at it, for he knows how great are the glory and rewards, which await his hitting it. He turns his eyes away from everything, and will not look save thither where the reward is placed. He knows that he would surely lose the prize if his strained sight were turned away from the mark even a very little.

7. How a man cannot possess the heavenly treasure and at the same time cling to the pleasures of earth.

The abbot Arsenius was once asked by the abbot Mark why he fled from the society of men. He replied, "God knows it is not that I hate men. I love them well. But I cannot dwell both with God and with men. There are multitudes of heavenly beings and many virtues, but all their wills are one, and they come of one will. Among men, it is otherwise. Their wills are many, and they pull us different ways. I am in this strait. I cannot leave God, for that is how I think of it, to dwell with men."

Chapter 2. On Being Crucified with Christ.

If any man will come after Me,
let him take up his cross, and follow Me.
— Saint Matthew, 16:24.

He who enters upon the way of life in fear bears the cross patiently.
He who advances in hope bears the cross readily.
He who is perfected in charity embraces the cross ardently.
— Saint Bernard, Sermon 1 on Saint Andrew's Day.

I have received the cross. I have received it from Your hand.
I will bear it, and bear it even unto death, as You have laid it upon me.
— The Imitation of Christ, 3, 36.

The agony of Christ will last till the end of the world;
we must not slumber during this agony.
— Pascal.

1. Of what it means to take up the cross with Christ.

Perhaps some man will say, “How can a man carry his cross? How can a man who is alive be crucified?” Hear, briefly, how this thing may be. The fear of the Lord is our cross. As, then, one who is crucified no longer has the power of moving or turning his limbs in any direction as he pleases, so we ought to fix our wishes and desires, not in accordance with what is pleasant and delightful to us now, but in accordance with the law of the Lord in whatsoever direction it constrain us. Also, he who is fastened to a cross no longer considers things present, nor thinks about his likings, nor is perplexed with anxiety or care for the morrow, nor is inflamed by any pride, or strife, or rivalry, grieves not at present insults, nor remembers past ones. While he is still breathing in the body, he is dead to all earthly things, and sends his heart on to that place to which he doubts not he shall shortly come. So we, when we are crucified by the fear of the Lord, ought to be dead to all these things. We die not only to carnal vices, but to all earthly things, even to those indifferent. We fix our minds there whither we hope at every moment we are to go.

2. Of one who feared because God took the cross he bore from him.

There was a certain old man who was frequently sick and feeble. One whole year it happened that no sickness of any kind troubled him. He wept on that account, and was sorely afflicted, saying, “You have left me, O Lord, and are unwilling to come to me this year.”

3. Of the hermit Palaemon, how he desired to crucify his body because the Lord was crucified.

When the holy time of Easter came, Palaemon said to his disciple Saint Pachomius, “Prepare some special food for us today, since this is a feast day for all Christians throughout the whole world.” Then Saint Pachomius, prompt ever in obedience, did as the old man bade him. After their prayers were finished, Palaemon went to the table to eat.

When he saw there oil added to the usual food he burst into tears and smote his hands against his forehead, saying, “My Lord has been crucified, and I — shall I eat oil?”

4. How the desire of being crucified with Christ will keep a man in the narrow way though he see others departing from it.

A certain elder was once asked, how a monk can avoid being offended and disheartened, when he sees others giving up the hermit life and returning to the world. He replied — “Watch the dogs which hunt hares. One of them only, perhaps, sees the hare and chases it. The others see nothing but the dog in full chase, so they run with him for a while and then grow weary and give up. The one that sees the hare goes on chasing it until he catches it. He takes no heed of the steep hills, nor of the thickets, nor of the brambles in his way. Sometimes his feet are flayed and pricked with thorns, yet he does not rest until he catches it. So it is with the monk who seeks Christ and gazes steadfastly on the cross. He takes no notice of the things, which vex and offend him. He cares for nothing but attaining the goal of being crucified with Christ.”

5. Of the narrow way, which leads unto life.

A certain elder was once asked, “What is this which we read — ‘Strait and narrow is the way’?” The old man replied, “The narrow way is that on which a man does violence to his own

imaginations, and cuts himself off from the fulfilment of his own will. This is the meaning of that which was written of the apostles, 'Behold we have left all, and followed You'."

Chapter 3. Being Dead to the World.

The Lord —
when the Jews spat on Him and buffeted Him
and smote Him with their hands,
when Peter denied Him thrice,
when the priests and elders accused Him,
when the soldiers mocked Him and scourged Him —
answered not.
He neither rebuked them, nor
defended Himself, nor reviled again, nor cursed
those that persecuted Him.

My son, in many things it is your duty to be
ignorant and to esteem yourself as one dead upon
the earth, and to whom the whole world is crucified.
— The Imitation of Christ, 3, 44.

You ought to be so dead to such affections of beloved friends,
that (so far as you are concerned) you would choose
to be without all human sympathy.
— The Imitation of Christ, 3, 42.

1. How Zacharias, the disciple of the abbot Moses, showed that the followers of the Lord must accept such treatment as the Master received.

Certain brethren once came to the abbot Moses, and asked him to speak to them some word of exhortation.

He turned to his disciple Zacharias and urged him, saying, "Do you speak somewhat to these brethren." Then Zacharias took off his cloak, and, laying it on the ground, trampled on it. "Behold," he said, "unless a man is thus trampled on he cannot be a monk."

2. The Abbot Sisois finds the secret of peace in the imitation of the sufferings of Christ.

The abbot Sisois said, "Suffer yourself to be despised. Cast your own will behind your back. Stand free from the cares of the world. Then you will have peace."

3. The parable, which the abbot Anub acted, meaning to teach thereby that the disciple of Jesus must be dead alike to insult and to praise.

Once a tribe of Mazici burst into the Scetic desert, and killed many of the fathers who dwelt there. Seven of the fathers found safety in flight, among whom were the abbot Pimenius, and another older abbot called Anub. These seven came in their flight to Terenuthi. There they found an ancient temple of some heathen god, now deserted by the worshippers. Into it, they entered, meaning to dwell together for a week without speaking to each other, while each sought a place where to build his solitary cell, for in the Scetic desert these seven had lived as hermits.

Now, there was in the temple an image of the ancient idol. The abbot Anub guessed the thought of dwelling together, which had entered the minds of the brethren. He therefore, when he rose in the morning, used to cast a stone at the face of the idol. In the evening, he used to speak to it, and say, "I have done wrong. Pardon me."

On the Sabbath day, when the brethren met together, the abbot Pimenius said to him, "How is it that you, a Christian man, have for a whole week been saying to an idol, 'Pardon me'?"

The abbot Anub replied to him, "I did this for your sakes. When I cast stones at the idol, was it angry? Did it speak to rebuke me? When I asked pardon of it, was it pleased? Did it boast?" The abbot Pimenius answered, "Surely no, my brother."

Then said the abbot Anub, "We seven are here together. If we wish to remain thus and yet find profit for our souls, this idol must be our example."

"When one of us is insulted or vexed by another, he must not get angry. When one of us is asked for pardon by his brother, he must not be puffed up. If we are not willing thus to live together it is better for each of us to depart to whatever place he wishes."

Then all of them fell upon, their faces to the earth, and promised that they would do as he advised.

4. Dorotheus the Theban, being persuaded that the flesh and the spirit are contrary one to the other, mortified the flesh with his exceeding toil. This he did that he might be partaker of the life, which is in Jesus.

All day long, even in the heat of summer, Dorotheus used to collect great stones along the shore of the sea.

Though now an old man, he never ceased from the labour of building cells of the stones, which he gathered. These cells he gave to hermits who could not build for themselves. Once a certain man asked him, "Why, my father, do you in your old age persist in slaying your body with such toil as this in the intolerable heat?" He answered, saying, "My body is slaying me. I am determined therefore to slay it."

5. How Saint Macarius taught the meaning of the apostle's words "Dead with Christ," "Buried with Christ."

A brother once came to the abbot Macarius and said to him, "Master, speak some word of exhortation to me, that, obeying it, I may be saved." Saint Macarius answered him, "Go to the tombs and attack the dead with insults."

The brother wondered at the word. Nevertheless he went, as he was bidden, and cast stones at the tombs, railing upon the dead. Then returning, he told what he had done. Macarius asked him, "Did the dead notice what you did?"

And he replied, "They did not notice me." "Go, then, again," said Macarius, "and this time praise them."

The brother, wondering yet more, went and praised the dead, calling them just men, apostles, saints. Returning, he told what he had done, saying, "I have praised the dead."

Macarius asked him, "Did they reply to you?"

And he said, "They did not reply to me."

Then said Macarius, “You know what insults you have heaped on them and with what praises you have flattered them, and yet they never spoke to you. If you desire salvation, you must be like these dead. You must think nothing of the wrongs men do to you, nor of the praises they offer you. Be like the dead.

“Thus you may be saved.”

6. Of bearing with evil men, and how a man may thus be a peacemaker since he will refuse the occasion of strife.

A certain hermit saw some men toilsomely bearing a dead body to the burial, and said to them, “You do well that you thus bear the dead. You would do better still to bear with the living. Then you would be makers of peace, and inherit the blessing of the Lord.”

7. Of two things by which a man is hindered from being truly dead to the world.

The abbot Pimenius said, “That monk may truly reckon himself dead to the world who has learnt to hate two things, ease for his body, and the vainglory which comes of the praise of men.”

8. Saint Antony teaches that a monk should be like a rock.

Saint Antony spoke to the abbot Ammon saying, “You have still a long way to advance in the fear of the Lord.”

Then leading him forth of the cell, he showed him a rock and said to him, “Go, hurt that rock. Beat it unmercifully.”

This he did, and Saint Antony asked him whether the rock made any answer. He said “No.”

Then Saint Antony said to him, “You must attain to the position of the rock and not know when anyone is trying to hurt you.”

9. How the abbot Macarius used to avoid the conversation of those who honoured him, and preferred to talk with men who offered him insults.

When anyone came respectfully to the abbot Macarius, desiring to hear some exhortation from him, he received no answer at all. But if anyone came despising Macarius and did violence to him in such words as these, “Lo you there, Father Macarius! You used to be a camel-driver, and steal from the matron. How your master used to beat you when he caught you robbing him!” then willingly, even joyfully, Macarius used to speak to such a man of whatever he wished to hear.

Chapter 4. How We Ought to Return Good for Evil.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you,
do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.
— Saint Matthew 5:44.

“My friend,” said the bishop, “before you go take your candlesticks.”

He went to the mantle-piece, fetched the two candlesticks,
and handed them to Jean Valjean.

“Now,” said the bishop, “go in peace, Jean Valjean, my brother,
you no longer belong to evil, but to good.

I have bought your soul of you.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*.

1. How an old man blessed one who injured him.

A certain brother came to the cell of an elder, one well known among the brethren for his holiness. Entering in, he stole the food, which was there. The old man saw him, but did not accuse him. He only laboured more diligently to supply again, what he had lost, saying in his heart, "I am sure that my brother must have been in great need, for else he would not have stolen." In spite of his toil, the old man came to endure great suffering for want of food. At last, he was brought even to the point of death. The brethren, knowing only that he was dying, came and stood round his bed. Among them, he saw the brother who had stolen his food. "Come hither to me," he said to him. Then taking his hands and kissing them, he said to those who stood around, "I pay my thanks to these hands, brethren, for because of them I am going, as I trust, to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Then that brother was stricken to the heart, and repented. He also in the end became an eager monk, wrought upon by the deeds of the elder, which he saw.

2. How the abbot Sisois taught a brother that the desire of vengeance separates a man from God.

There was a certain brother who had suffered an injury at the hands of another. Coming to the abbot Sisois, he explained the wrong, which he had suffered, and then said, "My father, I desire to be avenged." The old man begged him to leave his avenging in the hands of God, but he persisted, saying, "I cannot rest until I have well avenged myself." Then Sisois said to him, "Since your mind is altogether made up with regard to this matter, I need not reason with you. Let us, however, pray together."

Thus saying, he arose and began to pray in these words: "O God, You are no longer needful to us. We do not require Your care of us. We ourselves are willing, yea, and are able to avenge ourselves." As soon as the brother, who had desired vengeance, heard these words, he fell at the old man's feet and begged for pardon.

"As for him with whom I was angry," he said, "I shall not in any way contend with him."

3. A doctrine concerning injuries done to us by which we may escape from the danger of being angry, and even turn such wrongs into a source of profit for our souls.

A certain brother, who had been injured by another, came and told the story of what had happened to one of the elders. This is the reply, which the elder made to him: "Set your mind at rest concerning the wrong done to you. The harm was not meant for you, but for your sins. In every temptation to anger or hatred that comes to you through the act of man, accuse not him who does the injury. Say simply, 'It is on account of my own sins that this, and things like this, happen unto me'."

4. Of the one which may be reckoned supreme amongst the commandments of the Lord, both inasmuch as it is beyond all difficult to be kept, and also in that the keeping of it makes us fellow-sufferers with Him.

A certain brother came to an elder seeking some word of exhortation. "Tell me," he said, "of some one commandment, such that I may keep it, and thereby attain unto salvation." The old man answered him, "When men do wrong to you and revile you, endure and be silent. To do this is a very great thing. This is above all other commandments."

5. The abbot Poemen teaches that they who have grace to keep this commandment are very sharers in the death of the Lord upon the cross.

A certain brother once questioned the abbot Poemen, saying, "What is this word which the Lord says in the gospel, 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend'? How may one do such a thing?" The old man answered him, "Perhaps a man may hear from his friend some word which insults and angers him. Perhaps it is in his power to speak back to his friend in like manner. If then he chooses to endure in silence — if he does violence to himself, being fully determined to speak no angry word, nor any word to hurt or vex the other — then, verily, this man lays down, in sacrifice, his life for his friend."

6. The dealings of Saint Antony with certain brethren who wished to be perfect, but sought for some other way than the way which the Lord taught.

Certain brethren once came to Saint Antony and besought him to speak to them some word through which they might attain unto the perfection of salvation. He, however, said to them, "Ye have heard the Scriptures. The words which have come from the lips of Christ for your learning are sufficient for you." When they still pressed him, begging that he would deign to speak some word to them, he said, "It is taught in the gospel that if a man smite you on the one cheek you are to turn to him the other also." They then confessed that they were not able to do this. Saint Antony answered, "Is this too hard for you? Are you willing to let such a man strike you on the same cheek twice?"

They said, "We are not willing," hoping to be told of some easier thing. But he said to them, "If this, too, is beyond you, at least do not render evil for evil." Again, they answered him as they had done before. Then Saint Antony turned to his disciple who stood by, and said, "Prepare some food and give it to these men, for they are weak." But to the brethren who had inquired of him, he said, "If you cannot do one thing and will not do another, why do you come seeking a word of exhortation from me? To me it seems that what you need most is to pray. By prayer perhaps you may be healed of your infirmity."

7. A story of Saint Macarius, showing how he would not resist one who robbed him.

The abbot Macarius, when he dwelt in Egypt, once had occasion to leave his cell for a little while. At his return, he found a robber stealing whatever was in the cell. Saint Macarius stood and watched him, as one who was a stranger might watch having no interest in what was stolen. Then he loaded the robber's horse for him and led it forth saying, "We brought nothing into this world. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. According to his will so things happen. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

8. How the abbot Anastasius would not resist an evil done to him, and thereby won his brother's soul.

Anastasius had a manuscript written on vellum, which was worth a great sum of money, for it contained the whole of the Old and New Testaments. It happened that a certain brother who came to visit him, seeing this manuscript in his cell, coveted it. At his departure, he stole it. After a little while, Anastasius desired to read something in his manuscript. He searched for it but could not find it. Then he understood that this brother had stolen it. He was unwilling, however, to send after the thief or to ask him to restore the property lest, perhaps, he might add a lie to the sin of his theft. The brother who had committed the theft went straightway to a neighbouring town in order that he might sell the manuscript. When one came to buy it, he named a certain price. Then the buyer said, "Let me have the manuscript that I may find out whether it is worth so much."

Receiving it, he went straightway to the abbot Anastasius, and said to him, "My father, I pray you look at this book, and tell me if it is worth such a price. It is for such a sum that a certain man seeks to sell it to me." The abbot Anastasius answered him, "It is a good book, and is well worth what you are asked for it." Then he who was about to buy returned to the seller, and said, "Take the price you name. I have showed the book to the abbot Anastasius, and he told me that it was a good book, and well worth your price." Then the seller, he who had stolen it, asked, "Did the abbot Anastasius say anything more to you about it?" The other said, "No. I have told you all he said." Then the thief replied to him, "I have thought again about the matter, and I am not willing to sell the book at all." This he said, being cut to the heart. He hastened to the cell of the abbot Anastasius, threw himself upon the ground, and with tears of penitence besought the abbot that he would take back the book. But Anastasius refused, saying, "Go! And my peace go with you, brother. Take the book for your own. I give it freely to you." But he persisted weeping and praying, and he said, "Unless you take back the book, Father, my soul will never anywhere find peace." At length he took back his own book. Afterwards that brother remained with the blessed Anastasius, sharing his cell with him until the day of his death.

9. How, by meeting evil which was done to him, a certain monk was led on to do a deed, which grieved him greatly.

There was a certain great hermit who dwelt in the mountain called Athlibeus. It happened that he was attacked by robbers. He at once cried out, and the brethren who dwelt in the neighbouring cells ran to his assistance and captured the robbers. They were sent to the nearest city, and the judge condemned them to be put in prison. Then all those brethren were sad because on their account the robbers had been put in prison. They went to the abbot Poemen and told him all that had happened. He wrote a letter to the hermit, whom the robbers had attacked, in these words: "You have betrayed the robbers to punishment. Remember that was not your first act of betrayal. First, you betrayed yourself. Unless you had been betrayed by the evil within into resisting the wrong done to you, you would not have made that second betrayal of which you now repent."

10. How the injuries done to us by evil men are means whereby we may attain perfection.

There was once a monk who observed this rule of life. The more anyone injured or insulted him, the more eagerly he sought that man's company. This he did because, as he was wont to say, "Those whose company I seek are they who afford me the opportunity of perfection. They who speak well of us and bless us set our paths about with stumbling-blocks. It is they who deceive us."

Chapter 5. On Charity to Sinners.

Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones, which believe on Me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea.

— Saint Matthew 18:6 (Revised Version).

Deal not roughly with him that is tempted; but give him comfort, as you would wish to be done to yourself.

— The Imitation of Christ, 1, 13.

1. The example of Saint Antony, showing how he valued a sinner who repented.

It happened that a certain brother in the community of the abbot Elias fell into sin. The brethren expelled him from the monastery and he fled to Saint Antony who then dwelt on the inner

mountain. The saint kept him there some time and then sent him back to the monastery from which he had been cast out. The brethren, when they saw him, immediately drove him forth again. Then, as at first, he fled to Saint Antony, and said to him, "My father, they will not receive me." Then the saint was grieved, and sent to the brethren a message, saying, "A certain vessel suffered shipwreck in the sea, and all her cargo was lost. Yet with great labour, the sailors brought the ship herself to land.

"Do you now wish to push forth into the deep and sink the ship that has been rescued?" The brethren meditated upon the message, which the saint sent them. When they understood it, they were greatly ashamed, and at once received again the brother, who had sinned.

2. How the abbot Besarion desired to share the reproach of the Lord, of whom they said, "He eats with publicans and sinners."

A certain brother had sinned, and the priest ordered him to go out of the church and depart from the company of the brethren. Then the abbot Besarion arose and went out along with him, saying, "I also am a sinner."

3. How the abbot Pastor wished to deal gently with one of the Lord's little ones.

A brother came to the abbot Pastor and said, "I am working hard at the tilling of my land, for I desire to make a feast for the brethren." The abbot Pastor said to him, "Go in peace, my son, you are doing a good work." Then the brother departed joyfully, and laboured yet more that he might add something to the feast he was preparing. But the abbot Anub, who had heard what was said, rebuked Pastor, saying to him, "Do you not fear God, that you have spoken thus to a brother, telling him to make a feast?" The abbot Pastor, being grieved, was silent. After two days, he sent for the brother to whom he had spoken and, Anub being present, said to him, "What was that which you asked me the other day, for my mind was wandering when I answered you?" The brother replied to him, "I told you about the tilling of my field and the harvest of it, and the feast that I was making." The abbot Pastor said to him, "I thought you were speaking of your brother who is still in the world. The making of feasts is no work for a monk."

The brother was bitterly grieved when he heard this, and cried out, "I know no other good work to do, neither am I able to do any other; may I not till my farm for the sake of the brethren?" So saying, he departed. Then the abbot Anub was exceedingly sorry, and said, "My father, grant me your pardon." Pastor said to him, "Behold! I knew from the beginning that the making of feasts was no work for a monk, but according to the capacity of his mind, I spoke to him. At least I excited his mind to a work of love. Now he is sad and despairing, but now he will make his feast just the same."

4. How one, through exceeding great love for his brother, suffered himself to lie, and how the fathers saw that he did well.

Two brethren once went together to a town in order to sell the things that they had made during the previous year. One of them went out to buy certain things that were necessary for them. The other, meanwhile, waited for him in the inn. At instigation of the devil, this one fell into sin. When the other returned he said, "Lo, we have obtained what we wanted, let us now return to our cell. But he who had sinned replied, "I cannot return with you."

The other pressed him greatly, saying, "But why can you not return." Then he confessed, saying, "Because when you were absent I fell into sin, and now it is impossible for me to go back." Then

the other, being very desirous of winning and saving his brother's soul, said, and confirmed his words with an oath, "I also, while I was away from you, fell just as you did. Nevertheless, let us return to our cell and repent. All things are possible with God. It is even possible that He will pardon us if we repent, and not allow us to be tormented in the eternal fires of hell."

Thus, these two returned to their cell. They went to the elders who dwelt near them, and casting themselves at their feet, told the story of their temptation and their sin. Whatever the elders bid them do as penance they faithfully performed. The brother who had not sinned (except for his lie and his oath) did penance for the other's sin because of the great love that he bore to him. Then the Lord looked down from heaven and beheld this mighty labour of love. After a time the whole matter was revealed by the Lord to the fathers, and they saw the great love of the brother who had not at first sinned, how he afflicted himself for his brother's salvation, and how the Lord had granted pardon to the sinner. "This," they said, "is that which is written. He has laid down his own life for the sake of his brother's salvation."

5. The abbot Pastor teaches a certain hermit to think of his own sins and bewail them before judging and condemning a sinning brother.

Once, one of the brethren in a congregation fell into sin. Now there happened to be in that district a hermit who was renowned because for a long time he had not left his cell. To him the abbot of the congregation went and told the story of the brother's fall. The hermit, when he heard it, said, "Expel that man." So the sinning brother, driven forth from the community, went away to a desolate swamp and lamented. Now it came to pass that certain brethren on their way to the cell of the abbot Pastor heard him weeping in the swamp. They went down and found him altogether overwhelmed with grief. Filled with pity, they asked him to go with them to the cell of the abbot Pastor.

He would by no means agree to go, but kept saying, "Let me stay here and die." When these brethren came to the abbot Pastor, they told him of the man whom they had found weeping in the swamp. He immediately begged them to go back again and say, "The abbot Pastor bids you come to him." When the poor man heard their words, he arose and went with them. When Pastor saw him with all the marks of his grief upon him, he arose and kissed him.

Then bidding him be of good cheer, he set him down to meat. In the meanwhile, he sent a brother to the hermit who had condemned the sinner, with this message: "I have heard much of you, and now for a long time have desired to see you. Now, therefore, if it be the will of God and convenient to you, I beseech you to put yourself to the toil of coming hither." When the hermit heard these words, he said within himself, "No doubt God has revealed to him the kind of man I am, and therefore he has sent for me." Then rising up, he went to the cell of the abbot Pastor. When they had greeted each other and sat down, the abbot Pastor said, "There were two men who dwelt in one town. In the house of each of them there lay the dead body of a friend. The one of them forgot his own dead friend and the lamentation that was due to him, and leaving him unburied, went to weep at the other's funeral." The hermit when he heard these words was cut to the heart. He confessed that he had been angered at the sin of another while he forgot his own sin. Then he said, "Surely Pastor dwells in heavenly places, but I am here below on earth."

6. How the conviction of his own sinfulness manifests itself in more gentleness towards the sins of others.

The abbot Moses said, "Unless a man is convinced in his own heart that he is a sinner, God does not listen to his prayers." Then one of the brethren said to him, "What does it mean, this conviction in a

man's heart that he is a sinner?" The old man said to him, "He who is conscious of his own sins has no eyes for the sins of his neighbour."

7. The story of a certain brother's love for a sinner, and how he gained thereby his sister's soul.

A certain brother dwelt in a cell in Egypt who was renowned for his humility. Now he had a sister who was a harlot in the city, and was working the destruction of the souls of many men. Many times the elders exhorted him, and at last hardly persuaded him to go to her, if, perhaps, he might persuade her to leave her sinful life. When he came to the town one of the citizens ran before him to the harlot's house and told her, "Behold, your brother comes to see you."

She then, because she loved him, left her lovers on whom she was attending, and without even covering her head, ran to meet him. He immediately stretched forth his arms to her, and said, "My sister, my dearest sister, have pity on your own soul. Do you not know that through you many are going to perdition? How can you bear this bitter life of yours? How will you bear the torments of eternity?"

She trembled exceedingly, and replied to him, "My brother, are you sure that there is salvation for me even now?"

He answered her, "If you wish for it there is salvation for you." Then she fell at his feet, and besought him that he would take her with him into the desert.

He said to her, "Go, then, cover your head and follow me."

But she replied, "No. But let us go straightway.

"It is better that men should see me walking through the streets with my head uncovered than that I should go again into the place where I sinned." Then they went together, and by the way, he taught her the meaning of repentance.

At last, as they journeyed, they saw some men coming towards them on the road, and the brother said, "Since these men will not know that you are my sister, I beseech you go aside a little from the road until they pass."

After the men had passed, he called her, saying, "Sister, let us go on upon our way." When she did not answer him, he went to look for her and found her dead, and lo! Her footprints were full of blood, for she had started on their way barefooted.

When the elders heard the story, they talked among themselves of whether she was saved. God in the end revealed it to one of them, that inasmuch as she had cared nothing for her body or its pain upon her journey, inasmuch as she had counted her wounds as nothing for the great longing that she had to escape perdition, that therefore, for the sake of her heart's devotion, God had received her repentance.

8. How an old monk was redeemed from his sin by the gentleness and patience of his disciple.

There was a certain old monk who was a drunkard. He used to weave a mat every day, sell it in a neighbouring village, and spend the money he got on wine. After a while, there came a younger brother, who dwelt with him as a disciple. He also wove one mat every day. The old man used to take his mat, too, and sell it, and spend the price of both on wine. Late in the evening, he used to return and bring the disciple a very small piece of bread.

Thus, three years went by, and the young man spoke no word of complaint.

At last, he said within himself, "I am nearly naked, for my clothes are worn out. I am half starved for want of food. It is good that I arise and go hence."

Then again, he said within himself, "Whither have I to go? Better that I stay here. It was God who set me here. For God's sake, therefore, I will stay, enduring the life which I live."

Immediately that he had thus resolved an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "You need not depart. Tomorrow we shall come to you."

Then the brother said to the old man, "Do not leave the cell tomorrow, I beseech you, for some friends of mine are coming to take me away."

The next day, when the hour came at which the old man was wont to go down to the village, he grew impatient, and said to the disciple, "I think your friends will not come today. See how late it is."

But the brother besought him very earnestly to stay saying that his friends most certainly would come. While he was speaking death came to him, and he slept peacefully.

Then, when the old man saw that he was dead, he wept bitterly, and cried out, "Alas! Alas! Alas for me, my son! These many years I have lived carelessly; but you, in a brief time, have gained salvation for your soul by being patient."

From that day forth, the old man was sober, and well reported of for his good life.

9. How the abbot Macarius by his love, won for Christ the soul of a heathen priest.

Once the abbot Macarius took a journey to Mount Nitna, and, as his custom was, sent his disciple to walk some way in front of him. The young man, as he went, met one whom he recognized as the priest of a heathen temple, bearing upon his shoulders a heavy log.

At once he cried out against him, saying, "Where are you going, you devil?" The priest, goaded to anger by his words, beat him and left him fainting. Then he went again upon his way.

Soon he met the abbot Macarius, who said to him, "Peace be with you, toiler, peace be with you." The priest replied, "What good do you see in me that you greet me thus?" Macarius said, "I wish you peace because I see you toiling, and because you know not where you go." Then said the priest, "Your words have touched my heart. You are, indeed, a true servant of God. As for that other wretched monk who met me and insulted me, I replied to his words with blows."

Then, taking hold of the feet of the saint, he said, "I shall not leave you till you teach me to be a monk." They walked together to the place where the disciple lay. Together they bore him, for he could not walk, until they brought him to the church. There the brethren were struck with astonishment to see the heathen priest in company with Saint Macarius. Nevertheless, they received him and taught him to be a monk and many of the heathen round about were converted along with him. Often afterwards, Macarius used to say to them, "See how haughty words turn even good men into bad, and how true it is that loving, lowly words change bad men into good."

10. How the abbot Ammon hid a brother's sin, but warned him of his danger.

Once the abbot Ammon came to a certain place to eat bread with a brother who bore an evil reputation. Now it happened that a woman had gone into this brother's cell. The inhabitants of the

place were aware of it, and gathered together in great wrath to expel that brother from his cell. Hearing that Ammon was present, they asked him to go with them. As soon as the brother saw them coming, he hid the woman whom he had received in a large chest. When the crowd arrived at his cell, the abbot Ammon guessed what he had done, but for God's sake, he concealed it. He entered the cell, sat down on the chest, and then bid them search. When they had looked everywhere and not found the woman, the abbot Ammon said to them, "Where now are your suspicions? God grant you pardon for them." Then he prayed with them, and bid them depart.

After they were all gone, he took the brother by the hand and said, "My brother, beware." So saying, he departed.

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