

At my first lecture there were certainly not many people present, for everyone thought it absurd that I could attempt this so soon, when up to now I had made no study at all of the Scriptures. But all those who came approved, so that they commended the lecture warmly, and urged me to comment on the text on the same lines as my lecture. The news brought people who had missed my first lecture flocking to the second and third ones, all alike most eager to make copies of the glosses which I had begun with on the first day.

Anselm was now wildly jealous, and being already set against me by the suggestions of some of his pupils, as I said before, he began to attack me for lecturing on the Scriptures in the same way as my master William had done previously over philosophy. There were at this time two outstanding students in the old man's school, Alberic of Rheims and Lotulf of Lombardy,¹ whose hostility to me was intensified by the good opinion they had of themselves. It was largely through their insinuations, as was afterwards proved, that Anselm lost his head and curtly forbade me to continue my work of interpretation in the place where he taught,² on the pretext that any mistake which I might write down through lack of training in the subject would be attributed to him. When this reached the ears of the students, their indignation knew no bounds – this was an act of sheer spite and calumny, such as had never been directed at anyone before; but the more open it was, the more it brought me renown, and through persecution my fame increased.

A few days after this I returned to Paris, to the school which had long ago been intended for and offered to me,³ and

1. Very little is known of Lotulf, who came from Novara. Alberic became archdeacon of Rheims in 1113 and ran the school there with Lotulf; in 1137 he was elected archbishop of Bourges. They were two of Abelard's main opponents at the Council of Soissons: see p. 79.

2. Evidently a man could be forbidden to teach by a *magister scolarum*, though at this date it was not yet necessary for him to acquire a licence (*licentia docendi*) to do so from the official responsible for the schools in a diocese or city.

3. As *magister scolarum* at Notre Dame Abelard would be adopted into the Chapter as a canon but this did not mean that he was ordained a priest.

from which I had been expelled at the start. I held my position there in peace for several years, and as soon as I began my course of teaching I set myself to complete the commentaries on Ezekiel which I had started at Laon. These proved so popular with their readers that they judged my reputation to stand as high for my interpretation of the Scriptures as it had previously done for philosophy. The numbers in the school increased enormously as the students gathered there eager for instruction in both subjects, and the wealth and fame this brought me must be well known to you.

But success always puffs up fools with pride, and worldly security weakens the spirit's resolution and easily destroys it through carnal temptations. I began to think myself the only philosopher in the world, with nothing to fear from anyone, and so I yielded to the lusts of the flesh. Hitherto I had been entirely continent, but now the further I advanced in philosophy and theology, the further I fell behind the philosophers and holy Fathers in the impurity of my life. It is well known that the philosophers, and still more the Fathers, by which is meant those who have devoted themselves to the teachings of Holy Scripture, were especially glorified by their chastity. Since therefore I was wholly enslaved to pride and lechery, God's grace provided a remedy for both these evils, though not one of my choosing: first for my lechery by depriving me of those organs with which I practised it, and then for the pride which had grown in me through my learning – for in the words of the Apostle, 'Knowledge breeds conceit'¹ – when I was humiliated by the burning of the book of which I was so proud.²

The true story of both these episodes I now want you to

He was already *clericus* – 'clerk' rather than 'cleric' – for at this time *clerici* and *scholares* were synonymous, as the schools were all Church institutions. Masters and students were tonsured and wore clerical habits.

1. 1 Corinthians viii, 1. Abelard and Heloise both quote from the Bible very freely. Their own words have been translated when they are only approximate to the Latin of the Vulgate; otherwise the N.E.B., Knox or Jerusalem Bible has been used.

2. His treatise *On the Unity and Trinity of God*, burnt by order of the Council of Soissons. See p. 83.

know from the facts, in their proper order, instead of from hearsay. I had always held myself aloof from unclean association with prostitutes, and constant application to my studies had prevented me from frequenting the society of gentlewomen: indeed, I knew little of the secular way of life. Perverse Fortune flattered me, as the saying goes, and found an easy way to bring me toppling down from my pedestal, or rather, despite my overbearing pride and heedlessness of the grace granted me, God's compassion claimed me humbled for Himself.

There was in Paris at the time a young girl named Heloise,¹ the niece of Fulbert, one of the canons, and so much loved by him that he had done everything in his power to advance her education in letters. In looks she did not rank lowest, while in the extent of her learning she stood supreme. A gift for letters is so rare in women that it added greatly to her charm and had won her renown throughout the realm. I considered all the usual attractions for a lover and decided she was the one to bring to my bed, confident that I should have an easy success; for at that time I had youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation to recommend me, and feared no rebuff from any woman I might choose to honour with my love. Knowing the girl's knowledge and love of letters I thought she would be all the more ready to consent, and that even when separated we could enjoy each other's presence by exchange of written messages in which we could speak more openly than in person, and so need never lack the pleasures of conversation.

All on fire with desire for this girl I sought an opportunity of getting to know her through private daily meetings and so

1. None of the conjectures about Heloise's birth and parentage can be proved, and as she was a young girl (*adolescentula*), it can only be assumed that she was about seventeen at this time, and born in 1100 or 1101. Her mother's name appears in the necrology of the Paraclete as Hersinde; her father is unknown. It is possible that she was illegitimate, and twice in her letters (p. 129 and p. 130) she implies that her social status was lower than Abelard's. See further McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 8 ff. and note 219, p. 287 ff. Fulbert presumably lived in the cathedral close, north-east of Notre Dame, traditionally in a house on the Quai aux Fleurs.

more easily winning her over; and with this end in view I came to an arrangement with her uncle, with the help of some of his friends, whereby he should take me into his house, which was very near my school, for whatever sum he liked to ask. As a pretext I said that my household cares were hindering my studies and the expense was more than I could afford. Fulbert dearly loved money, and was moreover always ambitious to further his niece's education in letters, two weaknesses which made it easy for me to gain his consent and obtain my desire: he was all eagerness for my money and confident that his niece would profit from my teaching. This led him to make an urgent request which furthered my love and fell in with my wishes more than I had dared to hope; he gave me complete charge over the girl, so that I could devote all the leisure time left me by my school to teaching her by day and night, and if I found her idle I was to punish her severely. I was amazed by his simplicity – if he had entrusted a tender lamb to a ravening wolf it would not have surprised me more. In handing her over to me to punish as well as to teach, what else was he doing but giving me complete freedom to realize my desires, and providing an opportunity, even if I did not make use of it, for me to bend her to my will by threats and blows if persuasion failed? But there were two special reasons for his freedom from base suspicion: his love for his niece and my previous reputation for continence.

Need I say more? We were united, first under one roof, then in heart; and so with our lessons as a pretext we abandoned ourselves entirely to love. Her studies allowed us to withdraw in private, as love desired, and then with our books open before us, more words of love than of our reading passed between us, and more kissing than teaching. My hands strayed oftener to her bosom than to the pages; love drew our eyes to look on each other more than reading kept them on our texts. To avert suspicion I sometimes struck her, but these blows were prompted by love and tender feeling rather than anger and irritation, and were sweeter than any balm could be. In short, our desires left no stage of love-making untried,

and if love could devise something new, we welcomed it. We entered on each joy the more eagerly for our previous inexperience, and were the less easily sated.

Now the more I was taken up with these pleasures, the less time I could give to philosophy and the less attention I paid to my school. It was utterly boring for me to have to go to the school, and equally wearisome to remain there and to spend my days on study when my nights were sleepless with love-making. As my interest and concentration flagged, my lectures lacked all inspiration and were merely repetitive; I could do no more than repeat what had been said long ago, and when inspiration did come to me, it was for writing love-songs, not the secrets of philosophy. A lot of these songs, as you know, are still popular and sung in many places,¹ particularly by those who enjoy the kind of life I led. But the grief and sorrow and laments of my students when they realized my preoccupation, or rather, distraction of mind are hard to realize. Few could have failed to notice something so obvious, in fact no one, I fancy, except the man whose honour was most involved – Heloise's uncle. Several people tried on more than one occasion to draw his attention to it, but he would not believe them; because, as I said, of his boundless love for his niece and my well-known reputation for chastity in my previous life. We do not easily think ill of those whom we love most, and the taint of suspicion cannot exist along with warm affection. Hence the remark of St Jerome in his letter to Sabinian:² 'We are always the last to learn of evil in our own home, and the faults of our wife and children may be the talk of the town but do not reach our ears.'

But what is last to be learned is somehow learned eventually, and common knowledge cannot easily be hidden from one individual. Several months passed and then this happened in our case. Imagine the uncle's grief at the discovery, and the lovers' grief too at being separated! How I blushed with shame and contrition for the girl's plight, and what sorrow

1. None of these love-lyrics survives, and there are no love-poems in north France as early as this.

2. *Epistulae* cxlvii, 10. The mss. read 'to Castrician'.

she suffered at the thought of my disgrace! All our laments were for one another's troubles, and our distress was for each other, not for ourselves. Separation drew our hearts still closer while frustration inflamed our passion even more; then we became more abandoned as we lost all sense of shame and, indeed, shame diminished as we found more opportunities for love-making. And so we were caught in the act as the poet says happened to Mars and Venus.¹ Soon afterwards the girl found that she was pregnant, and immediately wrote me a letter full of rejoicing to ask what I thought she should do. One night then, when her uncle was away from home, I removed her secretly from his house, as we had planned, and sent her straight to my own country. There she stayed with my sister until she gave birth to a boy, whom she called Astralabe.²

On his return her uncle went almost out of his mind – one could appreciate only by experience his transports of grief and mortification. What action could he take against me? What traps could he set? He did not know. If he killed me or did me personal injury, there was the danger that his beloved niece might suffer for it in my country. It was useless to try to seize me or confine me anywhere against my will, especially as I was very much on guard against this very thing, knowing that he would not hesitate to assault me if he had the courage or the means.

In the end I took pity on his boundless misery and went to him, accusing myself of the deceit love had made me commit as if it were the basest treachery. I begged his forgiveness and

1. They were found in bed together by Venus' husband, Vulcan. The story we now associate with Homer (*Odyssey*, Book 8) was well known to Abelard through the versions by Ovid in *Ars amatoria*, 2. 561 ff. and *Metamorphoses*, 4. 169 ff.

2. In Letter 4, p. 146, Abelard adds the detail that she was disguised as a nun. The sister was probably the Denise or Dionisia who appears in the necrology of the Paraclete, as does Peter Astralabe or Astrolabe. We can only assume that Heloise stayed at Le Pallet, and there is no historical basis for associating her with the more romantic scenery of Clisson. See Introduction, p. 53. The child's strange name, which Abelard says she chose, remains unexplained.

promised to make any amends he might think fit. I protested that I had done nothing unusual in the eyes of anyone who had known the power of love, and recalled how since the beginning of the human race women had brought the noblest men to ruin. Moreover, to conciliate him further, I offered him satisfaction in a form he could never have hoped for: I would marry the girl I had wronged. All I stipulated was that the marriage should be kept secret so as not to damage my reputation.¹ He agreed, pledged his word and that of his supporters, and sealed the reconciliation I desired with a kiss. But his intention was to make it easier to betray me.

I set off at once for Brittany and brought back my mistress to make her my wife. But she was strongly opposed to the proposal, and argued hotly against it for two reasons: the risk involved and the disgrace to myself. She swore that no satisfaction could ever appease her uncle, as we subsequently found out. What honour could she win, she protested, from a marriage which would dishonour me and humiliate us both? The world would justly exact punishment from her if she removed such a light from its midst. Think of the curses, the loss to the Church and grief of philosophers which would greet such a marriage! Nature had created me for all mankind – it would be a sorry scandal if I should bind myself to a single woman and submit to such base servitude. She absolutely rejected this marriage; it would be nothing but a disgrace and a burden to me. Along with the loss to my reputation she put before me the difficulties of marriage, which the apostle Paul

1. Cf. note 3, p. 64. Opinion is divided on whether Abelard was in Orders at this time but, even if he were, the Church was only just beginning to forbid marriage to priests and the higher orders of clergy. It would have been thought unworthy of anyone in Abelard's position not to remain celibate, and would have been a bar to his advancement in the Church, where alone he could find scope for his ambitions. One of Heloise's arguments is that his marriage would mean a loss to the Church, her main one that it would be a betrayal of the philosophic ideal. But obviously a secret marriage would not satisfy Fulbert's demand for public satisfaction for the wrong done to his niece. Abelard's true motive for wanting a marriage is revealed in his second letter, p. 149.

exhorts us to avoid when he says: 'Has your marriage been dissolved? Do not seek a wife. If, however, you do marry, there is nothing wrong in it; and if a virgin marries, she has done no wrong. But those who marry will have pain and grief in this bodily life, and my aim is to spare you.' And again: 'I want you to be free from anxious care.'

But if I would accept neither the advice of the Apostle nor the exhortations of the Fathers on the heavy yoke of marriage, at least, she argued, I could listen to the philosophers, and pay regard to what had been written by them or concerning them on this subject – as for the most part the Fathers too have carefully done when they wish to rebuke us. For example, St Jerome in the first book of his *Against Jovinian*² recalls how Theophrastus sets out in considerable detail the unbearable annoyances of marriage and its endless anxieties, in order to prove by the clearest possible arguments that a man should not take a wife; and he brings his reasoning from the exhortations of the philosophers to this conclusion: 'Can any Christian hear Theophrastus argue in this way without a blush?' In the same book Jerome goes on to say that 'After Cicero had divorced Terentia and was asked by Hirtius to marry his sister he firmly refused to do so, on the grounds that he could not devote his attention to a wife and philosophy alike. He does not simply say "devote attention", but adds "alike", not wishing to do anything which would be a rival to his study of philosophy.'

But apart from the hindrances to such philosophic study, consider, she said, the true conditions for a dignified way of life. What harmony can there be between pupils and nursemaids, desks and cradles, books or tablets and distaffs, pen or stylus and spindles? Who can concentrate on thoughts of Scripture or philosophy and be able to endure babies crying, nurses soothing them with lullabies, and all the noisy coming and going of men and women about the house? Will he put up with the constant muddle and squalor which small children bring into the home? The wealthy can do so, you will say, for their mansions and large houses can provide privacy and,

1. 1 Corinthians vii, 27, 28, 32.

2. *Contra Jovinianum*, 47.

being rich, they do not have to count the cost nor be tormented by daily cares. But philosophers lead a very different life from rich men, and those who are concerned with wealth or are involved in mundane matters will not have time for the claims of Scripture or philosophy. Consequently, the great philosophers of the past have despised the world, not renouncing it so much as escaping from it, and have denied themselves every pleasure so as to find peace in the arms of philosophy alone. The greatest of them, Seneca, gives this advice to Lucilius:¹ 'Philosophy is not a subject for idle moments. We must neglect everything else and concentrate on this, for no time is long enough for it. Put it aside for a moment, and you might as well give it up, for once interrupted it will not remain. We must resist all other occupations, not merely dispose of them but reject them.'

This is the practice today through love of God of those among us who truly deserve the name of monks,² as it was of distinguished philosophers amongst the pagans in their pursuit of philosophy. For in every people, pagan, Jew or Christian, some men have always stood out for their faith or upright way of life, and have cut themselves off from their fellows because of their singular chastity or austerity. Amongst the Jews in times past there were the Nazirites,³ who dedicated themselves to the Lord according to the Law, and the sons of the prophets, followers of Elijah or Elisha, whom the Old Testament calls monks, as St Jerome bears witness;⁴ and in more recent times the three sects of philosophers described by Josephus in the eighteenth book of his *Antiquities*,⁵ the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. Today we have the monks who imitate either the communal life of the apostles or the earlier, solitary life of John. Among the pagans, as I said, are the philosophers: for the name of wisdom or philosophy used to be applied not so much to acquisition of learning as to a religious way of life, as we

1. *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 72. 3.

2. *Monachus* (monk) originally denotes one who chooses a solitary life.

3. Cf. Numbers vi, 21 and Judges xvi, 17 (Samson).

4. 2 Kings vi, 1; Jerome, *Epistulae* cxxv, 7. 5. *Antiquities*, 18.1.11.

learn from the first use of the word itself and from the testimony of the saints themselves. And so St Augustine, in the eighth book of his *City of God*, distinguishes between types of philosopher:¹

The Italian school was founded by Pythagoras of Samos, who is said to have been the first to use the term philosophy; before him men were called 'sages' if they seemed outstanding for some praiseworthy manner of life. But when Pythagoras was asked his profession, he replied that he was a philosopher, meaning a devotee or lover of wisdom, for he thought it too presumptuous to call himself a sage.

So the phrase 'if they seemed outstanding for some praiseworthy manner of life' clearly proves that the sages of the pagans, that is, the philosophers, were so called as a tribute to their way of life, not to their learning. There is no need for me to give examples of their chaste and sober lives – I should seem to be teaching Minerva herself. But if pagans and laymen could live in this way, though bound by no profession of faith, is there not a greater obligation on you, as clerk and canon, not to put base pleasures before your sacred duties, and to guard against being sucked down headlong into this Charybdis, there to lose all sense of shame and be plunged forever into a whirlpool of impurity? If you take no thought for the privilege of a clerk, you can at least uphold the dignity of a philosopher, and let a love of propriety curb your shamelessness if the reverence due to God means nothing to you. Remember Socrates' marriage and the sordid episode whereby he did at least remove the slur it cast on philosophy by providing an example to be a warning to his successors. This too was noted by Jerome, when he tells this tale of Socrates in the first book of his *Against Jovinian*:² 'One day after he had

1. *De civitate Dei*, 8.2.

2. 1.48. Muckle points out that all these quotations (apart from the one from Seneca) appear in other works by Abelard, and in particular in Book II of his *Theologia Christiana* written ten years previously (*Mediaeval Studies*, Vol. XII, pp. 173-4). This suggests that before circulating the *Historia calamitatum* Abelard had expanded Heloise's arguments and supplied precise quotations.

At this news her uncle and his friends and relatives im-
agined that I had tricked them, and had found an easy way of
ridding myself of Heloise by making her a nun. Wild with
indignation they plotted against me, and one night as I slept
peacefully in an inner room in my lodgings, they bribed one
of my servants to admit them and there took cruel vengeance
on me of such appalling barbarity as to shock the whole
world; they cut off the parts of my body whereby I had
committed the wrong of which they complained. Then they
killed, but the two who could be caught were blinded and
mutilated as I had been, one of them being the servant who
had been led by greed while in my service to betray his master.
Next morning the whole city gathered before my house,
and the scene of horror and amazement, mingled with
lamentations, cries and groans which exasperated and dis-
tressed me, is difficult, no, impossible, to describe. In particu-
lar, the clerks and, most of all, my pupils tormented me with
their unbearable weeping and wailing until I suffered more
from their sympathy than from the pain of my wound, and
felt the misery of my mutilation less than my shame and
humiliation. All sorts of thoughts filled my mind - how
brightly my reputation had shone, and now how easily in an
evil moment it had been dimmed or rather completely blotted
out; how just a judgement of God had struck me in the parts
of the body with which I had sinned, and how just a reprisal
had been taken by the very man I had myself betrayed. I
thought how my rivals would exult over my fitting punish-
ment, how this bitter blow would bring lasting grief and

century by a nobleman Hermericus and his wife Numma, who presented
it to the Abbey of St Denis. In the early ninth century Charlemagne
removed it from St Denis and made it independent, with his daughter
Theodrada as abbess. She intended it to revert to St Denis at her death,
but in the civil wars and the Norman invasions it was destroyed and
abandoned for about 150 years. At the end of the tenth century it was
filled with nuns of the order of St Benedict.
1. A letter of consolation exists, written by Fulk, prior of the Bene-
dictine house of St Eugene at Deuil, near Montmorency. See P.L. 178,
371-2; Cousin, Vol. I, pp. 703-7.

withstood an endless stream of invective which Xanthippe
poured out from a window above his head, he felt himself
soaked with dirty water. All he did was to wipe his head and
say: "I knew that thunderstorm would lead to rain."

Heloise then went on to the risks I should run in bringing
her back, and argued that the name of mistress instead of wife
would be dearer to her and more honourable for me - only
love freely given should keep me for her, not the construction
of a marriage tie, and if we had to be parted for a time, we
should find the joy of being together all the sweeter the rarer
our meetings were. But at last she saw that her attempts to
persuade or dissuade me were making no impression on my
foolish obstinacy, and she could not bear to offend me; so
amidst deep sighs and tears she ended in these words: "We
shall both be destroyed. All that is left us is suffering as great
as our love has been." In this, as the whole world knows, she
showed herself a true prophet.

And so when our baby son was born we entrusted him to
my sister's care and returned secretly to Paris. A few days
later, after a night's private vigil of prayer in a certain church,
at dawn we were joined in matrimony in the presence of
Fulbert and some of his, and our, friends. Afterwards we
parted secretly and went our ways unobserved. Subsequently
our meetings were few and furtive, in order to conceal as far
as possible what we had done. But Fulbert and his servants,
seeking satisfaction for the dishonour done to him, began to
spread the news of the marriage and break the promise of
secrecy they had given me. Heloise cursed them and swore
that there was no truth in this, and in his exasperation Fulbert
heaped abuse on her on several occasions. As soon as I
discovered this I removed her to a convent of nuns in the
town near Paris called Argenteuil, where she had been
brought up and educated as a small girl, and I also had made
exception of the veil, and made her put it on.¹

1. Heloise took the veil later when she became a nun, but she could have
stayed at the convent without wearing a habit at all. The Convent of
St Marie of Argenteuil was founded as a monastery in the late seventh

misery to my friends and parents, and how fast the news of this unheard-of disgrace would spread over the whole world. What road could I take now? How could I show my face in public, to be pointed at by every finger, derided by every tongue, a monstrous spectacle to all I met? I was also appalled to remember that according to the cruel letter of the Law, a eunuch is such an abomination to the Lord that men made eunuchs by the amputation or mutilation of their members are forbidden to enter a church as if they were stinking and unclean, and even animals in that state are rejected for sacrifice. 'Ye shall not present to the Lord any animal if its testicles have been bruised or crushed, torn or cut.' 'No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose organ has been severed shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord.'

I admit that it was shame and confusion in my remorse and misery rather than any devout wish for conversion which brought me to seek shelter in a monastery cloister. Heloise had already agreed to take the veil in obedience to my wishes and entered a convent. So we both put on the religious habit, I in the Abbey of St Denis,² and she in the Convent of Argenteuil which I spoke of before. There were many people, I remember, who in pity for her youth tried to dissuade her from submitting to the yoke of monastic rule as a penance too hard to bear, but all in vain; she broke out as best she could through her tears and sobs into Cornelia's famous lament;³

O noble husband,

Too great for me to wed, was it my fate
To bend that lofty head? What prompted me
To marry you and bring about your fall?
Now claim your due, and see me gladly pay . . .

1. Leviticus xxii, 24; Deuteronomy xxiii, 1.

2. The Benedictine Abbey of St Denis, built to enshrine the tomb of the first bishop of Paris, had close royal connections (many of the kings of France were crowned and buried there), and at this date (c. 1119) was still 'unreformed' and often used as a centre for transacting state business. It was to be splendidly embellished and monastic discipline restored in accordance with St Benedict's Rule by Abbot Suger under the guidance of St Bernard of Clairvaux. See *The Letters of St Bernard*, trans. B. S. James, no. 80.

3. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 8. 94.

So saying she hurried to the altar, quickly took up the veil blessed by the bishop, and publicly bound herself to the religious life.

I had still scarcely recovered from my wound when the clerks came thronging round to pester the abbot and myself with repeated demands that I should now for love of God continue the studies which hitherto I had pursued only in desire for wealth and fame. They urged me to consider that the talent entrusted to me by God would be required of me with interest; that instead of addressing myself to the rich as before I should devote myself to educating the poor, and recognize that the hand of the Lord had touched me for the express purpose of freeing me from the temptations of the flesh and the distractions of the world so that I could devote myself to learning, and thereby prove myself a true philosopher not of the world but of God.

Letter 1. Heloise to Abelard

To her master, or rather her father, husband, or rather brother; his handmaid, or rather his daughter, wife, or rather sister; to Abelard, Heloise.

Not long ago, my beloved, by chance someone brought me the letter of consolation you had sent to a friend. I saw at once from the superscription that it was yours, and was all the more eager to read it since the writer is so dear to my heart. I hoped for renewal of strength, at least from the writer's words which would picture for me the reality I have lost. But nearly every line of this letter was filled, I remember, with gall and wormwood, as it told the pitiful story of our entry into religion and the cross of unending suffering which you, my only love, continue to bear.

In that letter you did indeed carry out the promise you made your friend at the beginning, that he would think his own troubles insignificant or nothing, in comparison with your own. First you revealed the persecution you suffered from your teachers, then the supreme treachery of the mutilation of your person, and then described the abominable jealousy and violent attacks of your fellow-students, Alberic of Rheims and Lotulf of Lombardy.¹ You did not gloss over what at their instigation was done to your distinguished theological work or what amounted to a prison sentence passed on yourself. Then you went on to the plotting against you by your abbot and false brethren, the serious slanders from those two pseudo-apostles, spread against you by the same rivals, and the scandal stirred up among many people because you had acted contrary to custom in naming your oratory after the Paraclete. You went on to the incessant, intolerable persecutions which you still endure at the hands of that cruel tyrant and the evil monks you call your sons, and so brought your sad story to an end.

¹. See *Historia calamitatum*, p. 79.

No one, I think, could read or hear it dry-eyed; my own sorrows are renewed by the detail in which you have told it, and redoubled because you say your perils are still increasing. All of us here are driven to despair of your life, and every day we await in fear and trembling the final word of your death. And so in the name of Christ, who is still giving you some protection for his service, we beseech you to write as often as you think fit to us who are his handmaids and yours, with news of the perils in which you are still storm-tossed. We are all that are left you, so at least you should let us share your sorrow or your joy.

It is always some consolation in sorrow to feel that it is shared, and any burden laid on several is carried more lightly or removed. And if this storm has quietened down for a while, you must be all the more prompt to send us a letter which will be the more gladly received. But whatever you write about will bring us no small relief in the mere proof that you have us in mind. Letters from absent friends are welcome indeed, as Seneca himself shows us by his own example when he writes these words in a passage of a letter to his friend Lucilius:¹

Thank you for writing to me often, the one way in which you can make your presence felt, for I never have a letter from you without the immediate feeling that we are together. If pictures of absent friends give us pleasure, renewing our memories and relieving the pain of separation even if they cheat us with empty comfort, how much more welcome is a letter which comes to us in the very handwriting of an absent friend.

Thank God that here at least is a way of restoring your presence to us which no malice can prevent, nor any obstacle hinder; then do not, I beseech you, allow any negligence to hold you back.

You wrote your friend a long letter of consolation, prompted no doubt by his misfortunes, but really telling of your own. The detailed account you gave of these may have been intended for his comfort, but it also greatly increased

1. *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 40. 1.

our own feeling of desolation; in your desire to heal his wounds you have dealt us fresh wounds of grief as well as re-opening the old. I beg you, then, as you set about tending the wounds which others have dealt, heal the wounds you have yourself inflicted. You have done your duty to a friend and comrade, discharged your debt to friendship and comradeship, but it is a greater debt which binds you in obligation to us who can properly be called not friends so much as dearest friends, not comrades but daughters, or any other conceivable name more tender and holy. How great the debt by which you have bound yourself to us needs neither proof nor witness, were it in any doubt; if the whole world kept silent, the facts themselves would cry out.¹ For you after God are the sole founder of this place, the sole builder of this oratory, the sole creator of this community. You have built nothing here upon another man's foundation.² Everything here is your own creation. This was a wilderness open to wild beasts and brigands, a place which had known no home nor habitation of men. In the very lairs of wild beasts and lurking-places of robbers, where the name of God was never heard, you built a sanctuary to God and dedicated a shrine in the name of the Holy Spirit. To build it you drew nothing from the riches of kings and princes, though their wealth was great and could have been yours for the asking; whatever was done, the credit was to be yours alone. Clerks and scholars came flocking here, eager for your teaching, and ministered to all your needs; and even those who had lived on the benefices of the Church and knew only how to receive offerings, not to make them, whose hands were held out to take but not to give, became pressing in their lavish offers of assistance.

And so it is yours, truly your own, this new plantation for God's purpose, but it is sown with plants which are still very tender and need watering if they are to thrive. Through its feminine nature this plantation would be weak and frail even if it were not new; and so it needs a more careful and regular cultivation, according to the words of the Apostle:

1. Cf. Cicero, *In Catalinam*, 1. 8.

2. Cf. Romans xv, 20.

'I planted the seed and Apollos watered it; but God made it grow.'¹ The Apostle through the doctrine that he preached had planted and established in the faith the Corinthians, to whom he was writing. Afterwards the Apostle's own disciple, Apollos, had watered them with his holy exhortations and so God's grace bestowed on them growth in the virtues. You cultivate a vineyard of another's vines which you did not plant yourself and which has now turned to bitterness against you,² so that often your advice brings no result and your holy words are uttered in vain. You devote your care to another's vineyard; think what you owe to your own. You teach and admonish rebels to no purpose, and in vain you throw the pearls of your divine eloquence to the pigs.³ While you spend so much on the stubborn, consider what you owe to the obedient; you are so generous to your enemies but should reflect on how you are indebted to your daughters. Apart from everything else, consider the close tie by which you have bound yourself to me, and repay the debt you owe a whole community of women dedicated to God by discharging it the more dutifully to her who is yours alone.

Your superior wisdom knows better than our humble learning of the many serious treatises which the holy Fathers compiled for the instruction or exhortation or even the consolation of holy women, and of the care with which these were composed. And so in the precarious early days of our conversion long ago I was not a little surprised and troubled by your forgetfulness, when neither reverence for God nor our mutual love nor the example of the holy Fathers made you think of trying to comfort me, wavering and exhausted as I was by prolonged grief, either by word when I was with you or by letter when we had parted.⁴ Yet you must know that

1. I Corinthians iii, 6.

2. Cf. Jeremiah ii, 21.

3. Matthew vii, 6.

4. This sentence, often mistranslated as if it refers to the present and so suggesting that Abelard has never visited nor written to her at the Paraclete, has been used as evidence that the letters are a forgery because it contradicts what Abelard says in the *Historia calamitatum* (p. 98). But the tense (*movit*) is past, translated here as 'I was troubled,' and Heloise must be referring to his failure to help her by word before they separated and

you are bound to me by an obligation which is all the greater for the further close tie of the marriage sacrament uniting us, and are the deeper in my debt because of the love I have always borne you, as everyone knows, a love which is beyond all bounds.

You know, beloved, as the whole world knows, how much I have lost in you, how at one wretched stroke of fortune that supreme act of flagrant treachery robbed me of my very self in robbing me of you; and how my sorrow for my loss is nothing compared with what I feel for the manner in which I lost you. Surely the greater the cause for grief the greater the need for the help of consolation, and this no one can bring but you; you are the sole cause of my sorrow, and you alone can grant me the grace of consolation. You alone have the power to make me sad, to bring me happiness or comfort; you alone have so great a debt to repay me, particularly now when I have carried out all your orders so implicitly that when I was powerless to oppose you in anything, I found strength at your command to destroy myself. I did more, strange to say - my love rose to such heights of madness that it robbed itself of what it most desired beyond hope of recovery, when immediately at your bidding I changed my clothing along with my mind, in order to prove you the sole possessor of my body and my will alike. God knows I never sought anything in you except yourself; I wanted simply you, nothing of yours. I looked for no marriage-bond, no marriage portion, and it was not my own pleasures and wishes I sought to gratify, as you well know, but yours. The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word mistress, or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore. I believed that the more I humbled myself on your account, the more gratitude I should win from you, and also the less damage I should do to the brightness of your reputation.

You yourself on your own account did not altogether forget this in the letter of consolation I have spoken of

by letter after she had entered the convent. See McLeod, op. cit., pp. 248-50.

which you wrote to a friend;¹ there you thought fit to set out some of the reasons I gave in trying to dissuade you from binding us together in an ill-starred marriage. But you kept silent about most of my arguments for preferring love to wedlock and freedom to chains. God is my witness that if Augustus, Emperor of the whole world, thought fit to honour me with marriage and conferred all the earth on me to possess for ever, it would be dearer and more honourable to me to be called not his Empress but your whore.

For a man's worth does not rest on his wealth or power; these depend on fortune, but worth on his merits. And a woman should realize that if she marries a rich man more readily than a poor one, and desires her husband more for his possessions than for himself, she is offering herself for sale. Certainly any woman who comes to marry through desires of this kind deserves wages, not gratitude, for clearly her mind is on the man's property, not himself, and she would be ready to prostitute herself to a richer man, if she could. This is evident from the argument put forward in the dialogue of Aeschines Socraticus² by the learned Aspasia to Xenophon and his wife. When she had expounded it in an effort to bring about a reconciliation between them, she ended with these words: 'Unless you come to believe that there is no better man nor worthier woman on earth you will always still be looking for what you judge the best thing of all - to be the husband of the best of wives and the wife of the best of husbands.'

These are saintly words which are more than philosophic; indeed, they deserve the name of wisdom, not philosophy. It is a holy error and a blessed delusion between man and wife, when perfect love can keep the ties of marriage unbroken not so much through bodily continence as chastity of spirit. But what error permitted other women, plain truth permitted me,

1. This suggests that Heloise believed the *Historia calamitatum* to be a genuine letter to a real person, and not an example of a conventional epistolatory genre, unless she is writing ironically.

2. Aeschines Socraticus, a pupil of Socrates, wrote several dialogues of which fragments survive. This is however no proof that Heloise knew Greek, as the passage was well known in the Middle Ages from Cicero's translation of it in *De inventione*, 1.31.

and what they thought of their husbands, the world in general believed, or rather, knew to be true of yourself; so that my love for you was the more genuine for being further removed from error. What king or philosopher could match your fame? What district, town or village did not long to see you? When you appeared in public, who did not hurry to catch a glimpse of you, or crane his neck and strain his eyes to follow your departure? Every wife, every young girl desired you in absence and was on fire in your presence; queens and great ladies envied me my joys and my bed.

You had besides, I admit, two special gifts whereby to win at once the heart of any woman - your gifts for composing verse and song, in which we know other philosophers have rarely been successful. This was for you no more than a diversion, a recreation from the labours of your philosophic work, but you left many love-songs and verses which won wide popularity for the charm of their words and tunes and kept your name continually on everyone's lips.¹ The beauty of the airs ensured that even the unlettered did not forget you; more than anything this made women sigh for love of you. And as most of these songs told of our love, they soon made me widely known and roused the envy of many women against me. For your manhood was adorned by every grace of mind and body, and among the women who envied me then, could there be one now who does not feel compelled by my misfortune to sympathize with my loss of such joys? Who is there who was once my enemy, whether man or woman, who is not moved now by the compassion which is my due? Wholly guilty though I am, I am also, as you know, wholly innocent. It is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime, and justice should weigh not what was done but the spirit in which it is done.² What my

1. Cf. *Historia calamitatum*, p. 68 and note. None of Abelard's secular verse survives.

2. Cf. Letter 3, p. 132, Letter 5, p. 175, and Introduction, p. 18. This is the 'ethic of pure intention' strongly held by Heloise and Abelard and set out in his *Ethica* or *Scito te ipsum* (*Know yourself*): our actions must be judged good or bad solely through the spirit in which they are performed and not by their effects. The deed itself is neither good nor bad.

intention towards you has always been, you alone who have known it can judge. I submit all to your scrutiny, yield to your testimony in all things.

Tell me one thing, if you can. Why, after our entry into religion, which was your decision alone, have I been so neglected and forgotten by you that I have neither a word from you when you are here to give me strength nor the consolation of a letter in absence?¹ Tell me, I say, if you can – or I will tell you what I think and indeed the world suspects. It was desire, not affection which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love. So when the end came to what you desired, any show of feeling you used to make went with it. This is not merely my own opinion, beloved, it is everyone's. There is nothing personal or private about it; it is the general view which is widely held. I only wish that it *were* mine alone, and that the love you professed could find someone to defend it and so comfort me in my grief for a while. I wish I could think of some explanation which would excuse you and somehow cover up the way you hold me cheap.

I beg you then to listen to what I ask – you will see that it is a small favour which you can easily grant. While I am denied your presence, give me at least through your words – of which you have enough and to spare – some sweet semblance of yourself. It is no use my hoping for generosity in deeds if you are grudging in words. Up to now I had thought I deserved much of you, seeing that I carried out everything for your sake and continue up to the present moment in complete obedience to you. It was not any sense of vocation which brought me as a young girl to accept the austerities of the cloister, but your bidding alone, and if I deserve no gratitude from you, you may judge for yourself how my

1. This is not to be taken as contradicting Abelard's statement on p. 98 that he often visited the Paraclete, and had invited Heloise and her nuns to go there (either by letter or interview). Her complaint is that he never writes her a personal letter nor offers her help in her personal problems. In Letter 4, p. 145, he refers to her 'old perpetual complaint' to him, but he evidently will not be drawn into discussion. As Muckle puts it, 'he did not and would not become her individual spiritual director' (*Medieval Studies*, Vol. XV, p. 58). Cf. note 4, p. 112.

labours are in vain. I can expect no reward for this from God, for it is certain that I have done nothing as yet for love of him. When you hurried towards God I followed you, indeed, I went first to take the veil – perhaps you were thinking how Lot's wife turned back¹ when you made me put on the religious habit and take my vows before you gave yourself to God. Your lack of trust in me over this one thing, I confess, overwhelmed me with grief and shame. I would have had no hesitation, God knows, in following you or going ahead at your bidding to the flames of Hell.² My heart was not in me but with you, and now, even more, if it is not with you it is nowhere; truly, without you it cannot exist. See that it fares well with you, I beg, as it will if it finds you kind, if you give grace in return for grace,³ small for great, words for deeds. If only your love had less confidence in me, my dear, so that you would be more concerned on my behalf! But as it is, the more I have made you feel secure in me, the more I have to bear with your neglect.

Remember, I implore you, what I have done, and think how much you owe me. While I enjoyed with you the pleasures of the flesh, many were uncertain whether I was prompted by love or lust; but now the end is proof of the beginning. I have finally denied myself every pleasure in obedience to your will, kept nothing for myself except to prove that now, even more, I am yours. Consider then your injustice, if when I deserve more you give me less, or rather, nothing at all, especially when it is a small thing I ask of you and one you could so easily grant. And so, in the name of God to whom you have dedicated yourself, I beg you to restore your presence to me in the way you can – by writing me some word of comfort, so that in this at least I may find increased strength and readiness to serve God. When in the past you sought me out for sinful pleasures your letters came to me thick and fast, and your many songs put your Heloise on everyone's lips, so that every

1. Cf. Genesis xix, 26.

2. The Latin is *Vulcania loca*, Vulcan's regions, or Tartarus, and illustrates how Heloise's natural manner of expressing herself is classical.

3. John i, 16.

street and house echoed with my name. Is it not far better now to summon me to God than it was then to satisfy our lust? I beg you, think what you owe me, give ear to my pleas, and I will finish a long letter with a brief ending: farewell, my only love.

Letter 2. Abelard to Heloise

To Heloise, his dearly beloved sister in Christ, Abelard her brother in Christ.

If since our conversion from the world to God I have not yet written you any word of comfort or advice, it must not be attributed to indifference on my part but to your own good sense, in which I have always had such confidence that I did not think anything was needed; God's grace has bestowed on you all essentials to enable you to instruct the erring, comfort the weak and encourage the fainthearted, both by word and example, as, indeed, you have been doing since you first held the office of prioress under your abess. So if you still watch over your daughters as carefully as you did previously over your sisters, it is sufficient to make me believe that any teaching or exhortation from me would now be wholly superfluous. If, on the other hand, in your humility you think differently, and you feel that you have need of my instruction and writings in matters pertaining to God, write to me what you want, so that I may answer as God permits me. Meanwhile thanks be to God who has filled all your hearts with anxiety for my desperate, unceasing perils, and made you share in my affliction; may divine mercy protect me through the support of your prayers and quickly crush Satan beneath our feet. To this end in particular, I hasten to send the psalter you earnestly begged from me,¹ my sister once dear in the world and now dearest in Christ, so that you may offer a perpetual sacrifice of

1. *Psalterium*. Heloise's letter does not mention this, but the request could have been made in person at the time when Abelard was still visiting the Paraclete: the tense (*requisisti*) suggests it was not very recent (*requiris* would be more natural for a request just received). Possibly the bearer of the letter was told to ask for it. Muckle (*Mediaeval Studies*, Vol. XV, pp. 58-9) suggests that the word refers not to a psalter, or Book of Psalms, which the convent would surely already have, but to a 'Chant', that is, the arrangement of versicles and responses at the end of this letter which are to be used in the prayers on his behalf.

prayers to the Lord for our many great aberrations, and for the dangers which daily threaten me.

We have indeed many examples as evidence of the high position in the eyes of God and his saints which has been won by the prayers of the faithful, especially those of women on behalf of their dear ones and of wives for their husbands. The Apostle observes this closely when he bids us pray continually.¹ We read that the Lord said to Moses 'Let me alone, to vent my anger upon them,'² and to Jeremiah 'Therefore offer no prayer for these people nor stand in my path.'³ By these words the Lord himself makes it clear that the prayers of the devout set a kind of bridle on his wrath and check it from raging against sinners as fully as they deserve; just as a man who is willingly moved by his sense of justice to take vengeance can be turned aside by the entreaties of his friends and forcibly restrained, as it were, against his will. Thus when the Lord says to one who is praying or about to pray, 'Let me alone and do not stand in my path'⁴, he forbids prayers to be offered to him on behalf of the impious; yet the just man prays though the Lord forbids, obtains his requests and alters the sentence of the angry judge. And so the passage about Moses continues: 'And the Lord repented and spared his people the evil with which he had threatened them.'⁵ Elsewhere it is written about the universal works of God, 'He spoke, and it was.'⁶ But in this passage it is also recorded that he had said the people deserved affliction, but he had been prevented by the power of prayer from carrying out his words.

Consider then the great power of prayer, if we pray as we are bidden, seeing that the prophet won by prayer what he was forbidden to pray for, and turned God aside from his declared intention. And another prophet says to God: 'In thy wrath remember mercy.'⁷ The lords of the earth should listen and take note, for they are found obstinate rather than just in the execution of the justice they have decreed and

1. 1 Thessalonians v, 16. 2. Exodus xxxii, 10.
3. Jeremiah vii, 16, loosely quoted. 4. Exodus xxxii, 10.
5. Exodus xxxii, 14. 6. Psalm xxxiii, 9. 7. Habbakuk, iii, 2.

pronounced; they blush to appear lax if they are merciful, and untruthful if they change a pronouncement or do not carry out a decision which lacked foresight, even if they can emend their words by their actions. Such men could properly be compared with Jephtha, who made a foolish vow and in carrying it out even more foolishly, killed his only daughter.¹ But he who desires to be a 'member of his body'² says with the Psalmist 'I will sing of mercy and justice unto thee, O Lord.'³ 'Mercy', it is written, 'exalts judgement,' in accordance with the threat elsewhere in the Scriptures: 'In that judgement there will be no mercy for the man who has shown no mercy.'⁴ The Psalmist himself considered this carefully when at the entreaty of the wife of Nabal the Carmelite, as an act of mercy he broke the oath he had justly sworn concerning her husband and the destruction of his house.⁵ Thus he set prayer above justice, and the man's wrongdoing was wiped out by the entreaties of his wife.

Here you have an example, sister, and an assurance how much your prayers for me may prevail on God, if this woman's did so much for her husband, seeing that God who is our father loves his children more than David did a suppliant woman. David was indeed considered a pious and merciful man, but God is piety and mercy itself. And the woman whose entreaties David heard then was an ordinary lay person, in no way bound to God by the profession of holy devotion; whereas if you alone are not enough to win an answer to your prayer, the holy convent of widows and virgins which is with you will succeed where you cannot by yourself. For when the Truth says to the disciples, 'When two or three have met together in my name, I am there among them,'⁶ and again, 'If two of you agree about any request you have to make, it shall be granted by my Father,'⁷ we can all see how the com-

1. Judges xi, 30 ff. Abelard was to write a *Lament* for Jephtha's daughter, one of a set of six *Laments* (P.L. 178, 1819-20; Cousin, Vol. I, p. 334-9).

2. Cf. Ephesians v, 30. 3. Psalm ci, 1. 4. James ii, 13.
5. 1 Samuel, xxv, 32 ff: the meeting of David and Abigail.
6. Matthew xviii, 20. 7. Matthew xviii, 19.

munal prayer of a holy congregation must prevail upon God. If, as the apostle James says, 'A good man's prayer is powerful and effective,'¹ what should we hope for from the large numbers of a holy congregation? You know, dearest sister, from the thirty-eighth homily of St Gregory how much support the prayers of his fellow brethren quickly brought a brother, although he was unwilling and resisted. The depths of his misery, the fear of peril which tormented his unhappy soul, the utter despair and weariness of life which made him try to call his brethren from their prayers – all the details set out there cannot have escaped your understanding.

May this example give you and your convent of holy sisters greater confidence in prayer, so that I may be preserved alive for you all, through him, from whom, as Paul bears witness, women have even received back their dead raised to life.² For if you turn the pages of the Old and New Testaments you will find that the greatest miracles of resurrection were shown only, or mostly, to women, and were performed for them or on them. The Old Testament records two instances of men raised from the dead at the entreaties of their mothers, by Elijah and his disciple Elisha.³ The Gospel, it is true, has three instances only of the dead being raised by the Lord but, as they were shown to women only, they provide factual confirmation of the Apostle's words I quoted above: 'Women received back their dead raised to life.' It was to a widow at the gate of the city of Nain that the Lord restored her son, moved by compassion for her,⁴ and he also raised Lazarus his own friend at the entreaty of his sisters Mary and Martha.⁵ And when he granted this same favour to the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue at her father's petition,⁶ again 'women received back their dead raised to life', for in being brought back to life she received her own body from death just as those other women received the bodies of their dead.

Now these resurrections were performed with only a few interceding; and so the multiplied prayers of your shared devo-

1. James v, 16. 2. Hebrews xi, 35.
3. 1 Kings xvii, 17 ff.; 2 Kings iv, 32 ff. 4. Luke vii, 15.
5. John xi, 1 ff. 6. Mark v, 22 ff.

tion should easily win the preservation of my own life. The more God is pleased by the abstinence and continence which women have dedicated to him, the more willing he will be to grant their prayers. Moreover, it may well be that the majority of those raised from the dead were not of the faith, for we do not read that the widow mentioned above whose son was raised without her asking was a believer. But in our case we are bound together by the integrity of our faith and united in our profession of the same religious life.

Let me now pass from the holy convent of your community, where so many virgins and widows are dedicated to continual service of the Lord, and come to you alone, you whose sanctity must surely have the greatest influence in the eyes of God, and who are bound to do everything possible on my behalf, especially now when I am in the toils of such adversity. Always remember then in your prayers him who is especially yours; watch and pray the more confidently as you recognize your cause is just, and so more acceptable to him to whom you pray. Listen, I beg you, with the ear of your heart to what you have so often heard with your bodily ear. In the book of Proverbs it is written that 'A capable wife is her husband's crown,'¹ and again, 'Find a wife and you find a good thing; so you will earn the favour of the Lord;'² yet again, 'Home and wealth may come down from ancestors; but an intelligent wife is a gift from the Lord.'³ In Ecclesiasticus too it says that 'A good wife makes a happy husband,' and a little later, 'A good wife means a good life.'⁴ And we have it on the Apostle's authority that 'the unbelieving husband now belongs to God through his wife'.⁵ A special instance of this was granted by God's grace in our own country of France, when Clovis the king was converted to the Christian faith more by the prayers of his wife than by the preaching of holy men;⁶ his entire

1. Proverbs xii, 4. 2. Proverbs xviii, 22. 3. Proverbs xix, 14.

4. xxvi, 1; xxvi, 31. 5. 1. Corinthians vii, 14.

6. Clovis (481-511), founder of the Merovingian House of France, was converted to Christianity after his victory over the Alamanni in 496; his wife Clotild, a princess of Burgundy, was already a Catholic and had long begged him to renounce his pagan ways. The story was well known from Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, II. 29-31.

kingdom was then placed under divine law so that humbler men should be encouraged by the example of their betters to persevere in prayer. Indeed, such perseverance is warmly recommended to us in a parable of the Lord which says: 'If the man perseveres in his knocking, though he will not provide for him out of friendship, the very shamelessness of the request will make him get up and give him all he needs.'¹ It was certainly by what I might call this shamelessness in prayer that Moses (as I said above) softened the harshness of divine justice and changed its sentence.

You know, beloved, the warmth of charity your convent once used to show me in their prayers at the times I could be with you. At the conclusion of each of the Hours every day they would offer this special prayer to the Lord on my behalf; after the proper response and versicle were pronounced and sung they added prayers and a collect, as follows:

RESPONSE: Forsake me not, O Lord: Keep not far from me, my God.²

VERSICLE: Make haste, O Lord, to help me.³

PRAYER: Save thy servant, O my God, whose hope is in thee; Lord hear my prayer, and let my cry for help reach thee.⁴

(LET US PRAY) O God, who through thy servant hast been pleased to gather together thy handmaidens in thy name, we beseech thee to grant both to him and to us that we persevere in thy will. Through our Lord, etc.

But now that I am not with you, there is all the more need for the support of your prayers, the more I am gripped by fear of greater peril. And so I ask of you in entreaty, and entreat you in asking, particularly now that I am absent from you, to show me how truly your charity extends to the absent by adding this form of special prayer at the conclusion of each hour:

RESPONSE: O Lord, Father and Ruler of my life, do not desert me, lest I fall before my adversaries and my enemy gloats over me.⁵

1. Luke xi, 8.

2. Psalm xxxviii, 21.

3. Psalm lxx, 1.

4. Psalm cii, 1.

5. Cf. Ecclesiasticus xxiii, 3.

VERSICLE: Grasp shield and buckler and rise up to help me, lest my enemy gloats.¹

PRAYER: Save thy servant, O my God, whose hope is in thee. Send him help, O Lord, from thy holy place, and watch over him from Zion. Be a tower of strength to him, O Lord, in the face of his enemy. Lord hear my prayer, and let my cry for help reach thee.

(LET US PRAY) O God who through thy servant hast been pleased to gather together thy handmaidens in thy name, we beseech thee to protect him in all adversity and restore him in safety to thy handmaidens. Through our Lord, etc.

But if the Lord shall deliver me into the hands of my enemies so that they overcome and kill me, or by whatever chance I enter upon the way of all flesh while absent from you, wherever my body may lie, buried or unburied, I beg you to have it brought to your burial-ground, where our daughters, or rather, our sisters in Christ may see my tomb more often and thereby be encouraged to pour out their prayers more fully to the Lord on my behalf. There is no place, I think, so safe and salutary for a soul grieving for its sins and desolated by its transgressions than that which is specially consecrated to the true Paraclete, the Comforter, and which is particularly designated by his name. Nor do I believe that there is any place more fitting for Christian burial among the faithful than one amongst women dedicated to Christ. Women were concerned for the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ, they came ahead and followed after, bringing precious ointments,² keeping close watch around this tomb, weeping for the death of the Bridegroom, as it is written: 'The women sitting at the tomb wept and lamented for the Lord.'³ And there they were first reassured about his resurrection by the appearance of an angel and the words he spoke to them; later on they were found worthy both to taste the joy of his resurrection when he twice appeared to them, and also to touch him with their hands.

1. Psalm xxxv, 2.

2. Cf. Mark xvi, 1.

3. Not in the Gospels. It is the antiphon for the Benedictus in the Roman Breviary for Holy Saturday.

Finally, I ask this of you above all else: at present you are over-anxious about the danger to my body, but then your chief concern must be for the salvation of my soul, and you must show the dead man how much you loved the living by the special support of prayers chosen for him.

Live, fare you well, yourself and your sisters with you,
Live, but I pray, in Christ be mindful of me.

Letter 3. Heloise to Abelard

To her only one after Christ, she who is his alone in Christ.

I am surprised, my only love, that contrary to custom in letter-writing and, indeed, to the natural order, you have thought fit to put my name before yours in the greeting which heads your letter, so that we have woman before man, wife before husband, handmaid before master, nun before monk, deaconess¹ before priest and abbess before abbot. Surely the right and proper order is for those who write to their superiors or equals to put their names before their own, but in letters to inferiors, precedence in order of address follows precedence in rank.²

We were also greatly surprised when instead of bringing us the healing balm of comfort you increased our desolation and made the tears to flow which you should have dried. For which of us could remain dry-eyed on hearing the words you wrote towards the end of your letter: 'But if the Lord shall deliver me into the hands of my enemies so that they overcome and kill me . . .'? My dearest, how could you think such a thought? How could you give voice to it? Never may God be so forgetful of his humble handmaids as to let them outlive you; never may he grant us a life which would be harder to bear than any form of death. The proper course would be for you to perform our funeral rites, for you to commend our souls to God, and to send ahead of you those whom you

1. It is not clear what Heloise means here by 'deaconess', though subservience is implied from its use in the early Church. In Letter 7 Abelard uses the term for an abbess; see p. 199 and note.

2. Heloise shows her knowledge of the rules for composing formal letters (*Dictamen* or *Ars dictandi*) which are found in several treatises from the eleventh century onwards, notably in that by Alberic (later Cardinal), theologian and monk of Monte Cassino, born in 1008. The rule of precedence is generally observed; it is a tribute to Heloise's status and reputation when Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, in writing to her as abbess of the Paraclete, puts her name before his own.

Letter 5. Heloise to Abelard

God's own in species, his own as individual.¹

I would not want to give you cause for finding me disobedient in anything, so I have set the bridle of your injunction on the words which issue from my unbounded grief; thus in writing at least I may moderate what it is difficult or rather impossible to forestall in speech. For nothing is less under our control than the heart – having no power to command it we are forced to obey. And so when its impulses move us, none of us can stop their sudden promptings from easily breaking out, and even more easily overflowing into words which are the every-ready indications of the heart's emotions:² as it is written, 'A man's words are spoken from the overflowing of the heart.'³ I will therefore hold my hand from writing words which I cannot restrain my tongue from speaking; would that a grieving heart would be as ready to obey as a writer's hand! And yet you have it in your power to remedy my grief, even if you cannot entirely remove it. As one nail drives out another hammered in,⁴ a new thought expels an old, when the mind is intent on other things and forced to dismiss or interrupt its recollection of the past. But the more fully any thought occupies the mind and distracts it from other things, the more worthy should be the subject of such a thought and the more important it is where we direct our minds.

And so all we handmaids of Christ, who are your daughters in Christ, come as suppliants to demand of your paternal interest two things which we see to be very necessary for ourselves. One is that you will teach us how the order of nuns began and what authority there is for our profession.

1. i.e. Abelard's own. These cryptic words (*Domino specialiter, sua singulariter*) have also been translated as 'To him who is especially her lord, she who is uniquely his'.

2. An idea taken from Boethius' translation of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, Book I.

3. Matthew xii, 34.

4. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, IV. 35-75.

The other, that you will prescribe some Rule for us and write it down, a Rule which shall be suitable for women, and also describe fully the manner and habit of our way of life, which we find was never done by the holy Fathers. Through lack and need of this it is the practice today for men and women alike to be received into monasteries to profess the same Rule, and the same yoke of monastic ordinance is laid on the weaker sex as on the stronger.

At present the one Rule of St Benedict is professed in the Latin Church by women equally with men, although, as it was clearly written for men alone, it can only be fully obeyed by men, whether subordinates or superiors. Leaving aside for the moment the other articles of the Rule: how can women be concerned with what is written there about cowls, drawers or scapulars?¹ Or indeed, with tunics or woollen garments worn next to the skin, when the monthly purging of their superfluous humours must avoid such things? How are they affected by the ruling for the abbot,² that he shall read aloud the Gospel himself and afterwards start the hymn? What about the abbot's table, set apart for him with pilgrims and guests? Which is more fitting for our religious life: for an abbess never to offer hospitality to men, or for her to eat with men she has allowed in? It is all too easy for the souls of men and women to be destroyed if they live together in one place, and especially at table, where gluttony and drunkenness are rife, and wine which leads to lechery³ is drunk with enjoyment. St Jerome warns us of this when he writes to remind a mother and daughter that 'It is difficult to preserve modesty at table.'⁴ And the poet himself, that master of sensuality and shame, in his book called *The Art of Love* describes in detail what an opportunity for fornication is provided especially by banquets:⁵

When wine has sprinkled Cupid's thirsty wings
He stays and stands weighed down in his chosen place . . .
Then laughter comes, then even the poor find plenty,

1. *Regula*, chapter 55.

2. *Regula*, chapter 11.

3. Ephesians v, 18.

4. *Epistulae* cxvii, 6.

5. Ovid, *Ars amatoria* 1, 233-4, 239-40, 243-4.

Then sorrow and care and wrinkles leave the brow . . .
That is the time when girls bewitch men's hearts,
And Venus in the wine adds fire to fire.

And even if they admit to their table only women to whom they have given hospitality, is there no lurking danger there? Surely nothing is so conducive to a woman's seduction as woman's flattery, nor does a woman pass on the foulness of a corrupted mind so readily to any but another woman; which is why St Jerome particularly exhorts women of a sacred calling to avoid contact with women of the world.¹ Finally, if we exclude men from our hospitality and admit women only, it is obvious that we shall offend and annoy the men whose services are needed by a convent of the weaker sex, especially if little or no return seems to be made to those from whom most is received.

But if we cannot observe the tenor of this Rule, I am afraid that the words of the apostle James may be quoted to condemn us also:² 'For if a man keeps the whole law but for one single point, he is guilty of breaking all of it.' That is to say, although he carries out much of the law he is held guilty simply because he fails to carry out all of it, and he is turned into a law-breaker by the one thing he did not keep unless he fulfilled all the law's precepts. The apostle is careful to explain this at once by adding:³ 'For the One who said "Thou shalt not commit adultery" said also "Thou shalt not commit murder." You may not be an adulterer, but if you commit murder you are a law-breaker all the same.' Here he says openly that a man becomes guilty by breaking any one of the law's commandments, for the Lord himself who laid down one also laid down the other, and whatever commandment of the law is violated, it shows disregard of him who laid down the law in all its commandments, not in one alone.

However, to pass over those provisions of the Rule which we are unable to observe in every detail, or cannot observe without danger to ourselves: what about gathering in the harvest - has it ever been the custom for convents of

1. *Epistulae* xxii, 16.

2. James ii, 10.

3. James ii, 11.

nuns to go out to do this, or to tackle the work of the fields? Again, are we to test the constancy of the women we receive during the space of a single year, and instruct them by three readings of the Rule, as it says there?¹ What could be so foolish as to set out on an unknown path, not yet defined, or so presumptuous as to choose and profess a way of life of which you know nothing, or to take a vow you are not capable of keeping? And since discretion is the mother of all the virtues and reason the mediator of all that is good, who will judge anything virtuous or good which is seen to conflict with discretion and reason? For the virtues which exceed all bounds and measure are, as Jerome says,² to be counted among vices. It is clearly contrary to reason and discretion if burdens are imposed without previous investigation into the strength of those who are to bear them, to ensure that human industry may depend on natural constitution. No one would lay on an ass a burden suitable for an elephant, or expect the same from children and old people as from men, the same, that is, from the weak as from the strong, from the sick as from the healthy, from women, the weaker sex, as from men, the stronger one. The Pope St Gregory was careful to make this distinction as regards both admonition and precept in the twenty-fourth chapter of his *Pastoral*: 'Therefore men are to be admonished in one way, women in another; for heavy burdens may be laid on men and great matters exercise them, but lighter burdens on women, who should be gently converted by less exacting means.'

Certainly those who laid down rules for monks were not only completely silent about women but also prescribed regulations which they knew to be quite unsuitable for them, and this showed plainly enough that the necks of bullock and heifer should in no sense be brought under the same yoke of a common Rule, since those whom nature created unequal cannot properly be made equal in labour. St Benedict, who is imbued with the spirit of justice in everything, has this discretion in mind when he moderates everything in the Rule according to the quality of men or the times, so that, as he

1. *Regula*, chapter 58.

2. *Epistulae* cxxx, 11.

says himself at one point,¹ all may be done in moderation. And so first of all, starting with the abbot himself, he lays down that he shall preside over his subordinates in such a way that (he says)²

he will accommodate and adapt himself to them all in accordance with the disposition and intelligence of each individual. In this way he will suffer no loss in the flock entrusted to him but will even rejoice to see a good flock increase . . . At the same time he must always be conscious of his own frailty and remember that the bruised reed must not be broken . . . He must also be prudent and considerate, bearing in mind the good sense of holy Jacob when he said³ 'If I drive my herds too hard on the road they will all die in a single day.' Acting on this, and on other examples of discretion, the mother of the virtues, he must arrange everything so that there is always what the strong desire and the weak do not shrink from.

Such modification of regulations⁴ is the basis of the concessions granted to children, and the old and the weak in general, of the feeding of the lector or weekly server in the kitchen before the rest,⁵ and in the monastery itself, the provision of food and drink in quality or quantity adapted to the diversity of the people there. All these matters are precisely set out in the Rule. He also relaxes the set times for fasting according to the season or the amount of work to be done, to meet the needs of natural infirmity. What, I wonder, when he adapts everything to the quality of men and seasons, so that all his regulations can be carried out by everyone without complaint – what provision would he make for women if he laid down a Rule for them like that for men? For if in certain respects he is obliged to modify the strictness of the Rule for the young, the old and weak, according to their natural frailty or infirmity, what would he provide for the weaker sex whose frailty and infirmity is generally known?

Consider then how far removed it is from all reason and good sense if both women and men are bound by profession of a common Rule, and the same burden is laid on the weak as

1. *Regula*, chapter 48.

2. *Regula*, chapters 2 and 64; Isaiah xlii, 3.

3. Genesis xxxiii, 13.

4. *Regula*, chapters 35–41.

5. *Regula*, chapter 36.

on the strong. I think it should be sufficient for our infirmity if the virtue of continence and also of abstinence makes us the equals of the rulers of the Church themselves and of the clergy who are confirmed in holy orders, especially when the Truth says: 'Everyone will be fully trained if he reaches his teacher's level.' It would also be thought a great thing if we could equal religious laymen; for what is judged unimportant in the strong is admired in the weak. In the words of the Apostle:² 'Power comes to its full strength in weakness.' But lest we should underestimate the religion of the laity, of men like Abraham, David and Job, although they had wives, Chrysostom reminds us in his seventh sermon on the Letter to the Hebrews:

There are many ways whereby a man may struggle to charm that beast. What are they? Toil, study, vigils. 'But what concern are they of ours, when we are not monks?' Do you ask me that? Rather, ask Paul, when he says³ 'Be watchful in all tribulation and persevere in prayer' and 'Give no more thought to satisfying the bodily appetites.' For he wrote these things not only for monks but for all who were in the cities, and the layman should not have greater freedom than the monk, apart from sleeping with his wife. He has permission for this, but not for other things; and in everything he must conduct himself like a monk. The Beatitudes too, which are the actual words of Christ, were not addressed to monks alone, otherwise the whole world must perish . . . and he would have confined the things which belong to virtue within narrow limits. And how can marriage be honourable⁴ when it weighs so heavily on us?

From these words it can easily be inferred that anyone who adds the virtue of continence to the precepts of the Gospel will achieve monastic perfection. Would that our religion could rise to this height - to carry out the Gospel, not to go beyond it, lest we attempt to be more than Christians! Surely this is the reason (if I am not mistaken) why the holy Fathers decided not to lay down a general Rule for us as for men, like a new law, nor to burden our weakness with a great

1. Luke vi, 40.

2. 2 Corinthians xii, 9.

3. Cf. Ephesians vi, 18; Romans xiii, 14.

4. Cf. Hebrews xiii, 4.

number of vows; they looked to the words of the Apostle:¹ 'Because law can bring only retribution; but where there is no law there can be no breach of law.' And again, 'Law intruded to multiply law-breaking.' The same great preacher of continence also shows great consideration for our weakness and appears to urge the younger widows to a second marriage, when he says² 'It is my wish, therefore, that young widows shall marry again, have children and preside over a home. Then they will give no opponent occasion for slander.' St Jerome also believes this to be salutary advice, and tells Eustochium of the rash vows taken by women, in these words:³ 'But if those who are virgins are still not saved, because of other faults, what will become of those who have prostituted the members of Christ and turned the temple of the Holy Spirit into a brothel? It were better for a man to have entered matrimony and walked on the level than to strain after the heights and fall into the depths of hell.' St Augustine too has women's rashness in taking vows in mind when he writes to Julian in his book *On the Continence of Widows*:⁴ 'Let her who has not begun, think it over, and her who has made a start, continue. No opportunity must be given to the enemy, no offering taken from Christ.'

Consequently, canon law has taken our weakness into account, and laid down that deaconesses must not be ordained before the age of forty,⁵ and only then after thorough probation, while deacons may be promoted from the age of twenty. And in the monasteries there are those called the Canons Regular of St Augustine who claim to profess a certain rule and think themselves in no way inferior to monks although we see them eating meat and wearing linen. If our weakness can match their virtue, it should be considered no small thing. And Nature herself has made provision for our being safely granted a mild indulgence in any kind of food, for our sex is protected by greater sobriety. It is well

1. Romans iv, 15; v, 20.

2. 1 Timothy v, 14.

3. *Epistulae* xxii.

4. *De bono viduitatis*, 9.12.

5. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 lowered the age from sixty to forty (Muckle).

known that women can be sustained on less nourishment and at less cost than men, and medicine teaches that they are not so easily intoxicated. And so Macrobius Theodosius in the seventh book of his *Saturnalia*¹ notes that:

Aristotle says that women are rarely intoxicated, but old men often. Woman has an extremely humid body, as can be known from her smooth and glossy skin, and especially from her regular purgations which rid the body of superfluous moisture. So when wine is drunk and merged with so general a humidity, it loses its power and does not easily strike the seat of the brain when its strength is extinguished.

Again:

A woman's body which is destined for frequent purgations is pierced with several holes, so that it opens into channels and provides outlets for the moisture draining away to be dispersed. Through these holes the fumes of wine are quickly released. By contrast, in old men the body is dry, as is shown by their rough and wrinkled skin.

From this it can be inferred how much more safely and properly our nature and weakness can be allowed any sort of food and drink; in fact we cannot easily fall victims to gluttony and drunkenness, seeing that our moderation in food protects us from the one and the nature of the female body as described from the other. It should be sufficient for our infirmity, and indeed, a high tribute to it, if we live continently and without possessions, wholly occupied by service of God, and in doing so equal the leaders of the Church themselves in our way of life or religious laymen or even those who are called Canons Regular and profess especially to follow the apostolic life.

Finally, it is a great sign of forethought in those who bind themselves by vow to God if they perform more than they vow, so that they add something by grace to what they owe. For the Truth says in his own words:² 'When you have carried out all your orders, say "We are useless servants and have only done our duty."' Or, in plain words, 'We are useless

1. *Saturnalia*, VII, 6. 16-17; 18.

2. Luke xvii, 10.

and good for nothing, and deserve no credit, just because we were content only to pay what we owed and added nothing extra as a gift.' The Lord himself, speaking in a parable, says of what should be freely added:¹ 'But if you give more in addition, I will repay you on my return.'

If indeed many of those who rashly profess monastic observance today would pay more careful attention to this, would consider beforehand what it is that they profess in their vows, and study closely the actual tenor of the Rule, they would offend less through ignorance, and sin less through negligence. As things are, they all hurry almost equally indiscriminately to enter monastic life: they are received without proper discipline and live with even less, they profess a Rule they do not know and are equally ready to despise it and set up as law the customs they prefer. We must therefore be careful not to impose on a woman a burden under which we see nearly all men stagger and even fall. We see that the world has now grown old, and that with all other living creatures men too have lost their former natural vigour: and, in the words of the Truth, amongst many or indeed almost all men love itself has grown cold.² And so it would seem necessary today to change or to modify those Rules which were written for men in accordance with men's present nature.

St Benedict himself was also well aware of this need to discriminate, and admits that he has so tempered the rigour of monastic strictness that he regards the Rule he has set out, in comparison with earlier institutes, as no more than a basis for virtuous living and the beginning of a monastic life. He says that³ 'We have written down this Rule in order that by practising it we may show that we have attained some degree of virtue and the rudiments of monastic observance. But for anyone who would hasten towards perfection of the monastic life, there are the teachings of the holy Fathers, observance of which may lead a man to the summit of perfec-

1. Luke x, 35.

2. Matthew xxiv, 12. This pagan commonplace, a nostalgia for a Golden Age, would be known to Heloise through her classical reading, but it is equally common in the Middle Ages.

3. *Regula*, chapter 73.

tion.' And again, 'Whoever you are, then, who hasten to the heavenly kingdom, observe, with Christ's help, this minimum Rule as a beginning, and then you will come finally to the higher peaks of doctrine and virtue, under the protection of God.' He also says specifically¹ that whereas we read that the holy Fathers of old used to complete the psalter in a single day, he has modified psalmody for the lukewarm so as to spread the psalms over a week; the monks may then be content with a smaller number of them, as the clergy are.

Moreover, what is so contrary to the religious life and peace of the monastery as the thing which most encourages sensuality and starts up disturbances, which destroys our reason, the very image of God in us, whereby we are raised above the rest of creation? That thing is wine, which the Scriptures declare to be the most harmful of any form of nourishment, warning us to beware of it. The wisest of wise men refers to it in Proverbs in these words:²

Wine is reckless and strong drink quarrelsome; no one who delights in it grows wise . . . Who will know woe, as his father will, and quarrels, brawls, bruises without cause and bloodshot eyes? Those who linger late over their wine, and look for ready-mixed wine. Do not look at the wine when it glows and sparkles in the glass. It goes down smoothly, but in the end it will bite like a snake and spread venom like a serpent. Then your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind utter distorted words; you will be like a man sleeping in mid-ocean, like a drowsy helmsman who has lost his rudder, and you will say: 'They struck me and it did not hurt, dragged me off and I felt nothing. When I wake up I shall turn to wine again . . .'

And again:³

Do not give wine to kings, O Lemuel, never to kings, for there is no privy council where drinking prevails. If they drink they may forget what they have decreed and neglect the pleas of the poor for their sons.

In Ecclesiasticus too it is written:⁴ 'Wine and women rob the wise of their wits and are a hard test for good sense.'

1. *Regula*, chapter 18.
3. Proverbs xxxi, 4.

2. Proverbs xx, 1; xxxiii, 29 ff.
4. Ecclesiasticus xix, 2.

Jerome himself also, when writing to Nepotian about the life of the clergy, and apparently highly indignant because the priests of the Law abstain from anything which could intoxicate them and surpass our own priests in such abstinence, says:¹

Never smell of wine, lest you hear said of you those words of the philosopher:² 'This is not offering a kiss but proffering a cup.' The Apostle equally condemns priests who are given to drink, and the Old Law forbids it:³ 'Those who serve the altar shall not drink wine nor strong drink.' By 'strong drink' in Hebrew is understood any drink which can intoxicate, whether produced by fermentation, or from apple juice, or from honey-comb which has been distilled into a sweet, rough drink, or when the fruit of the date palm is pressed into liquid, or water is enriched with boiled grain. Whatever intoxicates and upsets the balance of the mind, shun it like wine.

See how what is forbidden kings to enjoy is wholly denied to priests, and is known to be more dangerous than any food. And yet so spiritual a man as St Benedict himself is compelled to allow it to monks as a sort of concession to the times in which he lived.⁴ 'Although,' he says, 'we read that wine is no drink for monks, yet because nowadays monks cannot be persuaded of this etc.' He had read, if I am not mistaken, these passages in the *Lives of the Fathers*:⁵

Certain people told abba Pastor that a particular monk drank no wine, to which he replied that wine was not for monks.

And further on:

There was once a celebration of the Mass on the Mount of abba Antony, and a jar of wine was found there. One of the elders took a small vessel, carried a cupful to abba Sisoi and gave it to him. He drank once, and a second time he took it and drank, but when it was offered a third time he refused, saying 'Peace, brother, do you not know it is Satan?'

1. *Epistulae* lii. 2. Not identifiable.
3. Cf. 1 Timothy iii, 3; Leviticus x, 9.
4. *Regula*, chapter 40. 5. *Vitae patrum*, V, 4. 31.

It is also said of abba Sisoï:

His disciple Abraham then asked, 'If this happens on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day in church, and he drinks three cups, is that too much?' 'If it were not Satan,' the old man replied, 'it would not be much.'

On the question of meat: where, I ask you, has this ever been condemned by God or forbidden to monks? Look, pray, and mark how of necessity St Benedict modifies the Rule on this point too (though it is more dangerous for monks and he knew it was not for them), because in his day it was impossible to persuade monks to abstain from meat. I would like to see the same dispensation granted in our own times, with a similar modification regarding matters which fall between good and evil and are called indifferent, so that vows would not compel what cannot now be gained by persuasion. If concessions were made without scandal on neutral points, it would be enough to forbid only what is sinful. Thus the same dispensations could be made for food as for clothing, so that provision could be made of what can be purchased more cheaply, and, in everything, necessity not superfluity could be our consideration. For things which do not prepare us for the Kingdom of God or commend us least to God call for no special attention. These are all outward works which are common to the damned and elect alike, as much to hypocrites as to the religious.¹ For nothing so divides Jew from Christian as the distinction between outward and inner works, especially since between the children of God and those of the devil love alone distinguishes: what the Apostle calls the sum of the law and the object of what is commanded.² And so he also disparages pride in works in order to set above it the righteousness of faith, and thus addresses Jewry:³

What room then is left for human pride? It is excluded. And on what principle? Of works? No, but through the principle of faith. For our argument is that a man is justified by faith without observances of the law.

1. Cf. Letter 3, p. 135.

2. Cf. Romans xiii, 10; 1 Timothy i, 5.

3. Romans iii, 27-8.

And again:¹

For if Abraham was justified by works, then he has a ground for pride, but not before God: for what does Scripture say? 'Abraham put his faith in the Lord and that faith was counted to him as righteousness.'

Once more:²

But if without any work he simply puts his faith in him who makes a just man of the sinner, then his faith is indeed 'counted as righteousness' according to God's gracious plan.

The Apostle also allows Christians to eat all kinds of food and distinguishes from it those things which count as righteous. 'The Kingdom of God,' he says,³ 'is not eating and drinking, but justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit . . . Everything is pure in itself, but anything is bad for the man who gives offence by his eating. It is a good thing not to eat meat and not to drink wine, nor to do anything which may offend or scandalize or weaken your brother.' In this passage there is no eating of food forbidden, only the giving of offence by eating, because certain converted Jews were scandalized when they saw things being eaten which the Law had forbidden. The apostle Peter was also trying to avoid giving such offence when he was seriously rebuked and wholesomely corrected, as Paul himself recounts in his letter to the Galatians.⁴ Paul also writes to the Corinthians:⁵ 'Certainly food does not commend us to God,' and again: 'You may eat anything sold in the meat market . . . The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' To the Colossians he says:⁶ 'Allow no one therefore to take you to task about what you eat or drink,' and later on, 'If you died with Christ and passed beyond the elements of this world, why do you behave as though still living the life of the world? "Do not touch this, do not taste that, do not handle the other" - these are all things which perish as we use them, all based on the injunctions and

1. Romans iv, 2-3.

2. Romans iv, 5.

3. Romans xiv, 12, 20-21.

4. Galatians ii, 11 ff.

5. 1 Corinthians viii, 8; x, 25-6.

6. Colossians ii, 16; xx, 22.

teaching of men.' The elements of the world are what he calls the first rudiments of the law dealing with carnal observances, in the practice of which, as in learning the rudiments of letters, the world, that is, a people still carnal, was engaged. But those who are Christ's own are dead as regards these rudiments or carnal observances, for they owe them nothing, as they no longer live in this world among carnal people who pay heed to forms and distinguish or discriminate between certain foods and similar things, and so say 'Do not touch this or that.' For such things when touched or tasted or handled, says the Apostle, are destructive to the soul in the act of using them for some purpose only in accordance with the precepts and teaching of men, that is, of carnal beings who interpret the law in a worldly sense and not in the way of Christ or of his own.

When Christ sent his apostles out to preach, at a time when it was even more necessary to avoid any scandal, he allowed them to eat any kind of food, so that wherever they might be shown hospitality they could live like their hosts, eating and drinking what was in the house.¹ Paul certainly foresaw through the Holy Spirit that they would fall away from this, the Lord's teaching and his own, and wrote on the subject to Timothy:²

The Spirit says expressly that in after-times some will desert from the faith and give their minds to subversive doctrines inspired by devils who speak lies in hypocrisy . . . They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from certain foods, though God created them to be enjoyed with thanksgiving by believers who have inward knowledge of the truth. For everything that God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected when it is taken with thanksgiving, since it is hallowed by God's own word and by prayer. By offering such advice as this to the brotherhood you will prove a good servant of Jesus Christ, bred in the precepts of our faith and of the sound instruction which you have followed.

But if anyone turns his bodily eye to the display of outward abstinence, he would then prefer John and John's disciples wasting away through excessive fasting, to Christ and his

1. Luke x, 7.

2. 1 Timothy iv, 1-6.

disciples: and indeed, John's disciples who were apparently still following Jewish custom in outward matters grumbled against Christ and his disciples, and even questioned the Lord himself:¹ 'Why is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting but yours are not?' In examining this passage and determining the difference between virtue and exhibition of virtue, St Augustine concludes that as regards outward matters, works add nothing to merit. In his book *On the Good of Marriage* he says that:

Continence is a virtue not of the body but of the soul. But the virtues of the spirit are displayed sometimes in works, sometimes in natural habit, as when the virtue of martyrs has been seen in their endurance of suffering. Also, patience was already in Job; the Lord knew this and gave proof of knowing it, but he made it known to men through the ordeal of Job's testing.²

And again:

So that it may truly be better understood how virtue may be in natural habit though not in works, I will quote an example of which no Catholic is in doubt. That the Lord Jesus, in the truth of the flesh, was hungry and thirsty and ate and drank, no one can fail to know who is faithful to his Gospel. Yet surely the virtue of continence was as great in him as in John the Baptist? 'For John came neither eating nor drinking and men said he was possessed. The Son of man came eating and drinking and they said, "Look at him, a glutton and a drinker, a friend of taxgatherers and sinners!"'³ After which he added, 'And yet God's wisdom is proved right by its own children,' for they see that the virtue of continence ought always to exist in natural habit but is shown in practice only in appropriate times and seasons, as was the virtue of endurance in the holy martyrs . . . And so just as the merit of endurance is not greater in the case of Peter who suffered martyrdom than in John who did not, so John who never married wins no greater merit for continence than Abraham who fathered children, for the celibacy of the one and the marriage of the other both fought for Christ in accordance with the difference of their times. Yet John was continent in practice as well, Abraham only as a habit. At the time after the days of the Patriarchs, when the Law declared a man

1. Mark ii, 18, referring to John the Baptist.

2. Job i, 8.

3. Matthew xi, 18-19.

to be accursed if he did not perpetuate his race in Israel, a man who could have continence did not reveal himself, but even so, he had it.¹ Afterwards 'the term was completed'² when it could be said, 'Let the man accept it who can;'³ and if he can, put it into practice, but if he does not wish to do so, he must not claim it untruthfully.

From these words it is clear that virtues alone win merit in the eyes of God, and that those who are equal in virtue, however different in works, deserve equally of him.

Consequently, those who are true Christians are wholly occupied with the inner man, so that they may adorn him with virtues and purify him of vices, but they have little or no concern for the outer man. We read⁴ that the apostles themselves were so simple and almost rough in their manner even when in the company of the Lord, that they were apparently forgetful of respect and propriety, and when walking through the cornfields were not ashamed to pick the ears of corn and strip and eat them like children. Nor were they careful about washing their hands before taking food; but when they were rebuked by some for what was thought an unclean habit, the Lord made excuses for them, saying that 'To eat without first washing his hands does not defile a man.'⁵ He then added the general ruling that the soul is not defiled by any outward thing but only by what proceeds from the heart, 'wicked thoughts, adultery, murder' and so on. For unless the spirit be first corrupted by evil intention, whatever is done outwardly in the body cannot be a sin. He also rightly says that even adultery or murder proceed from the heart and can be perpetrated without bodily contact, as in the words:⁶ 'If a man looks upon a woman with a lustful eye he has already committed adultery with her in his heart,' and 'Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.' Such

1. Deuteronomy xxv, 5-10: St Augustine means that a man could have the habit of continence though the Law forbade him to show it in practice. But the text quoted refers only to the brother-in-law of a widow.

2. Galatians iv, 4.

3. Matthew xix, 12, during a discussion of celibacy.

4. Matthew xii, 1 ff.

5. Matthew xv, 19-20.

6. Matthew v, 28; 1 John iii, 15.

acts are not necessarily committed by contact with or injury to the body, as when, for instance, a woman is violently assaulted or a judge compelled in justice to kill a man. 'No murderer', it is written,¹ 'has a place in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.'

And so it is not so much what things are done as the spirit in which they are done that we must consider, if we wish to please him who tests the heart and the loins and sees in hidden places, 'who will judge the secrets of men', says Paul, 'in accordance with my gospel',² that is, according to the doctrine of his preaching. Consequently, the modest offering of the widow, which was two tiny coins worth a farthing,³ was preferred to the lavish offerings of all the rich by him of whom it is said that he has no need of any possessions, and who takes pleasure in the offering because of the giver, rather than in the giver because of his offering: as it is written 'The Lord received Abel and his gift with favour,'⁴ that is, he looked first at the devotion of the giver and was pleased with the gift offered because of him. Such devotion of the heart is valued the more highly by God the less it is concerned with outward things, and we serve him with greater humility and think more of our duty to him the less we put our trust in outward things. The Apostle too, after writing to Timothy on the subject of a general indulgence about food, as I said above, went on to speak of training the body:⁵ 'Keep yourself in training for the practice of religion. The training of the body brings limited benefit, but the benefits of religion are without limit, since it holds promise not only for this life but for the life to come.' For the pious devotion of the mind to God wins from him both what is necessary in this life and things eternal in the life to come. By these examples are we not surely taught to think as Christians, and like Jacob to provide for our Father a meal from domestic animals and not go after wild game with Esau,⁶ and act the Jew in outward things? Hence the verse of the Psalmist:⁷ 'I have bound

1. Cf. 1 John iii, 15.

2. Romans ii, 16.

3. Cf. Mark xii, 42-4.

4. Genesis iv, 4.

5. 1 Timothy iv, 7-8.

6. Genesis xxvii, 6 ff.

7. Psalm lvi, 12.

myself with vows to thee, O God, and will redeem them with due thank-offerings.' To this add the words of the poet:¹ 'Do not look outside yourself.'

There are many, indeed innumerable testimonies from the learned, both secular and ecclesiastic, to teach us that we should care little for what is performed outwardly and called indifferent, otherwise the works of the Law and the insupportable yoke of its bondage, as Peter calls it,² would be preferable to the freedom of the Gospel and the easy yoke and light burden of Christ. Christ himself invites us to this easy yoke and light burden in the words:³ 'Come to me, all you whose work is hard, whose load is heavy . . .' The apostle Peter also sharply rebuked certain people who were already converted to Christ but believed they should still keep to the works of the Law, as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles:⁴ 'My brothers . . . why do you provoke God by laying on the shoulders of these converts a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? No, we believe that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, and so are they.'

Do you then also, I beg you, who seek to imitate not only Christ but also this apostle, in discrimination as in name, modify your instructions for works to suit our weak nature, so that we can be free to devote ourselves to the offices of praising God. This is the offering which the Lord commends, rejecting all outward sacrifices, when he says:⁵ 'If I am hungry I will not tell you, for the world and all that is in it are mine. Shall I eat the flesh of your bulls or drink the blood of he-goats? Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon me in time of trouble and I will come to your rescue, and you shall honour me.'

We do not speak like this with the intention of rejecting physical labour when necessity demands it, but so as not to attach importance to things which serve bodily needs and obstruct the celebration of the divine office, particularly when on apostolic authority the special concession was granted to

1. Persius, *Satires*, 1.7.
3. Matthew xi, 28-30.

2. Cf. Acts xv, 10.
4. Acts xv, 10-11.

5. Psalm l, 12-15.

devout women of being supported by services provided by others rather than on the result of their own labour. Thus Paul writes to Timothy:¹ 'If any among the faithful has widows in the family, he must support them himself: the Church must be relieved of the burden, so that it may be free to support those who are widows in the full sense.' By widows in the full sense he means all women devoted to Christ, for whom not only are their husbands dead but the world is crucified and they too to the world. It is right and proper that they should be supported from the funds of the Church as if from the personal resources of their husbands. Hence the Lord provided his mother with an apostle to care for her instead of her own husband,² and the apostles appointed seven deacons, or ministers of the Church, to minister to devout women.³

We know of course that when writing to the Thessalonians the Apostle sharply rebuked certain idle busybodies by saying that⁴ 'A man who will not work shall not eat', and that St Benedict instituted manual labour for the express purpose of preventing idleness.⁵ But was not Mary sitting idle in order to listen to the words of Christ, while Martha was working for her as much as for the Lord and grumbling rather enviously about her sister's repose, as if she had to bear the burden and heat of the day alone?⁶ Similarly today we see those who work on external things often complaining as they serve the earthly needs of those who are occupied with divine offices. Indeed, people often protest less about what tyrants seize from them than about what they are compelled to pay to those whom they call lazy and idle, although they observe them not only listening to Christ's words but also busily occupied in reading and chanting them. They do not see that it is no great matter, as the Apostle says,⁷ if they have to make material provision for those to whom they look for things of the spirit, nor is it unbecoming for men occupied with earthly matters to serve those who are devoted to the

1. 1 Timothy v, 16.

2. John xix, 26.

3. Acts vi, 5.

4. 2 Thessalonians iii, 10.

5. *Regula*, chapter 48.

6. Cf. Luke x, 39 ff.

7. Cf. 1 Corinthians ix, 11.

spiritual. That is why the ministers of the Church were also granted by the sanction of the Law this salutary concession of freedom through leisure, whereby the tribe of Levi should have no patrimony in the land, the better to serve the Lord, but should receive tithes and offerings from the labour of others.¹

As regards fasts, which Christians hold to be abstinence from vices rather than from food, you must consider whether anything should be added to what the Church has instituted, and order what is suitable for us.

But it is chiefly in connection with the offices of the Church and ordering of the psalms that provision is needed, so that here at least, if you think fit, you may allow some concession to our weakness, and when we recite the psalter in full within a week it shall not be necessary to repeat the same psalms. When St Benedict divided up the week according to his view, he left instructions² that others could order the psalms differently, if it seemed better to do so, for he expected that with passage of time the ceremonies of the Church would become more elaborate, and from a rough foundation would arise a splendid edifice.

Above all, we want you to decide what we ought to do about reading the Gospel in the Night Office.³ It seems to us hazardous if priests and deacons, who should perform the reading, are allowed among us at such hours, when we should be especially segregated from the approach and sight of men in order to devote ourselves more sincerely to God and to be safer from temptation.

It is for you then, master, while you live, to lay down for us what Rule we are to follow for all time, for after God you are the founder of this place, through God you are the creator of our community,⁴ with God you should be the director of our religious life. After you we may perhaps have another to guide us, one who will build something upon another's

1. Cf. Numbers xviii, 21.

2. *Regula*, chapter 18.

3. Cf. *Regula*, chapter 11.

4. Cf. Heloise's first letter (p. 111) where the sentence appears in much the same form.

foundation, and so, we fear, he may be less likely to feel concern for us, or be less readily heard by us; or indeed, he may be no less willing, but less able. Speak to us then, and we shall hear. Farewell.