

THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

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BOOK EIGHTH.

[continues]

15. That the demons are not better than men because of their aerial bodies, or on account of their superior place of abode. Wherefore let not the mind truly religious, and submitted to the true God, suppose that demons are better than men, because they have better bodies. Otherwise it must put many beasts before itself which are superior to us both in acuteness of the senses, in ease and quickness of movement, in strength and in long-continued vigour of body. What man can equal the eagle or the vulture in strength of vision? Who can equal the dog in acuteness of smell? Who can equal the hare, the stag, and all the birds in swiftness? Who can equal in strength the lion or the elephant? Who can equal in length of life the serpents, which are affirmed to put off old age along with their skin, and to return to youth again? But as we are better than all these by the possession of reason and understanding, so we ought also to be better than the demons by living good and virtuous lives. For divine providence gave to them bodies of a better quality than ours, that that in which we excel them might in this way be commended to us

as deserving to be far more cared for than the body, and that we should learn to despise the bodily excellence of the demons compared with goodness of life, in respect of which we are better than they, knowing that we too shall have immortality of body,—not an immortality tortured by eternal punishment, but that which is consequent on purity of soul. But now, as regards loftiness of place, it is altogether ridiculous to be so influenced by the fact that the demons inhabit the air, and we the earth, as to think that on that account they are to be put before us; for in this way we put all the birds before ourselves. But the birds, when they are weary with flying, or require to repair their bodies with food, come back to the earth to rest or to feed, which the demons, they say, do not. Are they, therefore, inclined to say that the birds are superior to us, and the demons superior to the birds? But if it be madness to think so, there is no reason why we should think that, on account of their inhabiting a loftier element, the demons have a claim to our religious submission. But as it is really the case that the birds of the air are not only not put before us who dwell on the earth, but are even subjected to us on account of the dignity of the rational soul which is in us, so also it is the case that the demons, though they are aerial, are not better than we who are terrestrial because the air is higher than the earth, but, on the contrary, men are to be put before demons because their despair is not to be compared to the hope of pious men. Even that law of Plato's, according to which he mutually orders and arranges the four elements, inserting between the two extreme elements—namely, fire, which is in the highest degree mobile, and the immoveable earth—the two middle ones, air and water, that by how much the air is higher up than the water, and the fire than the air, by so much also are the waters higher than the earth,—

this law, I say, sufficiently admonishes us not to estimate the merits of animated creatures according to the grades of the elements. And Apuleius himself says that man is a terrestrial animal in common with the rest, who is nevertheless to be put far before aquatic animals, though Plato puts the waters themselves before the land. By this he would have us understand that the same order is not to be observed when the question concerns the merits of animals, though it seems to be the true one in the gradation of bodies; for it appears to be possible that a soul of a higher order may inhabit a body of a lower, and a soul of a lower order a body of a higher.

16. What Apuleius the Platonist thought concerning the manners and actions of demons. The same Apuleius, when speaking concerning the manners of demons, said that they are agitated with the same perturbations of mind as men; that they are provoked by injuries, propitiated by services and by gifts, rejoice in honours, are delighted with a variety of sacred rites, and are annoyed if any of them be neglected. Among other things, he also says that on them depend the divinations of augurs, soothsayers, and prophets, and the revelations of dreams; and that from them also are the miracles of the magicians. But, when giving a brief definition of them, he says, "Demons are of an animal nature, passive in soul, rational in mind, aerial in body, eternal in time." "Of which five things, the three first are common to them and us, the fourth peculiar to themselves, and the fifth common to them with the gods." But I see that they have in common with the gods two of the first things, which they have in common with us. For he says that the gods also are animals; and when he is assigning to every order of beings its own element, he places us among the other terrestrial animals which live and feel upon the earth. Wherefore,

if the demons are animals as to genus, this is common to them, not only with men, but also with the gods and with beasts; if they are rational as to their mind, this is common to them with the gods and with men; if they are eternal in time, this is common to them with the gods only; if they are passive as to their soul, this is common to them with men only; if they are aerial in body, in this they are alone. Therefore it is no great thing for them to be of an animal nature, for so also are the beasts; in being rational as to mind, they are not above ourselves, for so are we also; and as to their being eternal as to time, what is the advantage of that if they are not blessed? for better is temporal happiness than eternal misery. Again, as to their being passive in soul, how are they in this respect above us, since we also are so, but would not have been so had we not been miserable? Also, as to their being aerial in body, how much value is to be set on that, since a soul of any kind whatsoever is to be set above every body? and therefore religious worship, which ought to be rendered from the soul, is by no means due to that thing which is inferior to the soul. Moreover, if he had, among those things which he says belong to demons, enumerated virtue, wisdom, happiness, and affirmed that they have those things in common with the gods, and, like them, eternally, he would assuredly have attributed to them something greatly to be desired, and much to be prized. And even in that case it would not have been our duty to worship them like God on account of these things, but rather to worship Him from whom we know they had received them. But how much less are they really worthy of divine honour,—those aerial animals who are only rational that they may be capable of misery, passive that they may be actually miserable, and eternal that it may be impossible for them to end their misery!

17. Whether it is proper that men should worship those spirits from whose vices it is necessary that they be freed. Wherefore, to omit other things, and confine our attention to that which he says is common to the demons with us, let us ask this question: If all the four elements are full of their own animals, the fire and the air of immortal, and the water and the earth of mortal ones, why are the souls of demons agitated by the whirlwinds and tempests of passions?—for the Greek word πάθος means perturbation, whence he chose to call the demons “passive in soul,” because the word passion, which is derived from πάθος, signified a commotion of the mind contrary to reason. Why, then, are these things in the minds of demons which are not in beasts? For if anything of this kind appears in beasts, it is not perturbation, because it is not contrary to reason, of which they are devoid. Now it is foolishness or misery which is the cause of these perturbations in the case of men, for we are not yet blessed in the possession of that perfection of wisdom which is promised to us at last, when we shall be set free from our present mortality. But the gods, they say, are free from these perturbations, because they are not only eternal, but also blessed; for they also have the same kind of rational souls, but most pure from all spot and plague. Wherefore, if the gods are free from perturbation because they are blessed, not miserable animals, and the beasts are free from them because they are animals which are capable neither of blessedness nor misery, it remains that the demons, like men, are subject to perturbations because they are not blessed but miserable animals. What folly, therefore, or rather what madness, to submit ourselves through any sentiment of religion to demons, when it belongs to the true religion to deliver us from that depravity which makes us like to them! For Apuleius

himself, although he is very sparing toward them, and thinks they are worthy of divine honours, is nevertheless compelled to confess that they are subject to anger; and the true religion commands us not to be moved with anger, but rather to resist it. The demons are won over by gifts; and the true religion commands us to favour no one on account of gifts received. The demons are flattered by honours; but the true religion commands us by no means to be moved by such things. The demons are haters of some men and lovers of others, not in consequence of a prudent and calm judgment, but because of what he calls their "passive soul;" whereas the true religion commands us to love even our enemies. Lastly, the true religion commands us to put away all disquietude of heart, and agitation of mind, and also all commotions and tempests of the soul, which Apuleius asserts to be continually swelling and surging in the souls of demons. Why, therefore, except through foolishness and miserable error, shouldst thou humble thyself to worship a being to whom thou desirest to be unlike in thy life? And why shouldst thou pay religious homage to him whom thou art unwilling to imitate, when it is the highest duty of religion to imitate Him whom thou worshippest?

18. What kind of religion that is which teaches that men ought to employ the advocacy of demons in order to be recommended to the favour of the good gods. In vain, therefore, have Apuleius, and they who think with him, conferred on the demons the honour of placing them in the air, between the ethereal heavens and the earth, that they may carry to the gods the prayers of men, to men the answers of the gods; for Plato held, they say, that no god has intercourse with man. They who believe these things have thought it unbecoming that men should have intercourse with the gods, and the gods with men, but a befitting thing that the demons should

have intercourse with both gods and men, presenting to the gods the petitions of men, and conveying to men what the gods have granted; so that a chaste man, and one who is a stranger to the crimes of the magic arts, must use as patrons, through whom the gods may be induced to hear him, demons who love these crimes, although the very fact of his not loving them ought to have recommended him to them as one who deserved to be listened to with greater readiness and willingness on their part. They love the abominations of the stage, which chastity does not love. They love, in the sorceries of the magicians, "a thousand arts of inflicting harm," which innocence does not love. Yet both chastity and innocence, if they wish to obtain anything from the gods, will not be able to do so by their own merits, except their enemies act as mediators on their behalf. Apuleius need not attempt to justify the fictions of the poets, and the mockeries of the stage. If human modesty can act so faithlessly towards itself as not only to love shameful things, but even to think that they are pleasing to the divinity, we can cite on the other side their own highest authority and teacher, Plato.

19. Of the impiety of the magic art, which is dependent on the assistance of malign spirits. Moreover, against those magic arts, concerning which some men, exceedingly wretched and exceedingly impious, delight to boast, may not public opinion itself be brought forward as a witness? For why are those arts so severely punished by the laws, if they are the works of deities who ought to be worshipped? Shall it be said that the Christians have ordained those laws by which magic arts are punished? With what other meaning, except that these sorceries are without doubt pernicious to the human race, did the most illustrious poet say, "By heaven, I swear, and your dear life, Unwillingly these arms I wield, And take, to meet the

coming strife, Enchantment's sword and shield." And that also which he says in another place concerning magic arts, "I've seen him to another place transport the standing corn," has reference to the fact that the fruits of one field are said to be transferred to another by these arts which this pestiferous and accursed doctrine teaches. Does not Cicero inform us that, among the laws of the Twelve Tables, that is, the most ancient laws of the Romans, there was a law written which appointed a punishment to be inflicted on him who should do this? Lastly, was it before Christian judges that Apuleius himself was accused of magic arts? Had he known these arts to be divine and pious, and congruous with the works of divine power, he ought not only to have confessed, but also to have professed them, rather blaming the laws by which these things were prohibited and pronounced worthy of condemnation, while they ought to have been held worthy of admiration and respect. For by so doing, either he would have persuaded the judges to adopt his own opinion, or, if they had shown their partiality for unjust laws, and condemned him to death notwithstanding his praising and commending such things, the demons would have bestowed on his soul such rewards as he deserved, who, in order to proclaim and set forth their divine works, had not feared the loss of his human life. As our martyrs, when that religion was charged on them as a crime, by which they knew they were made safe and most glorious throughout eternity, did not choose, by denying it, to escape temporal punishments, but rather by confessing, professing, and proclaiming it, by enduring all things for it with fidelity and fortitude, and by dying for it with pious calmness, put to shame the law by which that religion was prohibited, and caused its revocation. But there is extant a most copious and eloquent oration of

this Platonic philosopher, in which he defends himself against the charge of practising these arts, affirming that he is wholly a stranger to them, and only wishing to show his innocence by denying such things as cannot be innocently committed. But all the miracles of the magicians, who he thinks are justly deserving of condemnation, are performed according to the teaching and by the power of demons. Why, then, does he think that they ought to be honoured? For he asserts that they are necessary, in order to present our prayers to the gods, and yet their works are such as we must shun if we wish our prayers to reach the true God. Again, I ask, what kind of prayers of men does he suppose are presented to the good gods by the demons? If magical prayers, they will have none such; if lawful prayers, they will not receive them through such beings. But if a sinner who is penitent pour out prayers, especially if he has committed any crime of sorcery, does he receive pardon through the intercession of those demons by whose instigation and help he has fallen into the sin he mourns? or do the demons themselves, in order that they may merit pardon for the penitent, first become penitents because they have deceived them? This no one ever said concerning the demons; for had this been the case, they would never have dared to seek for themselves divine honours. For how should they do so who desired by penitence to obtain the grace of pardon, seeing that such detestable pride could not exist along with a humility worthy of pardon?

20. Whether we are to believe that the good gods are more willing to have intercourse with demons than with men. But does any urgent and most pressing cause compel the demons to mediate between the gods and men, that they may offer the prayers of men, and bring back the answers from the gods? and if so, what, pray, is that cause, what is that so great necessity? Because, say

they, no god has intercourse with man. Most admirable holiness of God, which has no intercourse with a supplicating man, and yet has intercourse with an arrogant demon! which has no intercourse with a penitent man, and yet has intercourse with a deceiving demon! which has no intercourse with a man fleeing for refuge to the divine nature, and yet has intercourse with a demon feigning divinity! which has no intercourse with a man seeking pardon, and yet has intercourse with a demon persuading to wickedness! which has no intercourse with a man expelling the poets by means of philosophical writings from a well-regulated state, and yet has intercourse with a demon requesting from the princes and priests of a state the theatrical performance of the mockeries of the poets! which has no intercourse with the man who prohibits the ascribing of crime to the gods, and yet has intercourse with a demon who takes delight in the fictitious representation of their crimes! which has no intercourse with a man punishing the crimes of the magicians by just laws, and yet has intercourse with a demon teaching and practising magical arts! which has no intercourse with a man shunning the imitation of a demon, and yet has intercourse with a demon lying in wait for the deception of a man!

21. Whether the gods use the demons as messengers and interpreters, and whether they are deceived by them willingly, or without their own knowledge. But herein, no doubt, lies the great necessity for this absurdity, so unworthy of the gods, that the ethereal gods, who are concerned about human affairs, would not know what terrestrial men were doing unless the aerial demons should bring them intelligence, because the ether is suspended far away from the earth and far above it, but the air is contiguous both to the ether and to the earth. O admirable wisdom! what else do these men think

concerning the gods who, they say, are all in the highest degree good, but that they are concerned about human affairs, lest they should seem unworthy of worship, whilst, on the other hand, from the distance between the elements, they are ignorant of terrestrial things? It is on this account that they have supposed the demons to be necessary as agents, through whom the gods may inform themselves with respect to human affairs, and through whom, when necessary, they may succour men; and it is on account of this office that the demons themselves have been held as deserving of worship. If this be the case, then a demon is better known by these good gods through nearness of body, than a man is by goodness of mind. O mournful necessity! or shall I not rather say detestable and vain error, that I may not impute vanity to the divine nature! For if the gods can, with their minds free from the hindrance of bodies, see our mind, they do not need the demons as messengers from our mind to them; but if the ethereal gods, by means of their bodies, perceive the corporeal indices of minds, as the countenance, speech, motion, and thence understand what the demons tell them, then it is also possible that they may be deceived by the falsehoods of demons. Moreover, if the divinity of the gods cannot be deceived by the demons, neither can it be ignorant of our actions. But I would they would tell me whether the demons have informed the gods that the fictions of the poets concerning the crimes of the gods displease Plato, concealing the pleasure which they themselves take in them; or whether they have concealed both, and have preferred that the gods should be ignorant with respect to this whole matter, or have told both, as well the pious prudence of Plato with respect to the gods as their own lust, which is injurious to the gods; or whether they have concealed Plato's opinion, according

to which he was unwilling that the gods should be defamed with falsely alleged crimes through the impious licence of the poets, whilst they have not been ashamed nor afraid to make known their own wickedness, which make them love theatrical plays, in which the infamous deeds of the gods are celebrated. Let them choose which they will of these four alternatives, and let them consider how much evil any one of them would require them to think of the gods. For if they choose the first, they must then confess that it was not possible for the good gods to dwell with the good Plato, though he sought to prohibit things injurious to them, whilst they dwelt with evil demons, who exulted in their injuries; and this because they suppose that the good gods can only know a good man, placed at so great a distance from them, through the mediation of evil demons, whom they could know on account of their nearness to themselves. If they shall choose the second, and shall say that both these things are concealed by the demons, so that the gods are wholly ignorant both of Plato's most religious law and the sacrilegious pleasure of the demons, what, in that case, can the gods know to any profit with respect to human affairs through these mediating demons, when they do not know those things which are decreed, through the piety of good men, for the honour of the good gods against the lust of evil demons? But if they shall choose the third, and reply that these intermediary demons have communicated, not only the opinion of Plato, which prohibited wrongs to be done to the gods, but also their own delight in these wrongs, I would ask if such a communication is not rather an insult? Now the gods, hearing both and knowing both, not only permit the approach of those malign demons, who desire and do things contrary to the dignity of the gods and the religion of Plato, but also, through these

wicked demons, who are near to them, send good things to the good Plato, who is far away from them; for they inhabit such a place in the concatenated series of the elements, that they can come into contact with those by whom they are accused, but not with him by whom they are defended,—knowing the truth on both sides, but not being able to change the weight of the air and the earth. There remains the fourth supposition; but it is worse than the rest. For who will suffer it to be said that the demons have made known the calumnious fictions of the poets concerning the immortal gods, and also the disgraceful mockeries of the theatres, and their own most ardent lust after, and most sweet pleasure in these things, whilst they have concealed from them that Plato, with the gravity of a philosopher, gave it as his opinion that all these things ought to be removed from a well-regulated republic; so that the good gods are now compelled, through such messengers, to know the evil doings of the most wicked beings, that is to say, of the messengers themselves, and are not allowed to know the good deeds of the philosophers, though the former are for the injury, but these latter for the honour of the gods themselves?

22. That we must, notwithstanding the opinion of Apuleius, reject the worship of demons. None of these four alternatives, then, is to be chosen; for we dare not suppose such unbecoming things concerning the gods as the adoption of any one of them would lead us to think. It remains, therefore, that no credence whatever is to be given to the opinion of Apuleius and the other philosophers of the same school, namely, that the demons act as messengers and interpreters between the gods and men to carry our petitions from us to the gods, and to bring back to us the help of the gods. On the contrary, we must believe them to be spirits most eager to inflict harm, utterly alien from righteousness,

swollen with pride, pale with envy, subtle in deceit; who dwell indeed in this air as in a prison, in keeping with their own character, because, cast down from the height of the higher heaven, they have been condemned to dwell in this element as the just reward of irretrievable transgression. But, though the air is situated above the earth and the waters, they are not on that account superior in merit to men, who, though they do not surpass them as far as their earthly bodies are concerned, do nevertheless far excel them through piety of mind,—they having made choice of the true God as their helper. Over many, however, who are manifestly unworthy of participation in the true religion, they tyrannize as over captives whom they have subdued,—the greatest part of whom they have persuaded of their divinity by wonderful and lying signs, consisting either of deeds or of predictions. Some, nevertheless, who have more attentively and diligently considered their vices, they have not been able to persuade that they are gods, and so have feigned themselves to be messengers between the gods and men. Some, indeed, have thought that not even this latter honour ought to be acknowledged as belonging to them, not believing that they were gods, because they saw that they were wicked, whereas the gods, according to their view, are all good. Nevertheless they dared not say that they were wholly unworthy of all divine honour, for fear of offending the multitude, by whom, through inveterate superstition, the demons were served by the performance of many rites, and the erection of many temples.

23. What Hermes Trismegistus thought concerning idolatry, and from what source he knew that the superstitions of Egypt were to be abolished. The Egyptian Hermes, whom they call Trismegistus, had a different opinion concerning those demons. Apuleius,

indeed, denies that they are gods; but when he says that they hold a middle place between the gods and men, so that they seem to be necessary for men as mediators between them and the gods, he does not distinguish between the worship due to them and the religious homage due to the supernal gods. This Egyptian, however, says that there are some gods made by the supreme God, and some made by men. Any one who hears this, as I have stated it, no doubt supposes that it has reference to images, because they are the works of the hands of men; but he asserts that visible and tangible images are, as it were, only the bodies of the gods, and that there dwell in them certain spirits, which have been invited to come into them, and which have power to inflict harm, or to fulfil the desires of those by whom divine honours and services are rendered to them. To unite, therefore, by a certain art, those invisible spirits to visible and material things, so as to make, as it were, animated bodies, dedicated and given up to those spirits who inhabit them,—this, he says, is to make gods, adding that men have received this great and wonderful power. I will give the words of this Egyptian as they have been translated into our tongue: “And, since we have undertaken to discourse concerning the relationship and fellowship between men and the gods, know, O Æsculapius, the power and strength of man. As the Lord and Father, or that which is highest, even God, is the maker of the celestial gods, so man is the maker of the gods who are in the temples, content to dwell near to men.” And a little after he says, “Thus humanity, always mindful of its nature and origin, perseveres in the imitation of divinity; and as the Lord and Father made eternal gods, that they should be like Himself, so humanity fashioned its own gods according to the likeness of its own countenance.” When this Æsculapius, to whom especially he was

speaking, had answered him, and had said, "Dost thou mean the statues, O Trismegistus?"—"Yes, the statues," replied he, "however unbelieving thou art, O Æsculapius,—the statues, animated, and full of sensation and spirit, and who do such great and wonderful things,—the statues, prescient of future things, and foretelling them by lot, by prophet, by dreams, and many other things, who bring diseases on men and cure them again, giving them joy or sorrow according to their merits. Dost thou not know, Æsculapius, that Egypt is an image of heaven, or, more truly, a translation and descent of all things which are ordered and transacted there,—that it is, in truth, if we may say so, to be the temple of the whole world? And yet, as it becomes the prudent man to know all things beforehand, ye ought not to be ignorant of this, that there is a time coming when it shall appear that the Egyptians have all in vain, with pious mind, and with most scrupulous diligence, waited on the divinity, and when all their holy worship shall come to nought, and be found to be in vain." Hermes then follows out at great length the statements of this passage, in which he seems to predict the present time, in which the Christian religion is overthrowing all lying figments with a vehemence and liberty proportioned to its superior truth and holiness, in order that the grace of the true Saviour may deliver men from those gods which man has made, and subject them to that God by whom man was made. But when Hermes predicts these things, he speaks as one who is a friend to these same mockeries of demons, and does not clearly express the name of Christ. On the contrary, he deplores, as if it had already taken place, the future abolition of those things by the observance of which there was maintained in Egypt a resemblance of heaven,—he bears witness to Christianity by a kind of mournful

prophecy. Now it was with reference to such that the apostle said, that “knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of corruptible man,” and so on, for the whole passage is too long to quote. For Hermes makes many such statements agreeable to the truth concerning the one true God who fashioned this world. And I know not how he has become so bewildered by that “darkening of the heart” as to stumble into the expression of a desire that men should always continue in subjection to those gods which he confesses to be made by men, and to bewail their future removal; as if there could be anything more wretched than mankind tyrannized over by the work of his own hands, since man, by worshipping the works of his own hands, may more easily cease to be man, than the works of his hands can, through his worship of them, become gods. For it can sooner happen that man, who has received an honourable position, may, through lack of understanding, become comparable to the beasts, than that the works of man may become preferable to the work of God, made in His own image, that is, to man himself. Wherefore deservedly is man left to fall away from Him who made him, when he prefers to himself that which he himself has made. For these vain, deceitful, pernicious, sacrilegious things did the Egyptian Hermes sorrow, because he knew that the time was coming when they should be removed. But his sorrow was as impudently expressed as his knowledge was imprudently obtained; for it was not the Holy Spirit who revealed these things to him, as He had done to the holy prophets, who, foreseeing these things, said with exultation, “If a man shall make gods, lo, they are

no gods;" and in another place, "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered." But the holy Isaiah prophesies expressly concerning Egypt in reference to this matter, saying, "And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and their heart shall be overcome in them," and other things to the same effect. And with the prophet are to be classed those who rejoiced that that which they knew was to come had actually come,—as Simeon, or Anna, who immediately recognised Jesus when He was born, or Elisabeth, who in the Spirit recognised Him when He was conceived, or Peter, who said by the revelation of the Father, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." But to this Egyptian those spirits indicated the time of their own destruction, who also, when the Lord was present in the flesh, said with trembling, "Art Thou come hither to destroy us before the time?" meaning by destruction before the time, either that very destruction which they expected to come, but which they did not think would come so suddenly as it appeared to have done, or only that destruction which consisted in their being brought into contempt by being made known. And, indeed, this was a destruction before the time, that is, before the time of judgment, when they are to be punished with eternal damnation, together with all men who are implicated in their wickedness, as the true religion declares, which neither errs nor leads into error; for it is not like him who, blown hither and thither by every wind of doctrine, and mixing true things with things which are false, bewails as about to perish a religion which he afterwards confesses to be error.

24. How Hermes openly confessed the error of his forefathers, the coming destruction of which he nevertheless bewailed. After a long interval, Hermes

again comes back to the subject of the gods which men have made, saying as follows: "But enough on this subject. Let us return to man and to reason, that divine gift on account of which man has been called a rational animal. For the things which have been said concerning man, wonderful though they are, are less wonderful than those which have been said concerning reason. For man to discover the divine nature, and to make it, surpasses the wonder of all other wonderful things. Because, therefore, our forefathers erred very far with respect to the knowledge of the gods, through incredulity and through want of attention to their worship and service, they invented this art of making gods; and this art once invented, they associated with it a suitable virtue borrowed from universal nature, and, being incapable of making souls, they evoked those of demons or of angels, and united them with these holy images and divine mysteries, in order that through these souls the images might have power to do good or harm to men." I know not whether the demons themselves could have been made, even by adjuration, to confess as he has confessed in these words: "Because our forefathers erred very far with respect to the knowledge of the gods, through incredulity and through want of attention to their worship and service, they invented the art of making gods." Does he say that it was a moderate degree of error which resulted in their discovery of the art of making gods, or was he content to say "they erred?" No; he must needs add "very far," and say, "They erred very far." It was this great error and incredulity, then, of their forefathers who did not attend to the worship and service of the gods, which was the origin of the art of making gods. And yet this wise man grieves over the ruin of this art at some future time, as if it were a divine religion. Is he not verily compelled by divine influence, on the one

hand, to reveal the past error of his forefathers, and by a diabolical influence, on the other hand, to bewail the future punishment of demons? For if their forefathers, by erring very far with respect to the knowledge of the gods, through incredulity and aversion of mind from their worship and service, invented the art of making gods, what wonder is it that all that is done by this detestable art, which is opposed to the divine religion, should be taken away by that religion, when truth corrects error, faith refutes incredulity, and conversion rectifies aversion? For if he had only said, without mentioning the cause, that his forefathers had discovered the art of making gods, it would have been our duty, if we paid any regard to what is right and pious, to consider and to see that they could never have attained to this art if they had not erred from the truth, if they had believed those things which are worthy of God, if they had attended to divine worship and service. However, if we alone should say that the causes of this art were to be found in the great error and incredulity of men, and aversion of the mind erring from and unfaithful to divine religion, the impudence of those who resist the truth were in some way to be borne with; but when he who admires in man, above all other things, this power which it has been granted him to practise, and sorrows because a time is coming when all those figments of gods invented by men shall even be commanded by the laws to be taken away,—when even this man confesses nevertheless, and explains the causes which led to the discovery of this art, saying that their ancestors, through great error and incredulity, and through not attending to the worship and service of the gods, invented this art of making gods,—what ought we to say, or rather to do, but to give to the Lord our God all the thanks we are able, because He has taken away those things by causes the

contrary of those which led to their institution? For that which the prevalence of error instituted, the way of truth took away; that which incredulity instituted, faith took away; that which aversion from divine worship and service instituted, conversion to the one true and holy God took away. Nor was this the case only in Egypt, for which country alone the spirit of the demons lamented in Hermes, but in all the earth, which sings to the Lord a new song, as the truly holy and truly prophetic Scriptures have predicted, in which it is written, "Sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, all the earth." For the title of this psalm is, "When the house was built after the captivity." For a house is being built to the Lord in all the earth, even the city of God, which is the holy Church, after that captivity in which demons held captive those men who, through faith in God, became living stones in the house. For although man made gods, it did not follow that he who made them was not held captive by them, when, by worshipping them, he was drawn into fellowship with them,—into the fellowship not of stolid idols, but of cunning demons; for what are idols but what they are represented to be in the same Scriptures, "They have eyes, but they do not see," and, though artistically fashioned, are still without life and sensation? But unclean spirits, associated through that wicked art with these same idols, have miserably taken captive the souls of their worshippers, by bringing them down into fellowship with themselves. Whence the apostle says, "We know that an idol is nothing, but those things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I would not ye should have fellowship with demons." After this captivity, therefore, in which men were held by malign demons, the house of God is being built in all the earth; whence the title of that psalm in which it is said, "Sing unto the Lord a

new song; sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless His name; declare well His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, among all people His wonderful things. For great is the Lord, and much to be praised: He is terrible above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are demons: but the Lord made the heavens." Wherefore he who sorrowed because a time was coming when the worship of idols should be abolished, and the domination of the demons over those who worshipped them, wished, under the influence of a demon, that that captivity should always continue, at the cessation of which that psalm celebrates the building of the house of the Lord in all the earth. Hermes foretold these things with grief, the prophet with joyfulness; and because the Spirit is victorious who sang these things through the ancient prophets, even Hermes himself was compelled in a wonderful manner to confess, that those very things which he wished not to be removed, and at the prospect of whose removal he was sorrowful, had been instituted, not by prudent, faithful, and religious, but by erring and unbelieving men, averse to the worship and service of the gods. And although he calls them gods, nevertheless, when he says that they were made by such men as we certainly ought not to be, he shows, whether he will or not, that they are not to be worshipped by those who do not resemble these image-makers, that is, by prudent, faithful, and religious men, at the same time also making it manifest that the very men who made them involved themselves in the worship of those as gods who were not gods. For true is the saying of the prophet, "If a man make gods, lo, they are no gods." Such gods, therefore, acknowledged by such worshippers and made by such men, did Hermes call "gods made by men," that is to say, demons, through some art of I know not what description, bound

by the chains of their own lusts to images. But, nevertheless, he did not agree with that opinion of the Platonic Apuleius, of which we have already shown the incongruity and absurdity, namely, that they were interpreters and intercessors between the gods whom God made, and men whom the same God made, bringing to God the prayers of men, and from God the gifts given in answer to these prayers. For it is exceedingly stupid to believe that gods whom men have made have more influence with gods whom God has made than men themselves have, whom the very same God has made. And consider, too, that it is a demon which, bound by a man to an image by means of an impious art, has been made a god, but a god to such a man only, not to every man. What kind of god, therefore, is that which no man would make but one erring, incredulous, and averse to the true God? Moreover, if the demons which are worshipped in the temples, being introduced by some kind of strange art into images, that is, into visible representations of themselves, by those men who by this art made gods when they were straying away from, and were averse to the worship and service of the gods,—if, I say, those demons are neither mediators nor interpreters between men and the gods, both on account of their own most wicked and base manners, and because men, though erring, incredulous, and averse from the worship and service of the gods, are nevertheless beyond doubt better than the demons whom they themselves have evoked, then it remains to be affirmed that what power they possess they possess as demons, doing harm by bestowing pretended benefits,—harm all the greater for the deception,—or else openly and undisguisedly doing evil to men. They cannot, however, do anything of this kind unless where they are permitted by the deep and secret providence of God, and then only so far as they

are permitted. When, however, they are permitted, it is not because they, being midway between men and the gods, have through the friendship of the gods great power over men; for these demons cannot possibly be friends to the good gods who dwell in the holy and heavenly habitation, by whom we mean holy angels and rational creatures, whether thrones, or dominations, or principalities, or powers, from whom they are as far separated in disposition and character as vice is distant from virtue, wickedness from goodness.

25. Concerning those things which may be common to the holy angels and to men. Wherefore we must by no means seek, through the supposed mediation of demons, to avail ourselves of the benevolence or beneficence of the gods, or rather of the good angels, but through resembling them in the possession of a good will, through which we are with them, and live with them, and worship with them the same God, although we cannot see them with the eyes of our flesh. But it is not in locality we are distant from them, but in merit of life, caused by our miserable unlikeness to them in will, and by the weakness of our character; for the mere fact of our dwelling on earth under the conditions of life in the flesh does not prevent our fellowship with them. It is only prevented when we, in the impurity of our hearts, mind earthly things. But in this present time, while we are being healed that we may eventually be as they are, we are brought near to them by faith, if by their assistance we believe that He who is their blessedness is also ours.
26. That all the religion of the pagans has reference to dead men. It is certainly a remarkable thing how this Egyptian, when expressing his grief that a time was coming when those things would be taken away from Egypt, which he confesses to have been invented by men erring, incredulous, and averse to the service of

divine religion, says, among other things, "Then shall that land, the most holy place of shrines and temples, be full of sepulchres and dead men," as if, in sooth, if these things were not taken away, men would not die! as if dead bodies could be buried elsewhere than in the ground! as if, as time advanced, the number of sepulchres must not necessarily increase in proportion to the increase of the number of the dead! But they who are of a perverse mind, and opposed to us, suppose that what he grieves for is that the memorials of our martyrs were to succeed to their temples and shrines, in order, forsooth, that they may have grounds for thinking that gods were worshipped by the pagans in temples, but that dead men are worshipped by us in sepulchres. For with such blindness do impious men, as it were, stumble over mountains, and will not see the things which strike their own eyes, that they do not attend to the fact that in all the literature of the pagans there are not found any, or scarcely any gods, who have not been men, to whom, when dead, divine honours have been paid. I will not enlarge on the fact that Varro says that all dead men are thought by them to be gods Manes, and proves it by those sacred rites which are performed in honour of almost all the dead, among which he mentions funeral games, considering this the very highest proof of divinity, because games are only wont to be celebrated in honour of divinities. Hermes himself, of whom we are now treating, in that same book in which, as if foretelling future things, he says with sorrow, "Then shall that land, the most holy place of shrines and temples, be full of sepulchres and dead men," testifies that the gods of Egypt were dead men. For, having said that their forefathers, erring very far with respect to the knowledge of the gods, incredulous and inattentive to the divine worship and service, invented the art of making gods, with which art, when

invented, they associated the appropriate virtue which is inherent in universal nature, and by mixing up that virtue with this art, they called forth the souls of demons or of angels (for they could not make souls), and caused them to take possession of, or associate themselves with holy images and divine mysteries, in order that through these souls the images might have power to do good or harm to men;—having said this, he goes on, as it were, to prove it by illustrations, saying, “Thy grandsire, O Æsculapius, the first discoverer of medicine, to whom a temple was consecrated in a mountain of Libya, near to the shore of the crocodiles, in which temple lies his earthly man, that is, his body,—for the better part of him, or rather the whole of him, if the whole man is in the intelligent life, went back to heaven,—affords even now by his divinity all those helps to infirm men, which formerly he was wont to afford to them by the art of medicine.” He says, therefore, that a dead man was worshipped as a god in that place where he had his sepulchre. He deceives men by a falsehood, for the man “went back to heaven.” Then he adds, “Does not Hermes, who was my grandsire, and whose name I bear, abiding in the country which is called by his name, help and preserve all mortals who come to him from every quarter?” For this elder Hermes, that is, Mercury, who, he says, was his grandsire, is said to be buried in Hermopolis, that is, in the city called by his name; so here are two gods whom he affirms to have been men, Æsculapius and Mercury. Now concerning Æsculapius, both the Greeks and the Latins think the same thing; but as to Mercury, there are many who do not think that he was formerly a mortal, though Hermes testifies that he was his grandsire. But are these two different individuals who were called by the same name? I will not dispute much whether they are different individuals or not. It is

sufficient to know that this Mercury of whom Hermes speaks is, as well as Æsculapius, a god who once was a man, according to the testimony of this same Trismegistus, esteemed so great by his countrymen, and also the grandson of Mercury himself. Hermes goes on to say, "But do we know how many good things Isis, the wife of Osiris, bestows when she is propitious, and what great opposition she can offer when enraged?" Then, in order to show that there were gods made by men through this art, he goes on to say, "For it is easy for earthly and mundane gods to be angry, being made and composed by men out of either nature;" thus giving us to understand that he believed that demons were formerly the souls of dead men, which, as he says, by means of a certain art invented by men very far in error, incredulous, and irreligious, were caused to take possession of images, because they who made such gods were not able to make souls. When, therefore, he says "either nature," he means soul and body,—the demon being the soul, and the image the body. What, then, becomes of that mournful complaint, that the land of Egypt, the most holy place of shrines and temples, was to be full of sepulchres and dead men? Verily, the fallacious spirit, by whose inspiration Hermes spoke these things, was compelled to confess through him that even already that land was full of sepulchres and of dead men, whom they were worshipping as gods. But it was the grief of the demons which was expressing itself through his mouth, who were sorrowing on account of the punishments which were about to fall upon them at the tombs of the martyrs. For in many such places they are tortured and compelled to confess, and are cast out of the bodies of men, of which they had taken possession.

27. Concerning the nature of the honour which the Christians pay to their martyrs. But, nevertheless, we

do not build temples, and ordain priests, rites, and sacrifices for these same martyrs; for they are not our gods, but their God is our God. Certainly we honour their reliquaries, as the memorials of holy men of God who strove for the truth even to the death of their bodies, that the true religion might be made known, and false and fictitious religions exposed. For if there were some before them who thought that these religions were really false and fictitious, they were afraid to give expression to their convictions. But who ever heard a priest of the faithful, standing at an altar built for the honour and worship of God over the holy body of some martyr, say in the prayers, I offer to thee a sacrifice, O Peter, or O Paul, or O Cyprian? for it is to God that sacrifices are offered at their tombs,—the God who made them both men and martyrs, and associated them with holy angels in celestial honour; and the reason why we pay such honours to their memory is, that by so doing we may both give thanks to the true God for their victories, and, by recalling them afresh to remembrance, may stir ourselves up to imitate them by seeking to obtain like crowns and palms, calling to our help that same God on whom they called. Therefore, whatever honours the religious may pay in the places of the martyrs, they are but honours rendered to their memory, not sacred rites or sacrifices offered to dead men as to gods. And even such as bring thither food,—which, indeed, is not done by the better Christians, and in most places of the world is not done at all,—do so in order that it may be sanctified to them through the merits of the martyrs, in the name of the Lord of the martyrs, first presenting the food and offering prayer, and thereafter taking it away to be eaten, or to be in part bestowed upon the needy. But he who knows the one sacrifice of Christians, which is the sacrifice offered in those places, also knows that these are not

sacrifices offered to the martyrs. It is, then, neither with divine honours nor with human crimes, by which they worship their gods, that we honour our martyrs; neither do we offer sacrifices to them, or convert the crimes of the gods into their sacred rites. For let those who will and can read the letter of Alexander to his mother Olympias, in which he tells the things which were revealed to him by the priest Leon, and let those who have read it recall to memory what it contains, that they may see what great abominations have been handed down to memory, not by poets, but by the mystic writings of the Egyptians, concerning the goddess Isis, the wife of Osiris, and the parents of both, all of whom, according to these writings, were royal personages. Isis, when sacrificing to her parents, is said to have discovered a crop of barley, of which she brought some ears to the king her husband, and his councillor Mercurius, and hence they identify her with Ceres. Those who read the letter may there see what was the character of those people to whom when dead sacred rites were instituted as to gods, and what those deeds of theirs were which furnished the occasion for these rites. Let them not once dare to compare in any respect those people, though they hold them to be gods, to our holy martyrs, though we do not hold them to be gods. For we do not ordain priests and offer sacrifices to our martyrs, as they do to their dead men, for that would be incongruous, undue, and unlawful, such being due only to God; and thus we do not delight them with their own crimes, or with such shameful plays as those in which the crimes of the gods are celebrated, which are either real crimes committed by them at a time when they were men, or else, if they never were men, fictitious crimes invented for the pleasure of noxious demons. The god of Socrates, if he had a god, cannot have belonged to this class of

demons. But perhaps they who wished to excel in this art of making gods, imposed a god of this sort on a man who was a stranger to, and innocent of any connection with that art. What need we say more? No one who is even moderately wise imagines that demons are to be worshipped on account of the blessed life which is to be after death. But perhaps they will say that all the gods are good, but that of the demons some are bad and some good, and that it is the good who are to be worshipped, in order that through them we may attain to the eternally blessed life. To the examination of this opinion we will devote the following book.

