

THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

[Podcast 3 of 50]

BOOK SECOND.

ARGUMENT. IN THIS BOOK AUGUSTINE REVIEWS THOSE CALAMITIES WHICH THE ROMANS SUFFERED BEFORE THE TIME OF CHRIST, AND WHILE THE WORSHIP OF THE FALSE GODS WAS UNIVERSALLY PRACTISED; AND DEMONSTRATES THAT, FAR FROM BEING PRESERVED FROM MISFORTUNE BY THE GODS, THE ROMANS HAVE BEEN BY THEM OVERWHELMED WITH THE ONLY, OR AT LEAST THE GREATEST, OF ALL CALAMITIES—THE CORRUPTION OF MANNERS, AND THE VICIES OF THE SOUL.

[End of Argument]

1. Of the limits which must be put to the necessity of replying to an adversary. If the feeble mind of man did not presume to resist the clear evidence of truth, but yielded its infirmity to wholesome doctrines, as to a health-giving medicine, until it obtained from God, by its faith and piety, the grace needed to heal it, they who have just ideas, and express them in suitable language, would need to use no long discourse to refute the errors of empty conjecture. But this mental infirmity is now more prevalent and hurtful than ever, to such an extent that even after the truth has been as fully

demonstrated as man can prove it to man, they hold for the very truth their own unreasonable fancies, either on account of their great blindness, which prevents them from seeing what is plainly set before them, or on account of their opinionative obstinacy, which prevents them from acknowledging the force of what they do see. There therefore frequently arises a necessity of speaking more fully on those points which are already clear, that we may, as it were, present them not to the eye, but even to the touch, so that they may be felt even by those who close their eyes against them. And yet to what end shall we ever bring our discussions, or what bounds can be set to our discourse, if we proceed on the principle that we must always reply to those who reply to us? For those who are either unable to understand our arguments, or are so hardened by the habit of contradiction, that though they understand they cannot yield to them, reply to us, and, as it is written, "speak hard things," and are incorrigibly vain. Now, if we were to propose to confute their objections as often as they with brazen face chose to disregard our arguments, and as often as they could by any means contradict our statements, you see how endless, and fruitless, and painful a task we should be undertaking. And therefore I do not wish my writings to be judged even by you, my son Marcellinus, nor by any of those others at whose service this work of mine is freely and in all Christian charity put, if at least you intend always to require a reply to every exception which you hear taken to what you read in it; for so you would become like those silly women of whom the apostle says that they are "always learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

2. Recapitulation of the contents of the first book. In the foregoing book, having begun to speak of the city of

God, to which I have resolved, Heaven helping me, to consecrate the whole of this work, it was my first endeavour to reply to those who attribute the wars by which the world is being devastated, and specially the recent sack of Rome by the barbarians, to the religion of Christ, which prohibits the offering of abominable sacrifices to devils. I have shown that they ought rather to attribute it to Christ, that for His name's sake the barbarians, in contravention of all custom and law of war, threw open as sanctuaries the largest churches, and in many instances showed such reverence to Christ, that not only His genuine servants, but even those who in their terror feigned themselves to be so, were exempted from all those hardships which by the custom of war may lawfully be inflicted. Then out of this there arose the question, why wicked and ungrateful men were permitted to share in these benefits; and why, too, the hardships and calamities of war were inflicted on the godly as well as on the ungodly. And in giving a suitably full answer to this large question, I occupied some considerable space, partly that I might relieve the anxieties which disturb many when they observe that the blessings of God, and the common and daily human casualties, fall to the lot of bad men and good without distinction; but mainly that I might minister some consolation to those holy and chaste women who were outraged by the enemy, in such a way as to shock their modesty, though not to sully their purity, and that I might preserve them from being ashamed of life, though they have no guilt to be ashamed of. And then I briefly spoke against those who with a most shameless wantonness insult over those poor Christians who were subjected to those calamities, and especially over those broken-hearted and humiliated, though chaste and holy women; these fellows themselves being most depraved and unmanly

profligates, quite degenerate from the genuine Romans, whose famous deeds are abundantly recorded in history, and everywhere celebrated, but who have found in their descendants the greatest enemies of their glory. In truth, Rome, which was founded and increased by the labours of these ancient heroes, was more shamefully ruined by their descendants, while its walls were still standing, than it is now by the razing of them. For in this ruin there fell stones and timbers; but in the ruin those profligates effected, there fell, not the mural, but the moral bulwarks and ornaments of the city, and their hearts burned with passions more destructive than the flames which consumed their houses. Thus I brought my first book to a close. And now I go on to speak of those calamities which that city itself, or its subject provinces, have suffered since its foundation; all of which they would equally have attributed to the Christian religion, if at that early period the doctrine of the gospel against their false and deceiving gods had been as largely and freely proclaimed as now.

3. That we need only to read history in order to see what calamities the Romans suffered before the religion of Christ began to compete with the worship of the gods. But remember that, in recounting these things, I have still to address myself to ignorant men; so ignorant, indeed, as to give birth to the common saying, "Drought and Christianity go hand in hand." There are indeed some among them who are thoroughly well educated men, and have a taste for history, in which the things I speak of are open to their observation; but in order to irritate the uneducated masses against us, they feign ignorance of these events, and do what they can to make the vulgar believe that those disasters, which in certain places and at certain times uniformly

befall mankind, are the result of Christianity, which is being everywhere diffused, and is possessed of a renown and brilliancy which quite eclipse their own gods. Let them then, along with us, call to mind with what various and repeated disasters the prosperity of Rome was blighted, before ever Christ had come in the flesh, and before His name had been blazoned among the nations with that glory which they vainly grudge. Let them, if they can, defend their gods in this article, since they maintain that they worship them in order to be preserved from these disasters, which they now impute to us if they suffer in the least degree. For why did these gods permit the disasters I am to speak of to fall on their worshippers before the preaching of Christ's name offended them, and put an end to their sacrifices?

4. That the worshippers of the gods never received from them any healthy moral precepts, and that in celebrating their worship all sorts of impurities were practised. First of all, we would ask why their gods took no steps to improve the morals of their worshippers. That the true God should neglect those who did not seek His help, that was but justice; but why did those gods, from whose worship ungrateful men are now complaining that they are prohibited, issue no laws which might have guided their devotees to a virtuous life? Surely it was but just, that such care as men showed to the worship of the gods, the gods on their part should have to the conduct of men. But, it is replied, it is by his own will a man goes astray. Who denies it? But none the less was it incumbent on these gods, who were men's guardians, to publish in plain terms the laws of a good life, and not to conceal them from their worshippers. It was their part to send prophets to reach and convict such as broke these laws,

and publicly to proclaim the punishments which await evildoers, and the rewards which may be looked for by those that do well. Did ever the walls of any of their temples echo to any such warning voice? I myself, when I was a young man, used sometimes to go to the sacrilegious entertainments and spectacles; I saw the priests raving in religious excitement, and heard the choristers; I took pleasure in the shameful games which were celebrated in honour of gods and goddesses, of the virgin Cœlestis, and Berecynthia, the mother of all the gods. And on the holy day consecrated to her purification, there were sung before her couch productions so obscene and filthy for the ear—I do not say of the mother of the gods, but of the mother of any senator or honest man—nay, so impure, that not even the mother of the foul-mouthed players themselves could have formed one of the audience. For natural reverence for parents is a bond which the most abandoned cannot ignore. And, accordingly, the lewd actions and filthy words with which these players honoured the mother of the gods, in presence of a vast assemblage and audience of both sexes, they could not for very shame have rehearsed at home in presence of their own mothers. And the crowds that were gathered from all quarters by curiosity, offended modesty must, I should suppose, have scattered in the confusion of shame. If these are sacred rites, what is sacrilege? If this is purification, what is pollution? This festivity was called the Tables, as if a banquet were being given at which unclean devils might find suitable refreshment. For it is not difficult to see what kind of spirits they must be who are delighted with such obscenities, unless, indeed, a man be blinded by these evil spirits passing themselves off under the name of gods, and either disbelieves in their existence, or leads such a life

as prompts him rather to propitiate and fear them than the true God.

5. Of the obscenities practised in honour of the mother of the gods. In this matter I would prefer to have as my assessors in judgment, not those men who rather take pleasure in these infamous customs than take pains to put an end to them, but that same Scipio Nasica who was chosen by the senate as the citizen most worthy to receive in his hands the image of that demon Cybele, and convey it into the city. He would tell us whether he would be proud to see his own mother so highly esteemed by the state as to have divine honours adjudged to her; as the Greeks and Romans and other nations have decreed divine honours to men who had been of material service to them, and have believed that their mortal benefactors were thus made immortal, and enrolled among the gods. Surely he would desire that his mother should enjoy such felicity were it possible. But if we proceeded to ask him whether, among the honours paid to her, he would wish such shameful rites as these to be celebrated, would he not at once exclaim that he would rather his mother lay stone-dead, than survive as a goddess to lend her ear to these obscenities? Is it possible that he who was of so severe a morality, that he used his influence as a Roman senator to prevent the building of a theatre in that city dedicated to the manly virtues, would wish his mother to be propitiated as a goddess with words which would have brought the blush to her cheek when a Roman matron? Could he possibly believe that the modesty of an estimable woman would be so transformed by her promotion to divinity, that she would suffer herself to be invoked and celebrated in terms so gross and immodest, that if she had heard the like while alive upon earth, and had listened without

stopping her ears and hurrying from the spot, her relatives, her husband, and her children would have blushed for her? Therefore, the mother of the gods being such a character as the most profligate man would be ashamed to have for his mother, and meaning to enthrall the minds of the Romans, demanded for her service their best citizen, not to ripen him still more in virtue by her helpful counsel, but to entangle him by her deceit, like her of whom it is written, "The adulteress will hunt for the precious soul." Her intent was to puff up this high-souled man by an apparently divine testimony to his excellence, in order that he might rely upon his own eminence in virtue, and make no further efforts after true piety and religion, without which natural genius, however brilliant, vapours into pride and comes to nothing. For what but a guileful purpose could that goddess demand the best man, seeing that in her own sacred festivals she requires such obscenities as the best men would be covered with shame to hear at their own tables?

6. That the gods of the pagans never inculcated holiness of life. This is the reason why those divinities quite neglected the lives and morals of the cities and nations who worshipped them, and threw no dreadful prohibition in their way to hinder them from becoming utterly corrupt, and to preserve them from those terrible and detestable evils which visit not harvests and vintages, not house and possessions, not the body which is subject to the soul, but the soul itself, the spirit that rules the whole man. If there was any such prohibition, let it be produced, let it be proved. They will tell us that purity and probity were inculcated upon those who were initiated in the mysteries of religion, and that secret incitements to virtue were whispered in the ear of the élite; but this is an idle boast. Let them

show or name to us the places which were at any time consecrated to assemblages in which, instead of the obscene songs and licentious acting of players, instead of the celebration of those most filthy and shameless Fugalia (well called Fugalia, since they banish modesty and right feeling), the people were commanded in the name of the gods to restrain avarice, bridle impurity, and conquer ambition; where, in short, they might learn in that school which Persius vehemently lashes them to, when he says: "Be taught, ye abandoned creatures, and ascertain the causes of things; what we are, and for what end we are born; what is the law of our success in life, and by what art we may turn the goal without making shipwreck; what limit we should put to our wealth, what we may lawfully desire, and what uses filthy lucre serves; how much we should bestow upon our country and our family; learn, in short, what God meant thee to be, and what place He has ordered you to fill." Let them name to us the places where such instructions were wont to be communicated from the gods, and where the people who worshipped them were accustomed to resort to hear them, as we can point to our churches built for this purpose in every land where the Christian religion is received.

7. That the suggestions of philosophers are precluded from having any moral effect, because they have not the authority which belongs to divine instruction, and because man's natural bias to evil induces him rather to follow the examples of the gods than to obey the precepts of men. But will they perhaps remind us of the schools of the philosophers, and their disputations? In the first place, these belong not to Rome, but to Greece; and even if we yield to them that they are now Roman, because Greece itself has become a Roman province, still the teachings of the philosophers are not

the commandments of the gods, but the discoveries of men, who, at the prompting of their own speculative ability, made efforts to discover the hidden laws of nature, and the right and wrong in ethics, and in dialectic what was consequent according to the rules of logic, and what was inconsequent and erroneous. And some of them, by God's help, made great discoveries; but when left to themselves they were betrayed by human infirmity, and fell into mistakes. And this was ordered by divine providence, that their pride might be restrained, and that by their example it might be pointed out that it is humility which has access to the highest regions. But of this we shall have more to say, if the Lord God of truth permit, in its own place.

However, if the philosophers have made any discoveries which are sufficient to guide men to virtue and blessedness, would it not have been greater justice to vote divine honours to them? Were it not more accordant with every virtuous sentiment to read Plato's writings in a "Temple of Plato," than to be present in the temples of devils to witness the priests of Cybele mutilating themselves, the effeminate being consecrated, the raving fanatics cutting themselves, and whatever other cruel or shameful, or shamefully cruel or cruelly shameful, ceremony is enjoined by the ritual of such gods as these? Were it not a more suitable education, and more likely to prompt the youth to virtue, if they heard public recitals of the laws of the gods, instead of the vain laudation of the customs and laws of their ancestors? Certainly all the worshippers of the Roman gods, when once they are possessed by what Persius calls "the burning poison of lust," prefer to witness the deeds of Jupiter rather than to hear what Plato taught or Cato censured. Hence the young profligate in Terence, when he sees on the wall a fresco representing the fabled descent of Jupiter into the lap

of Danaë in the form of a golden shower, accepts this as authoritative precedent for his own licentiousness, and boasts that he is an imitator of God. "And what God?" he says. "He who with His thunder shakes the loftiest temples. And was I, a poor creature compared to Him, to make bones of it? No; I did it, and with all my heart."

8. That the theatrical exhibitions publishing the shameful actions of the gods, propitiated rather than offended them. But, some one will interpose, these are the fables of poets, not the deliverances of the gods themselves. Well, I have no mind to arbitrate between the lewdness of theatrical entertainments and of mystic rites; only this I say, and history bears me out in making the assertion, that those same entertainments, in which the fictions of poets are the main attraction, were not introduced in the festivals of the gods by the ignorant devotion of the Romans, but that the gods themselves gave the most urgent commands to this effect, and indeed extorted from the Romans these solemnities and celebrations in their honour. I touched on this in the preceding book, and mentioned that dramatic entertainments were first inaugurated at Rome on occasion of a pestilence, and by authority of the pontiff. And what man is there who is not more likely to adopt, for the regulation of his own life, the examples that are represented in plays which have a divine sanction, rather than the precepts written and promulgated with no more than human authority? If the poets gave a false representation of Jove in describing him as adulterous, then it were to be expected that the chaste gods should in anger avenge so wicked a fiction, in place of encouraging the games which circulated it. Of these plays, the most inoffensive are comedies and tragedies, that is to say, the dramas which poets write for the stage, and which, though they often handle impure

subjects, yet do so without the filthiness of language which characterizes many other performances; and it is these dramas which boys are obliged by their seniors to read and learn as a part of what is called a liberal and gentlemanly education.

9. That the poetical licence which the Greeks, in obedience to their gods, allowed, was restrained by the ancient Romans. The opinion of the ancient Romans on this matter is attested by Cicero in his work *De Republica*, in which Scipio, one of the interlocutors, says, "The lewdness of comedy could never have been suffered by audiences, unless the customs of society had previously sanctioned the same lewdness." And in the earlier days the Greeks preserved a certain reasonableness in their licence, and made it a law, that whatever comedy wished to say of any one, it must say it of him by name. And so in the same work of Cicero's, Scipio says, "Whom has it not aspersed? Nay, whom has it not worried? Whom has it spared? Allow that it may assail demagogues and factions, men injurious to the commonwealth—a Cleon, a Cleophon, a Hyperbolus. That is tolerable, though it had been more seemly for the public censor to brand such men, than for a poet to lampoon them; but to blacken the fame of Pericles with scurrilous verse, after he had with the utmost dignity presided over their state alike in war and in peace, was as unworthy of a poet, as if our own Plautus or Nævius were to bring Publius and Cneius Scipio on the comic stage, or as if Cæcilius were to caricature Cato." And then a little after he goes on: "Though our Twelve Tables attached the penalty of death only to a very few offences, yet among these few this was one: if any man should have sung a pasquinade, or have composed a satire calculated to bring infamy or disgrace on another person. Wisely

decreed. For it is by the decisions of magistrates, and by a well-informed justice, that our lives ought to be judged, and not by the flighty fancies of poets; neither ought we to be exposed to hear calumnies, save where we have the liberty of replying, and defending ourselves before an adequate tribunal." This much I have judged it advisable to quote from the fourth book of Cicero's De Republica; and I have made the quotation word for word, with the exception of some words omitted, and some slightly transposed, for the sake of giving the sense more readily. And certainly the extract is pertinent to the matter I am endeavouring to explain. Cicero makes some further remarks, and concludes the passage by showing that the ancient Romans did not permit any living man to be either praised or blamed on the stage. But the Greeks, as I said, though not so moral, were more logical in allowing this licence which the Romans forbade: for they saw that their gods approved and enjoyed the scurrilous language of low comedy when directed not only against men, but even against themselves; and this, whether the infamous actions imputed to them were the fictions of poets, or were their actual iniquities commemorated and acted in the theatres. And would that the spectators had judged them worthy only of laughter, and not of imitation! Manifestly it had been a stretch of pride to spare the good name of the leading men and the common citizens, when the very deities did not grudge that their own reputation should be blemished.

10. That the devils, in suffering either false or true crimes to be laid to their charge, meant to do men a mischief. It is alleged, in excuse of this practice, that the stories told of the gods are not true, but false, and mere inventions; but this only makes matters worse, if we

form our estimate by the morality our religion teaches; and if we consider the malice of the devils, what more wily and astute artifice could they practise upon men? When a slander is uttered against a leading statesman of upright and useful life, is it not reprehensible in proportion to its untruth and groundlessness? What punishment, then, shall be sufficient when the gods are the objects of so wicked and outrageous an injustice? But the devils, whom these men repute gods, are content that even iniquities they are guiltless of should be ascribed to them, so long as they may entangle men's minds in the meshes of these opinions, and draw them on along with themselves to their predestinated punishment: whether such things were actually committed by the men whom these devils, delighting in human infatuation, cause to be worshipped as gods, and in whose stead they, by a thousand malign and deceitful artifices, substitute themselves, and so receive worship; or whether, though they were really the crimes of men, these wicked spirits gladly allowed them to be attributed to higher beings, that there might seem to be conveyed from heaven itself a sufficient sanction for the perpetration of shameful wickedness. The Greeks, therefore, seeing the character of the gods they served, thought that the poets should certainly not refrain from showing up human vices on the stage, either because they desired to be like their gods in this, or because they were afraid that, if they required for themselves a more unblemished reputation than they asserted for the gods, they might provoke them to anger.

11. That the Greeks admitted players to offices of state, on the ground that men who pleased the gods should not be contemptuously treated by their fellows. It was a part of this same reasonableness of the Greeks which

induced them to bestow upon the actors of these same plays no inconsiderable civic honours. In the above-mentioned book of the De Republica, it is mentioned that Æschines, a very eloquent Athenian, who had been a tragic actor in his youth, became a statesman, and that the Athenians again and again sent another tragedian, Aristodemus, as their plenipotentiary to Philip. For they judged it unbecoming to condemn and treat as infamous persons those who were the chief actors in the scenic entertainments which they saw to be so pleasing to the gods. No doubt this was immoral of the Greeks, but there can be as little doubt they acted in conformity with the character of their gods; for how could they have presumed to protect the conduct of the citizens from being cut to pieces by the tongues of poets and players, who were allowed, and even enjoined by the gods, to tear their divine reputation to tatters? And how could they hold in contempt the men who acted in the theatres those dramas which, as they had ascertained, gave pleasure to the gods whom they worshipped? Nay, how could they but grant to them the highest civic honours? On what plea could they honour the priests who offered for them acceptable sacrifices to the gods, if they branded with infamy the actors who in behalf of the people gave to the gods that pleasure or honour which they demanded, and which, according to the account of the priests, they were angry at not receiving? Labeo, whose learning makes him an authority on such points, is of opinion that the distinction between good and evil deities should find expression in a difference of worship; that the evil should be propitiated by bloody sacrifices and doleful rites, but the good with a joyful and pleasant observance, as, e.g. (as he says himself), with plays, festivals, and banquets. All this we shall, with God's help, hereafter discuss. At present, and speaking to the

subject on hand, whether all kinds of offerings are made indiscriminately to all the gods, as if all were good (and it is an unseemly thing to conceive that there are evil gods; but these gods of the pagans are all evil, because they are not gods, but evil spirits), or whether, as Labeo thinks, a distinction is made between the offerings presented to the different gods, the Greeks are equally justified in honouring alike the priests by whom the sacrifices are offered, and the players by whom the dramas are acted, that they may not be open to the charge of doing an injury to all their gods, if the plays are pleasing to all of them, or (which were still worse) to their good gods, if the plays are relished only by them.

12. That the Romans, by refusing to the poets the same licence in respect of men which they allowed them in the case of the gods, showed a more delicate sensitiveness regarding themselves than regarding the gods. The Romans, however, as Scipio boasts in that same discussion, declined having their conduct and good name subjected to the assaults and slanders of the poets, and went so far as to make it a capital crime if any one should dare to compose such verses. This was a very honourable course to pursue, so far as they themselves were concerned, but in respect of the gods it was proud and irreligious: for they knew that the gods not only tolerated, but relished, being lashed by the injurious expressions of the poets, and yet they themselves would not suffer this same handling; and what their ritual prescribed as acceptable to the gods, their law prohibited as injurious to themselves. How then, Scipio, do you praise the Romans for refusing this licence to the poets, so that no citizen could be calumniated, while you know that the gods were not included under this protection? Do you count your

senate-house worthy of so much higher a regard than the Capitol? Is the one city of Rome more valuable in your eyes than the whole heaven of gods, that you prohibit your poets from uttering any injurious words against a citizen, though they may with impunity cast what imputations they please upon the gods, without the interference of senator, censor, prince, or pontiff? It was, forsooth, intolerable that Plautus or Nævius should attack Publius and Cneius Scipio, insufferable that Cæcilius should lampoon Cato; but quite proper that your Terence should encourage youthful lust by the wicked example of supreme Jove.

13. That the Romans should have understood that gods who desired to be worshipped in licentious entertainments were unworthy of divine honour. But Scipio, were he alive, would possibly reply: "How could we attach a penalty to that which the gods themselves have consecrated? For the theatrical entertainments in which such things are said, and acted, and performed, were introduced into Roman society by the gods, who ordered that they should be dedicated and exhibited in their honour." But was not this, then, the plainest proof that they were no true gods, nor in any respect worthy of receiving divine honours from the republic? Suppose they had required that in their honour the citizens of Rome should be held up to ridicule, every Roman would have resented the hateful proposal. How then, I would ask, can they be esteemed worthy of worship, when they propose that their own crimes be used as material for celebrating their praises? Does not this artifice expose them, and prove that they are detestable devils? Thus the Romans, though they were superstitious enough to serve as gods those who made no secret of their desire to be worshipped in licentious plays, yet had sufficient regard to their hereditary dignity and

virtue, to prompt them to refuse to players any such rewards as the Greeks accorded them. On this point we have this testimony of Scipio, recorded in Cicero: "They [the Romans] considered comedy and all theatrical performances as disgraceful, and therefore not only debarred players from offices and honours open to ordinary citizens, but also decreed that their names should be branded by the censor, and erased from the roll of their tribe." An excellent decree, and another testimony to the sagacity of Rome; but I could wish their prudence had been more thoroughgoing and consistent. For when I hear that if any Roman citizen chose the stage as his profession, he not only closed to himself every laudable career, but even became an outcast from his own tribe, I cannot but exclaim: This is the true Roman spirit, this is worthy of a state jealous of its reputation. But then some one interrupts my rapture, by inquiring with what consistency players are debarred from all honours, while plays are counted among the honours due to the gods? For a long while the virtue of Rome was uncontaminated by theatrical exhibitions; and if they had been adopted for the sake of gratifying the taste of the citizens, they would have been introduced hand in hand with the relaxation of manners. But the fact is, that it was the gods who demanded that they should be exhibited to gratify them. With what justice, then, is the player excommunicated by whom God is worshipped? On what pretext can you at once adore him who exacts, and brand him who acts these plays? This, then, is the controversy in which the Greeks and Romans are engaged. The Greeks think they justly honour players, because they worship the gods who demand plays: the Romans, on the other hand, do not suffer an actor to disgrace by his name his own plebeian tribe, far less the senatorial order. And the whole of this discussion

may be summed up in the following syllogism. The Greeks give us the major premiss: If such gods are to be worshipped, then certainly such men may be honoured. The Romans add the minor: But such men must by no means be honoured. The Christians draw the conclusion: Therefore such gods must by no means be worshipped.

14. That Plato, who excluded poets from a well-ordered city, was better than these gods who desire to be honoured by theatrical plays. We have still to inquire why the poets who write the plays, and who by the law of the twelve tables are prohibited from injuring the good name of the citizens, are reckoned more estimable than the actors, though they so shamefully asperse the character of the gods? Is it right that the actors of these poetical and God-dishonouring effusions be branded, while their authors are honoured? Must we not here award the palm to a Greek, Plato, who, in framing his ideal republic, conceived that poets should be banished from the city as enemies of the state? He could not brook that the gods be brought into disrepute, nor that the minds of the citizens be depraved and besotted, by the fictions of the poets. Compare now human nature as you see it in Plato, expelling poets from the city that the citizens be uninjured, with the divine nature as you see it in these gods exacting plays in their own honour. Plato strove, though unsuccessfully, to persuade the light-minded and lascivious Greeks to abstain from so much as writing such plays; the gods used their authority to extort the acting of the same from the dignified and sober-minded Romans. And not content with having them acted, they had them dedicated to themselves, consecrated to themselves, solemnly celebrated in their own honour. To which, then, would it be more

becoming in a state to decree divine honours,—to Plato, who prohibited these wicked and licentious plays, or to the demons who delighted in blinding men to the truth of what Plato unsuccessfully sought to inculcate? This philosopher, Plato, has been elevated by Labeo to the rank of a demigod, and set thus upon a level with such as Hercules and Romulus. Labeo ranks demigods higher than heroes, but both he counts among the deities. But I have no doubt that he thinks this man whom he reckons a demigod worthy of greater respect not only than the heroes, but also than the gods themselves. The laws of the Romans and the speculations of Plato have this resemblance, that the latter pronounces a wholesale condemnation of poetical fictions, while the former restrain the licence of satire, at least so far as men are the objects of it. Plato will not suffer poets even to dwell in his city: the laws of Rome prohibit actors from being enrolled as citizens; and if they had not feared to offend the gods who had asked the services of the players, they would in all likelihood have banished them altogether. It is obvious, therefore, that the Romans could not receive, nor reasonably expect to receive, laws for the regulation of their conduct from their gods, since the laws they themselves enacted far surpassed and put to shame the morality of the gods. The gods demand stage-plays in their own honour; the Romans exclude the players from all civic honours: the former commanded that they should be celebrated by the scenic representation of their own disgrace; the latter commanded that no poet should dare to blemish the reputation of any citizen. But that demigod Plato resisted the lust of such gods as these, and showed the Romans what their genius had left incomplete; for he absolutely excluded poets from his ideal state, whether they composed fictions with no regard to truth, or set the worst possible examples

before wretched men under the guise of divine actions. We for our part, indeed, reckon Plato neither a god nor a demigod; we would not even compare him to any of God's holy angels, nor to the truth-speaking prophets, nor to any of the apostles or martyrs of Christ, nay, not to any faithful Christian man. The reason of this opinion of ours we will, God prospering us, render in its own place. Nevertheless, since they wish him to be considered a demigod, we think he certainly is more entitled to that rank, and is every way superior, if not to Hercules and Romulus (though no historian could ever narrate nor any poet sing of him that he had killed his brother, or committed any crime), yet certainly to Priapus, or a Cynocephalus, or the Fever,—divinities whom the Romans have partly received from foreigners, and partly consecrated by home-grown rites. How, then, could gods such as these be expected to promulgate good and wholesome laws, either for the prevention of moral and social evils, or for their eradication where they had already sprung up?—gods who used their influence even to sow and cherish profligacy, by appointing that deeds truly or falsely ascribed to them should be published to the people by means of theatrical exhibitions, and by thus gratuitously fanning the flame of human lust with the breath of a seemingly divine approbation. In vain does Cicero, speaking of poets, exclaim against this state of things in these words: "When the plaudits and acclamation of the people, who sit as infallible judges, are won by the poets, what darkness benights the mind, what fears invade, what passions inflame it!"

15. That it was vanity, not reason, which created some of the Roman gods. But is it not manifest that vanity rather than reason regulated the choice of some of their false gods? This Plato, whom they reckon a

demigod, and who used all his eloquence to preserve men from the most dangerous spiritual calamities, has yet not been counted worthy even of a little shrine; but Romulus, because they can call him their own, they have esteemed more highly than many gods, though their secret doctrine can allow him the rank only of a demigod. To him they allotted a flamen, that is to say, a priest of a class so highly esteemed in their religion (distinguished, too, by their conical mitres), that for only three of their gods were flamens appointed—the Flamen Dialis for Jupiter, Martialis for Mars, and Quirinalis for Romulus (for when the ardour of his fellow-citizens had given Romulus a seat among the gods, they gave him this new name Quirinus). And thus by this honour Romulus has been preferred to Neptune and Pluto, Jupiter's brothers, and to Saturn himself, their father. They have assigned the same priesthood to serve him as to serve Jove; and in giving Mars (the reputed father of Romulus) the same honour, is this not rather for Romulus' sake than to honour Mars?

