

THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

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BOOK SECOND.

[continues]

16. That if the gods had really possessed any regard for righteousness, the Romans should have received good laws from them, instead of having to borrow them from other nations. Moreover, if the Romans had been able to receive a rule of life from their gods, they would not have borrowed Solon's laws from the Athenians, as they did some years after Rome was founded; and yet they did not keep them as they received them, but endeavoured to improve and amend them. Although Lycurgus pretended that he was authorized by Apollo to give laws to the Lacedemonians, the sensible Romans did not choose to believe this, and were not induced to borrow laws from Sparta. Numa Pompilius, who succeeded Romulus in the kingdom, is said to have framed some laws, which, however, were not sufficient for the regulation of civic affairs. Among these regulations were many pertaining to religious observances, and yet he is not reported to have received even these from the gods. With respect, then, to moral evils, evils of life and conduct,—evils which are so mighty, that, according to the wisest pagans, by

them states are ruined while their cities stand uninjured,—their gods made not the smallest provision for preserving their worshippers from these evils, but, on the contrary, took special pains to increase them, as we have previously endeavoured to prove.

17. Of the rape of the Sabine women, and other iniquities perpetrated in Rome's palmiest days. But possibly we are to find the reason for this neglect of the Romans by their gods, in the saying of Sallust, that "equity and virtue prevailed among the Romans not more by force of laws than of nature." I presume it is to this inborn equity and goodness of disposition we are to ascribe the rape of the Sabine women. What, indeed, could be more equitable and virtuous, than to carry off by force, as each man was fit, and without their parents' consent, girls who were strangers and guests, and who had been decoyed and entrapped by the pretence of a spectacle! If the Sabines were wrong to deny their daughters when the Romans asked for them, was it not a greater wrong in the Romans to carry them off after that denial? The Romans might more justly have waged war against the neighbouring nation for having refused their daughters in marriage when they first sought them, than for having demanded them back when they had stolen them. War should have been proclaimed at first: it was then that Mars should have helped his warlike son, that he might by force of arms avenge the injury done him by the refusal of marriage, and might also thus win the women he desired. There might have been some appearance of "right of war" in a victor carrying off, in virtue of this right, the virgins who had been without any show of right denied him; whereas there was no "right of peace" entitling him to carry off those who were not given to him, and to wage an unjust war with their justly enraged parents. One happy circumstance was indeed connected with this act of

violence, viz., that though it was commemorated by the games of the circus, yet even this did not constitute it a precedent in the city or realm of Rome. If one would find fault with the results of this act, it must rather be on the ground that the Romans made Romulus a god in spite of his perpetrating this iniquity; for one cannot reproach them with making this deed any kind of precedent for the rape of women. Again, I presume it was due to this natural equity and virtue, that after the expulsion of King Tarquin, whose son had violated Lucretia, Junius Brutus the consul forced Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, Lucretia's husband and his own colleague, a good and innocent man, to resign his office and go into banishment, on the one sole charge that he was of the name and blood of the Tarquins. This injustice was perpetrated with the approval, or at least connivance, of the people, who had themselves raised to the consular office both Collatinus and Brutus. Another instance of this equity and virtue is found in their treatment of Marcus Camillus. This eminent man, after he had rapidly conquered the Veians, at that time the most formidable of Rome's enemies, and who had maintained a ten years' war, in which the Roman army had suffered the usual calamities attendant on bad generalship, after he had restored security to Rome, which had begun to tremble for its safety, and after he had taken the wealthiest city of the enemy, had charges brought against him by the malice of those that envied his success, and by the insolence of the tribunes of the people; and seeing that the city bore him no gratitude for preserving it, and that he would certainly be condemned, he went into exile, and even in his absence was fined 10,000 asses. Shortly after, however, his ungrateful country had again to seek his protection from the Gauls. But I cannot now mention all the shameful and iniquitous acts with which Rome was

agitated, when the aristocracy attempted to subject the people, and the people resented their encroachments, and the advocates of either party were actuated rather by the love of victory than by any equitable or virtuous consideration.

18. What the history of Sallust reveals regarding the life of the Romans, either when straitened by anxiety or relaxed in security. I will therefore pause, and adduce the testimony of Sallust himself, whose words in praise of the Romans (that "equity and virtue prevailed among them not more by force of laws than of nature") have given occasion to this discussion. He was referring to that period immediately after the expulsion of the kings, in which the city became great in an incredibly short space of time. And yet this same writer acknowledges in the first book of his history, in the very exordium of his work, that even at that time, when a very brief interval had elapsed after the government had passed from kings to consuls, the more powerful men began to act unjustly, and occasioned the defection of the people from the patricians, and other disorders in the city. For after Sallust had stated that the Romans enjoyed greater harmony and a purer state of society between the second and third Punic wars than at any other time, and that the cause of this was not their love of good order, but their fear lest the peace they had with Carthage might be broken (this also, as we mentioned, Nasica contemplated when he opposed the destruction of Carthage, for he supposed that fear would tend to repress wickedness, and to preserve wholesome ways of living), he then goes on to say: "Yet, after the destruction of Carthage, discord, avarice, ambition, and the other vices which are commonly generated by prosperity, more than ever increased." If they "increased," and that "more than ever," then already they had appeared, and had been

increasing. And so Sallust adds this reason for what he said. "For," he says, "the oppressive measures of the powerful, and the consequent secessions of the plebs from the patricians, and other civil dissensions, had existed from the first, and affairs were administered with equity and well-tempered justice for no longer a period than the short time after the expulsion of the kings, while the city was occupied with the serious Tuscan war and Tarquin's vengeance." You see how, even in that brief period after the expulsion of the kings, fear, he acknowledges, was the cause of the interval of equity and good order. They were afraid, in fact, of the war which Tarquin waged against them, after he had been driven from the throne and the city, and had allied himself with the Tuscans. But observe what he adds: "After that, the patricians treated the people as their slaves, ordering them to be scourged or beheaded just as the kings had done, driving them from their holdings, and harshly tyrannizing over those who had no property to lose. The people, overwhelmed by these oppressive measures, and most of all by exorbitant usury, and obliged to contribute both money and personal service to the constant wars, at length took arms, and seceded to Mount Aventine and Mount Sacer, and thus obtained for themselves tribunes and protective laws. But it was only the second Punic war that put an end on both sides to discord and strife." You see what kind of men the Romans were, even so early as a few years after the expulsion of the kings; and it is of these men he says, that "equity and virtue prevailed among them not more by force of law than of nature." Now, if these were the days in which the Roman republic shows fairest and best, what are we to say or think of the succeeding age, when, to use the words of the same historian, "changing little by little from the fair and virtuous city it was, it became utterly wicked

and dissolute?" This was, as he mentions, after the destruction of Carthage. Sallust's brief sum and sketch of this period may be read in his own history, in which he shows how the profligate manners which were propagated by prosperity resulted at last even in civil wars. He says: "And from this time the primitive manners, instead of undergoing an insensible alteration as hitherto they had done, were swept away as by a torrent: the young men were so depraved by luxury and avarice, that it may justly be said that no father had a son who could either preserve his own patrimony, or keep his hands off other men's." Sallust adds a number of particulars about the vices of Sylla, and the debased condition of the republic in general; and other writers make similar observations, though in much less striking language. However, I suppose you now see, or at least any one who gives his attention has the means of seeing, in what a sink of iniquity that city was plunged before the advent of our heavenly King. For these things happened not only before Christ had begun to teach, but before He was even born of the Virgin. If, then, they dare not impute to their gods the grievous evils of those former times, more tolerable before the destruction of Carthage, but intolerable and dreadful after it, although it was the gods who by their malign craft instilled into the minds of men the conceptions from which such dreadful vices branched out on all sides, why do they impute these present calamities to Christ, who teaches life-giving truth, and forbids us to worship false and deceitful gods, and who, abominating and condemning with His divine authority those wicked and hurtful lusts of men, gradually withdraws His own people from a world that is corrupted by these vices, and is falling into ruins, to make of them an eternal city, whose glory rests not on the acclamations of vanity, but on the judgment of truth?

19. Of the corruption which had grown upon the Roman republic before Christ abolished the worship of the gods. Here, then, is this Roman republic, “which has changed little by little from the fair and virtuous city it was, and has become utterly wicked and dissolute.” It is not I who am the first to say this, but their own authors, from whom we learned it for a fee, and who wrote it long before the coming of Christ. You see how, before the coming of Christ, and after the destruction of Carthage, “the primitive manners, instead of undergoing insensible alteration, as hitherto they had done, were swept away as by a torrent; and how depraved by luxury and avarice the youth were.” Let them now, on their part, read to us any laws given by their gods to the Roman people, and directed against luxury and avarice. And would that they had only been silent on the subjects of chastity and modesty, and had not demanded from the people indecent and shameful practices, to which they lent a pernicious patronage by their so-called divinity. Let them read our commandments in the Prophets, Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, or Epistles; let them peruse the large number of precepts against avarice and luxury which are everywhere read to the congregations that meet for this purpose, and which strike the ear, not with the uncertain sound of a philosophical discussion, but with the thunder of God’s own oracle pealing from the clouds. And yet they do not impute to their gods the luxury and avarice, the cruel and dissolute manners, that had rendered the republic utterly wicked and corrupt, even before the coming of Christ; but whatever affliction their pride and effeminacy have exposed them to in these latter days, they furiously impute to our religion. If the kings of the earth and all their subjects, if all princes and judges of the earth, if young men and maidens, old and young, every age, and both sexes; if

they whom the Baptist addressed, the publicans and the soldiers, were all together to hearken to and observe the precepts of the Christian religion regarding a just and virtuous life, then should the republic adorn the whole earth with its own felicity, and attain in life everlasting to the pinnacle of kingly glory. But because this man listens, and that man scoffs, and most are enamoured of the blandishments of vice rather than the wholesome severity of virtue, the people of Christ, whatever be their condition—whether they be kings, princes, judges, soldiers, or provincials, rich or poor, bond or free, male or female—are enjoined to endure this earthly republic, wicked and dissolute as it is, that so they may by this endurance win for themselves an eminent place in that most holy and august assembly of angels and republic of heaven, in which the will of God is the law.

20. Of the kind of happiness and life truly delighted in by those who inveigh against the Christian religion. But the worshippers and admirers of these gods delight in imitating their scandalous iniquities, and are nowise concerned that the republic be less depraved and licentious. Only let it remain undefeated, they say, only let it flourish and abound in resources; let it be glorious by its victories, or still better, secure in peace; and what matters it to us? This is our concern, that every man be able to increase his wealth so as to supply his daily prodigalities, and so that the powerful may subject the weak for their own purposes. Let the poor court the rich for a living, and that under their protection they may enjoy a sluggish tranquillity; and let the rich abuse the poor as their dependants, to minister to their pride. Let the people applaud not those who protect their interests, but those who provide them with pleasure. Let no severe duty be commanded, no impurity forbidden. Let kings estimate

their prosperity, not by the righteousness, but by the servility of their subjects. Let the provinces stand loyal to the kings, not as moral guides, but as lords of their possessions and purveyors of their pleasures; not with a hearty reverence, but a crooked and servile fear. Let the laws take cognizance rather of the injury done to another man's property, than of that done to one's own person. If a man be a nuisance to his neighbour, or injure his property, family, or person, let him be actionable; but in his own affairs let every one with impunity do what he will in company with his own family, and with those who willingly join him. Let there be a plentiful supply of public prostitutes for every one who wishes to use them, but specially for those who are too poor to keep one for their private use. Let there be erected houses of the largest and most ornate description: in these let there be provided the most sumptuous banquets, where every one who pleases may, by day or night, play, drink, vomit, dissipate. Let there be everywhere heard the rustling of dancers, the loud, immodest laughter of the theatre; let a succession of the most cruel and the most voluptuous pleasures maintain a perpetual excitement. If such happiness is distasteful to any, let him be branded as a public enemy; and if any attempt to modify or put an end to it, let him be silenced, banished, put an end to. Let these be reckoned the true gods, who procure for the people this condition of things, and preserve it when once possessed. Let them be worshipped as they wish; let them demand whatever games they please, from or with their own worshippers; only let them secure that such felicity be not imperilled by foe, plague, or disaster of any kind. What sane man would compare a republic such as this, I will not say to the Roman empire, but to the palace of Sardanapalus, the ancient king who was so abandoned to pleasures, that he

caused it to be inscribed on his tomb, that now that he was dead, he possessed only those things which he had swallowed and consumed by his appetites while alive? If these men had such a king as this, who, while self-indulgent, should lay no severe restraint on them, they would more enthusiastically consecrate to him a temple and a flamen than the ancient Romans did to Romulus.

21. Cicero's opinion of the Roman republic. But if our adversaries do not care how foully and disgracefully the Roman republic be stained by corrupt practices, so long only as it holds together and continues in being, and if they therefore pooh-pooh the testimony of Sallust to its "utterly wicked and profligate" condition, what will they make of Cicero's statement, that even in his time it had become entirely extinct, and that there remained extant no Roman republic at all? He introduces Scipio (the Scipio who had destroyed Carthage) discussing the republic, at a time when already there were presentiments of its speedy ruin by that corruption which Sallust describes. In fact, at the time when the discussion took place, one of the Gracchi, who, according to Sallust, was the first great instigator of seditions, had already been put to death. His death, indeed, is mentioned in the same book. Now Scipio, in the end of the second book, says: "As, among the different sounds which proceed from lyres, flutes, and the human voice, there must be maintained a certain harmony which a cultivated ear cannot endure to hear disturbed or jarring, but which may be elicited in full and absolute concord by the modulation even of voices very unlike one another; so, where reason is allowed to modulate the diverse elements of the state, there is obtained a perfect concord from the upper, lower, and middle classes as from various sounds; and what musicians call harmony in singing, is concord in matters of state, which is the strictest bond and best

security of any republic, and which by no ingenuity can be retained where justice has become extinct." Then, when he had expatiated somewhat more fully, and had more copiously illustrated the benefits of its presence and the ruinous effects of its absence upon a state, Pilus, one of the company present at the discussion, struck in and demanded that the question should be more thoroughly sifted, and that the subject of justice should be freely discussed for the sake of ascertaining what truth there was in the maxim which was then becoming daily more current, that "the republic cannot be governed without injustice." Scipio expressed his willingness to have this maxim discussed and sifted, and gave it as his opinion that it was baseless, and that no progress could be made in discussing the republic unless it was established, not only that this maxim, that "the republic cannot be governed without injustice," was false, but also that the truth is, that it cannot be governed without the most absolute justice. And the discussion of this question, being deferred till the next day, is carried on in the third book with great animation. For Pilus himself undertook to defend the position that the republic cannot be governed without injustice, at the same time being at special pains to clear himself of any real participation in that opinion. He advocated with great keenness the cause of injustice against justice, and endeavoured by plausible reasons and examples to demonstrate that the former is beneficial, the latter useless, to the republic. Then, at the request of the company, Lælius attempted to defend justice, and strained every nerve to prove that nothing is so hurtful to a state as injustice; and that without justice a republic can neither be governed, nor even continue to exist. When this question has been handled to the satisfaction of the company, Scipio reverts to the original thread of discourse, and repeats

with commendation his own brief definition of a republic, that it is the weal of the people. "The people" he defines as being not every assemblage or mob, but an assemblage associated by a common acknowledgment of law, and by a community of interests. Then he shows the use of definition in debate; and from these definitions of his own he gathers that a republic, or "weal of the people," then exists only when it is well and justly governed, whether by a monarch, or an aristocracy, or by the whole people. But when the monarch is unjust, or, as the Greeks say, a tyrant; or the aristocrats are unjust, and form a faction; or the people themselves are unjust, and become, as Scipio for want of a better name calls them, themselves the tyrant, then the republic is not only blemished (as had been proved the day before), but by legitimate deduction from those definitions, it altogether ceases to be. For it could not be the people's weal when a tyrant factiously lorded it over the state; neither would the people be any longer a people if it were unjust, since it would no longer answer the definition of a people—"an assemblage associated by a common acknowledgment of law, and by a community of interests." When, therefore, the Roman republic was such as Sallust described it, it was not "utterly wicked and profligate," as he says, but had altogether ceased to exist, if we are to admit the reasoning of that debate maintained on the subject of the republic by its best representatives. Tully himself, too, speaking not in the person of Scipio or any one else, but uttering his own sentiments, uses the following language in the beginning of the fifth book, after quoting a line from the poet Ennius, in which he said, "Rome's severe morality and her citizens are her safeguard." "This verse," says Cicero, "seems to me to have all the sententious truthfulness of an oracle. For neither would the citizens have availed without the

morality of the community, nor would the morality of the commons without outstanding men have availed either to establish or so long to maintain in vigour so grand a republic with so wide and just an empire. Accordingly, before our day, the hereditary usages formed our foremost men, and they on their part retained the usages and institutions of their fathers. But our age, receiving the republic as a chef-d'œuvre of another age which has already begun to grow old, has not merely neglected to restore the colours of the original, but has not even been at the pains to preserve so much as the general outline and most outstanding features. For what survives of that primitive morality which the poet called Rome's safeguard? It is so obsolete and forgotten, that, far from practising it, one does not even know it. And of the citizens what shall I say? Morality has perished through poverty of great men; a poverty for which we must not only assign a reason, but for the guilt of which we must answer as criminals charged with a capital crime. For it is through our vices, and not by any mishap, that we retain only the name of a republic, and have long since lost the reality."

This is the confession of Cicero, long indeed after the death of Africanus, whom he introduced as an interlocutor in his work *De Republica*, but still before the coming of Christ. Yet, if the disasters he bewails had been lamented after the Christian religion had been diffused, and had begun to prevail, is there a man of our adversaries who would not have thought that they were to be imputed to the Christians? Why, then, did their gods not take steps then to prevent the decay and extinction of that republic, over the loss of which Cicero, long before Christ had come in the flesh, sings so lugubrious a dirge? Its admirers have need to inquire whether, even in the days of primitive men and

morals, true justice flourished in it; or was it not perhaps even then, to use the casual expression of Cicero, rather a coloured painting than the living reality? But, if God will, we shall consider this elsewhere. For I mean in its own place to show that—according to the definitions in which Cicero himself, using Scipio as his mouthpiece, briefly propounded what a republic is, and what a people is, and according to many testimonies, both of his own lips and of those who took part in that same debate—Rome never was a republic, because true justice had never a place in it. But accepting the more feasible definitions of a republic, I grant there was a republic of a certain kind, and certainly much better administered by the more ancient Romans than by their modern representatives. But the fact is, true justice has no existence save in that republic whose founder and ruler is Christ, if at least any choose to call this a republic; and indeed we cannot deny that it is the people's weal. But if perchance this name, which has become familiar in other connections, be considered alien to our common parlance, we may at all events say that in this city is true justice; the city of which Holy Scripture says, "Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God." 22. That the Roman gods never took any steps to prevent the republic from being ruined by immorality. But what is relevant to the present question is this, that however admirable our adversaries say the republic was or is, it is certain that by the testimony of their own most learned writers it had become, long before the coming of Christ, utterly wicked and dissolute, and indeed had no existence, but had been destroyed by profligacy. To prevent this, surely these guardian gods ought to have given precepts of morals and a rule of life to the people by whom they were worshipped in so many temples, with so great a variety of priests and sacrifices, with such numberless and diverse rites, so many festal solemnities, so many celebrations of magnificent games. But in all this the demons only looked

after their own interest, and cared not at all how their worshippers lived, or rather were at pains to induce them to lead an abandoned life, so long as they paid these tributes to their honour, and regarded them with fear. If any one denies this, let him produce, let him point to, let him read the laws which the gods had given against sedition, and which the Gracchi transgressed when they threw everything into confusion; or those Marius, and Cinna, and Carbo broke when they involved their country in civil wars, most iniquitous and unjustifiable in their causes, cruelly conducted, and yet more cruelly terminated; or those which Sylla scorned, whose life, character, and deeds, as described by Sallust and other historians, are the abhorrence of all mankind. Who will deny that at that time the republic had become extinct? Possibly they will be bold enough to suggest in defence of the gods, that they abandoned the city on account of the profligacy of the citizens, according to the lines of Virgil: "Gone from each fane, each sacred shrine, Are those who made this realm divine." But, firstly, if it be so, then they cannot complain against the Christian religion, as if it were that which gave offence to the gods and caused them to abandon Rome, since the Roman immorality had long ago driven from the altars of the city a cloud of little gods, like as many flies. And yet where was this host of divinities, when, long before the corruption of the primitive morality, Rome was taken and burnt by the Gauls? Perhaps they were present, but asleep? For at that time the whole city fell into the hands of the enemy, with the single exception of the Capitoline hill; and this too would have been taken, had not—the watchful geese aroused the sleeping gods! And this gave occasion to the festival of the goose, in which Rome sank nearly to the superstition of the Egyptians, who worship beasts and birds. But of these adventitious evils which are inflicted by hostile armies or by some disaster, and which attach rather to the body than the soul, I am not meanwhile disputing. At

present I speak of the decay of morality, which at first almost imperceptibly lost its brilliant hue, but afterwards was wholly obliterated, was swept away as by a torrent, and involved the republic in such disastrous ruin, that though the houses and walls remained standing, the leading writers do not scruple to say that the republic was destroyed. Now, the departure of the gods "from each fane, each sacred shrine," and their abandonment of the city to destruction, was an act of justice, if their laws inculcating justice and a moral life had been held in contempt by that city. But what kind of gods were these, pray, who declined to live with a people who worshipped them, and whose corrupt life they had done nothing to reform? 23. That the vicissitudes of this life are dependent not on the favour or hostility of demons, but on the will of the true God. But, further, is it not obvious that the gods have abetted the fulfilment of men's desires, instead of authoritatively bridling them? For Marius, a low-born and self-made man, who ruthlessly provoked and conducted civil wars, was so effectually aided by them, that he was seven times consul, and died full of years in his seventh consulship, escaping the hands of Sylla, who immediately afterwards came into power. Why, then, did they not also aid him, so as to restrain him from so many enormities? For if it is said that the gods had no hand in his success, this is no trivial admission, that a man can attain the dearly coveted felicity of this life even though his own gods be not propitious; that men can be loaded with the gifts of fortune as Marius was, can enjoy health, power, wealth, honours, dignity, length of days, though the gods be hostile to him; and that, on the other hand, men can be tormented as Regulus was, with captivity, bondage, destitution, watchings, pain, and cruel death, though the gods be his friends. To concede this is to make a compendious confession that the gods are useless, and their worship superfluous. If the gods have taught the people rather what goes clean counter to the virtues of the

soul, and that integrity of life which meets a reward after death; if even in respect of temporal and transitory blessings they neither hurt those whom they hate nor profit whom they love, why are they worshipped, why are they invoked with such eager homage? Why do men murmur in difficult and sad emergencies, as if the gods had retired in anger? and why, on their account, is the Christian religion injured by the most unworthy calumnies? If in temporal matters they have power either for good or for evil, why did they stand by Marius, the worst of Rome's citizens, and abandon Regulus, the best? Does this not prove themselves to be most unjust and wicked? And even if it be supposed that for this very reason they are the rather to be feared and worshipped, this is a mistake; for we do not read that Regulus worshipped them less assiduously than Marius. Neither is it apparent that a wicked life is to be chosen, on the ground that the gods are supposed to have favoured Marius more than Regulus. For Metellus, the most highly esteemed of all the Romans, who had five sons in the consulship, was prosperous even in this life; and Catiline, the worst of men, reduced to poverty and defeated in the war his own guilt had aroused, lived and perished miserably. Real and secure felicity is the peculiar possession of those who worship that God by whom alone it can be conferred. It is thus apparent, that when the republic was being destroyed by profligate manners, its gods did nothing to hinder its destruction by the direction or correction of its manners, but rather accelerated its destruction by increasing the demoralization and corruption that already existed. They need not pretend that their goodness was shocked by the iniquity of the city, and that they withdrew in anger. For they were there, sure enough; they are detected, convicted: they were equally unable to break silence so as to guide others, and to keep silence so as to conceal themselves. I do not dwell on the fact that the inhabitants of Minturnæ took pity on Marius,

and commended him to the goddess Marica in her grove, that she might give him success in all things, and that from the abyss of despair in which he then lay he forthwith returned unhurt to Rome, and entered the city the ruthless leader of a ruthless army; and they who wish to know how bloody was his victory, how unlike a citizen, and how much more relentlessly than any foreign foe he acted, let them read the histories. But this, as I said, I do not dwell upon; nor do I attribute the bloody bliss of Marius to, I know not what Minturnian goddess [Marica], but rather to the secret providence of God, that the mouths of our adversaries might be shut, and that they who are not led by passion, but by prudent consideration of events, might be delivered from error. And even if the demons have any power in these matters, they have only that power which the secret decree of the Almighty allots to them, in order that we may not set too great store by earthly prosperity, seeing it is oftentimes vouchsafed even to wicked men like Marius; and that we may not, on the other hand, regard it as an evil, since we see that many good and pious worshippers of the one true God are, in spite of the demons, pre-eminently successful; and, finally, that we may not suppose that these unclean spirits are either to be propitiated or feared for the sake of earthly blessings or calamities: for as wicked men on earth cannot do all they would, so neither can these demons, but only in so far as they are permitted by the decree of Him whose judgments are fully comprehensible, justly reprehensible by none. 24. Of the deeds of Sylla, in which the demons boasted that he had their help. It is certain that Sylla—whose rule was so cruel, that, in comparison with it, the preceding state of things which he came to avenge was regretted—when first he advanced towards Rome to give battle to Marius, found the auspices so favourable when he sacrificed, that, according to Livy's account, the augur Postumius expressed his willingness to lose his head if Sylla did not, with the help of the gods,

accomplish what he designed. The gods, you see, had not departed from “every fane and sacred shrine,” since they were still predicting the issue of these affairs, and yet were taking no steps to correct Sylla himself. Their presages promised him great prosperity, but no threatenings of theirs subdued his evil passions. And then, when he was in Asia conducting the war against Mithridates, a message from Jupiter was delivered to him by Lucius Titius, to the effect that he would conquer Mithridates; and so it came to pass. And afterwards, when he was meditating a return to Rome for the purpose of avenging in the blood of the citizens injuries done to himself and his friends, a second message from Jupiter was delivered to him by a soldier of the sixth legion, to the effect that it was he who had predicted the victory over Mithridates, and that now he promised to give him power to recover the republic from his enemies, though with great bloodshed. Sylla at once inquired of the soldier what form had appeared to him; and, on his reply, recognised that it was the same as Jupiter had formerly employed to convey to him the assurance regarding the victory over Mithridates. How, then, can the gods be justified in this matter for the care they took to predict these shadowy successes, and for their negligence in correcting Sylla, and restraining him from stirring up a civil war so lamentable and atrocious, that it not merely disfigured, but extinguished, the republic? The truth is, as I have often said, and as Scripture informs us, and as the facts themselves sufficiently indicate, the demons are found to look after their own ends only, that they may be regarded and worshipped as gods, and that men may be induced to offer to them a worship which associates them with their crimes, and involves them in one common wickedness and judgment of God. Afterwards, when Sylla had come to Tarentum, and had sacrificed there, he saw on the head of the victim’s liver the likeness of a golden crown. Thereupon the same soothsayer Postumius

interpreted this to signify a signal victory, and ordered that he only should eat of the entrails. A little afterwards, the slave of a certain Lucius Pontius cried out, "I am Bellona's messenger; the victory is yours, Sylla!" Then he added that the Capitol should be burned. As soon as he had uttered this prediction he left the camp, but returned the following day more excited than ever, and shouted, "The Capitol is fired!" And fired indeed it was. This it was easy for a demon both to foresee and quickly to announce. But observe, as relevant to our subject, what kind of gods they are under whom these men desire to live, who blaspheme the Saviour that delivers the wills of the faithful from the dominion of devils. The man cried out in prophetic rapture, "The victory is yours, Sylla!" And to certify that he spoke by a divine spirit, he predicted also an event which was shortly to happen, and which indeed did fall out, in a place from which he in whom this spirit was speaking was far distant. But he never cried, Forbear thy villanies, Sylla!—the villanies which were committed at Rome by that victor to whom a golden crown on the calf's liver had been shown as the divine evidence of his victory. If such signs as this were customarily sent by just gods, and not by wicked demons, then certainly the entrails he consulted should rather have given Sylla intimation of the cruel disasters that were to befall the city and himself. For that victory was not so conducive to his exaltation to power, as it was fatal to his ambition; for by it he became so insatiable in his desires, and was rendered so arrogant and reckless by prosperity, that he may be said rather to have inflicted a moral destruction on himself than corporal destruction on his enemies. But these truly woful and deplorable calamities the gods gave him no previous hint of, neither by entrails, augury, dream, nor prediction. For they feared his amendment more than his defeat. Yea, they took good care that this glorious conqueror of his own fellow-citizens should be conquered and led captive by his own infamous

vices, and should thus be the more submissive slave of the demons themselves. 25. How powerfully the evil spirits incite men to wicked actions, by giving them the quasi-divine authority of their example. Now, who does not hereby comprehend,—unless he has preferred to imitate such gods rather than by divine grace to withdraw himself from their fellowship,—who does not see how eagerly these evil spirits strive by their example to lend, as it were, divine authority to crime? Is not this proved by the fact that they were seen in a wide plain in Campania rehearsing among themselves the battle which shortly after took place there with great bloodshed between the armies of Rome? For at first there were heard loud crashing noises, and afterwards many reported that they had seen for some days together two armies engaged. And when this battle ceased, they found the ground all indented with just such footprints of men and horses as a great conflict would leave. If, then, the deities were veritably fighting with one another, the civil wars of men are sufficiently justified; yet, by the way, let it be observed that such pugnacious gods must be very wicked or very wretched. If, however, it was but a sham-fight, what did they intend by this, but that the civil wars of the Romans should seem no wickedness, but an imitation of the gods? For already the civil wars had begun; and before this, some lamentable battles and execrable massacres had occurred. Already many had been moved by the story of the soldier, who, on stripping the spoils of his slain foe, recognised in the stripped corpse his own brother, and, with deep curses on civil wars, slew himself there and then on his brother's body. To disguise the bitterness of such tragedies, and kindle increasing ardour in this monstrous warfare, these malign demons, who were reputed and worshipped as gods, fell upon this plan of revealing themselves in a state of civil war, that no compunction for fellow-citizens might cause the Romans to shrink from such battles, but that the human criminality might be justified by

the divine example. By a like craft, too, did these evil spirits command that scenic entertainments, of which I have already spoken, should be instituted and dedicated to them. And in these entertainments the poetical compositions and actions of the drama ascribed such iniquities to the gods, that every one might safely imitate them, whether he believed the gods had actually done such things, or, not believing this, yet perceived that they most eagerly desired to be represented as having done them. And that no one might suppose, that in representing the gods as fighting with one another, the poets had slandered them, and imputed to them unworthy actions, the gods themselves, to complete the deception, confirmed the compositions of the poets by exhibiting their own battles to the eyes of men, not only through actions in the theatres, but in their own persons on the actual field. We have been forced to bring forward these facts, because their authors have not scrupled to say and to write that the Roman republic had already been ruined by the depraved moral habits of the citizens, and had ceased to exist before the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now this ruin they do not impute to their own gods, though they impute to our Christ the evils of this life, which cannot ruin good men, be they alive or dead. And this they do, though our Christ has issued so many precepts inculcating virtue and restraining vice; while their own gods have done nothing whatever to preserve that republic that served them, and to restrain it from ruin by such precepts, but have rather hastened its destruction, by corrupting its morality through their pestilent example. No one, I fancy, will now be bold enough to say that the republic was then ruined because of the departure of the gods "from each fane, each sacred shrine," as if they were the friends of virtue, and were offended by the vices of men. No, there are too many presages from entrails, auguries, soothsayings, whereby they boastingly proclaimed themselves prescient of future events and

controllers of the fortune of war,—all which prove them to have been present. And had they been indeed absent, the Romans would never in these civil wars have been so far transported by their own passions as they were by the instigations of these gods. 26. That the demons gave in secret certain obscure instructions in morals, while in public their own solemnities inculcated all wickedness. Seeing that this is so,—seeing that the filthy and cruel deeds, the disgraceful and criminal actions of the gods, whether real or feigned, were at their own request published, and were consecrated, and dedicated in their honour as sacred and stated solemnities; seeing they vowed vengeance on those who refused to exhibit them to the eyes of all, that they might be proposed as deeds worthy of imitation, why is it that these same demons, who, by taking pleasure in such obscenities, acknowledge themselves to be unclean spirits, and by delighting in their own villanies and iniquities, real or imaginary, and by requesting from the immodest, and extorting from the modest, the celebration of these licentious acts, proclaim themselves instigators to a criminal and lewd life;—why, I ask, are they represented as giving some good moral precepts to a few of their own elect, initiated in the secrecy of their shrines? If it be so, this very thing only serves further to demonstrate the malicious craft of these pestilent spirits. For so great is the influence of probity and chastity, that all men, or almost all men, are moved by the praise of these virtues; nor is any man so depraved by vice, but he hath some feeling of honour left in him. So that, unless the devil sometimes transformed himself, as Scripture says, into an angel of light, he could not compass his deceitful purpose. Accordingly, in public, a bold impurity fills the ear of the people with noisy clamour; in private, a feigned chastity speaks in scarce audible whispers to a few: an open stage is provided for shameful things, but on the praiseworthy the curtain falls: grace hides, disgrace flaunts: a wicked

deed draws an overflowing house, a virtuous speech finds scarce a hearer, as though purity were to be blushed at, impurity boasted of. Where else can such confusion reign, but in devils' temples? Where, but in the haunts of deceit? For the secret precepts are given as a sop to the virtuous, who are few in number; the wicked examples are exhibited to encourage the vicious, who are countless. Where and when those initiated in the mysteries of Cœlestis received any good instructions, we know not. What we do know is, that before her shrine, in which her image is set, and amidst a vast crowd gathering from all quarters, and standing closely packed together, we were intensely interested spectators of the games which were going on, and saw, as we pleased to turn the eye, on this side a grand display of harlots, on the other the virgin goddess: we saw this virgin worshipped with prayer and with obscene rites. There we saw no shamefaced mimes, no actress overburdened with modesty: all that the obscene rites demanded was fully complied with. We were plainly shown what was pleasing to the virgin deity, and the matron who witnessed the spectacle returned home from the temple a wiser woman. Some, indeed, of the more prudent women turned their faces from the immodest movements of the players, and learned the art of wickedness by a furtive regard. For they were restrained, by the modest demeanour due to men, from looking boldly at the immodest gestures; but much more were they restrained from condemning with chaste heart the sacred rites of her whom they adored. And yet this licentiousness—which, if practised in one's home, could only be done there in secret—was practised as a public lesson in the temple; and if any modesty remained in men, it was occupied in marvelling that wickedness which men could not unrestrainedly commit should be part of the religious teaching of the gods, and that to omit its exhibition should incur the anger of the gods. What spirit can that be, which by a hidden inspiration

stirs men's corruption, and goads them to adultery, and feeds on the full-fledged iniquity, unless it be the same that finds pleasure in such religious ceremonies, sets in the temples images of devils, and loves to see in play the images of vices; that whispers in secret some righteous sayings to deceive the few who are good, and scatters in public invitations to profligacy, to gain possession of the millions who are wicked? 27. That the obscenities of those plays which the Romans consecrated in order to propitiate their gods, contributed largely to the overthrow of public order. Cicero, a weighty man, and a philosopher in his way, when about to be made edile, wished the citizens to understand that, among the other duties of his magistracy, he must propitiate Flora by the celebration of games. And these games are reckoned devout in proportion to their lewdness. In another place, and when he was now consul, and the state in great peril, he says that games had been celebrated for ten days together, and that nothing had been omitted which could pacify the gods: as if it had not been more satisfactory to irritate the gods by temperance, than to pacify them by debauchery; and to provoke their hate by honest living, than soothe it by such unseemly grossness. For no matter how cruel was the ferocity of those men who were threatening the state, and on whose account the gods were being propitiated: it could not have been more hurtful than the alliance of gods who were won with the foulest vices. To avert the danger which threatened men's bodies, the gods were conciliated in a fashion that drove virtue from their spirits; and the gods did not enrol themselves as defenders of the battlements against the besiegers, until they had first stormed and sacked the morality of the citizens. This propitiation of such divinities,—a propitiation so wanton, so impure, so immodest, so wicked, so filthy, whose actors the innate and praiseworthy virtue of the Romans disabled from civic honours, erased from their tribe, recognised as polluted and made infamous;—this

propitiation, I say, so foul, so detestable, and alien from every religious feeling, these fabulous and ensnaring accounts of the criminal actions of the gods, these scandalous actions which they either shamefully and wickedly committed, or more shamefully and wickedly feigned, all this the whole city learned in public both by the words and gestures of the actors. They saw that the gods delighted in the commission of these things, and therefore believed that they wished them not only to be exhibited to them, but to be imitated by themselves. But as for that good and honest instruction which they speak of, it was given in such secrecy, and to so few (if indeed given at all), that they seemed rather to fear it might be divulged, than that it might not be practised. 28. That the Christian religion is health-giving. They, then, are but abandoned and ungrateful wretches, in deep and fast bondage to that malign spirit, who complain and murmur that men are rescued by the name of Christ from the hellish thralldom of these unclean spirits, and from a participation in their punishment, and are brought out of the night of pestilential ungodliness into the light of most healthful piety. Only such men could murmur that the masses flock to the churches and their chaste acts of worship, where a seemly separation of the sexes is observed; where they learn how they may so spend this earthly life, as to merit a blessed eternity hereafter; where Holy Scripture and instruction in righteousness are proclaimed from a raised platform in presence of all, that both they who do the word may hear to their salvation, and they who do it not may hear to judgment. And though some enter who scoff at such precepts, all their petulance is either quenched by a sudden change, or is restrained through fear or shame. For no filthy and wicked action is there set forth to be gazed at or to be imitated; but either the precepts of the true God are recommended, His miracles narrated, His gifts praised, or His benefits implored.

29. An exhortation to the Romans to renounce paganism. This, rather, is the religion worthy of your desires, O admirable Roman race,—the progeny of your Scævolas and Scipios, of Regulus, and of Fabricius. This rather covet, this distinguish from that foul vanity and crafty malice of the devils. If there is in your nature any eminent virtue, only by true piety is it purged and perfected, while by impiety it is wrecked and punished. Choose now what you will pursue, that your praise may be not in yourself, but in the true God, in whom is no error. For of popular glory you have had your share; but by the secret providence of God, the true religion was not offered to your choice. Awake, it is now day; as you have already awaked in the persons of some in whose perfect virtue and sufferings for the true faith we glory: for they, contending on all sides with hostile powers, and conquering them all by bravely dying, have purchased for us this country of ours with their blood; to which country we invite you, and exhort you to add yourselves to the number of the citizens of this city, which also has a sanctuary of its own in the true remission of sins. Do not listen to those degenerate sons of thine who slander Christ and Christians, and impute to them these disastrous times, though they desire times in which they may enjoy rather impunity for their wickedness than a peaceful life. Such has never been Rome's ambition even in regard to her earthly country. Lay hold now on the celestial country, which is easily won, and in which you will reign truly and for ever. For there shalt thou find no vestal fire, no Capitoline stone, but the one true God "No date, no goal will here ordain: But grant an endless, boundless reign." No longer, then, follow after false and deceitful gods; abjure them rather, and despise them, bursting forth into true liberty. Gods they are not, but malignant spirits, to whom your eternal happiness will be a sore

punishment. Juno, from whom you deduce your origin according to the flesh, did not so bitterly grudge Rome's citadels to the Trojans, as these devils whom yet ye repute gods, grudge an everlasting seat to the race of mankind. And thou thyself hast in no wavering voice passed judgment on them, when thou didst pacify them with games, and yet didst account as infamous the men by whom the plays were acted. Suffer us, then, to assert thy freedom against the unclean spirits who had imposed on thy neck the yoke of celebrating their own shame and filthiness. The actors of these divine crimes thou hast removed from offices of honour; supplicate the true God, that He may remove from thee those gods who delight in their crimes,—a most disgraceful thing if the crimes are really theirs, and a most malicious invention if the crimes are feigned. Well done, in that thou hast spontaneously banished from the number of your citizens all actors and players. Awake more fully: the majesty of God cannot be propitiated by that which defiles the dignity of man. How, then, can you believe that gods who take pleasure in such lewd plays, belong to the number of the holy powers of heaven, when the men by whom these plays are acted are by yourselves refused admission into the number of Roman citizens even of the lowest grade? Incomparably more glorious than Rome, is that heavenly city in which for victory you have truth; for dignity, holiness; for peace, felicity; for life, eternity. Much less does it admit into its society such gods, if thou dost blush to admit into thine such men. Wherefore, if thou wouldst attain to the blessed city, shun the society of devils. They who are propitiated by deeds of shame, are unworthy of the worship of right-hearted men. Let these, then, be obliterated from your worship by the cleansing of the Christian religion, as those men were blotted from your citizenship by the

editor's mark. But, so far as regards carnal benefits, which are the only blessings the wicked desire to enjoy, and carnal miseries, which alone they shrink from enduring, we will show in the following book that the demons have not the power they are supposed to have; and although they had it, we ought rather on that account to despise these blessings, than for the sake of them to worship those gods, and by worshipping them to miss the attainment of these blessings they grudge us. But that they have not even this power which is ascribed to them by those who worship them for the sake of temporal advantages, this, I say, I will prove in the following book; so let us here close the present argument.

