

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN

ON FLIGHT FROM THE
WORLD

De Fuga Saeculi

SABBATISMUS

Saint Ambrose of Milan (340–397)
De Fuga Saeculi · On Flight from the World

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[ON FLEEING THE WORLD.]

NOTICE ON THE BOOK "ON FLEEING THE WORLD."

This book has occupied various positions among the Ambrosian works. Indeed, in the manuscripts and in the most ancient editions, it holds the place immediately following the books *On Isaac* and *On the Good of Death*. However, when Erasmus chose to distribute all of Ambrose's monuments into certain classes, he grouped it with the preceding treatise *On the Good of Death* in the order of ethical works after the books *On Duties* and *On Virgins*, in which he was later imitated by Costerius and Gillotius. Finally, those who presided over the Roman edition, thinking this very book to be nothing other than a mystical exposition of the passage in Genesis where Rebecca persuades her son Jacob to flee to Mesopotamia (Chap. XXVII, 43), transferred it to follow the commentary *On Jacob* and the *Happy Life*. But they leaned upon an inadequate support. For although the Holy Prelate mentions that flight of Jacob more than once, it was never his intention to elaborate an explanation on that passage of Scripture; nor does he use the example of this patriarch otherwise than that of certain other eminent men whom he proposes for the purpose of more effectively stimulating the sending of an eternal message to the world. Therefore, having discussed this book with a more attentive examination, we have restored it to its former place; and this all the more willingly, because it should only be placed before the disputation *On*

Jacob and the Happy Life which it followed in the Roman edition: from which change no confusion can arise. And yet, not only the authority of the manuscripts and ancient editions impelled us to this, but much more the kinship of the material, which joins it with the preceding treatises. Why not also the testimony of Ambrose himself? For when he speaks thus at the very threshold of the book: "Our discourse is frequent concerning the fleeing of this world," we have no doubt that he silently indicates in some way the treatises On Abraham, On Isaac and the Soul, and On the Good of Death; since he more urgently exhorts his auditors or readers to the flight of the world and its vanities in all these, and especially in this last one, where three chapters are consumed in that matter, as has been observed by us in the preceding notices.

This is demonstrated by the entire structure of this little book. For it was shown by us above that the Holy Prelate, in his sermons and treatises, most diligently imbued the competent Catechumens with all the precepts of the Christian life: but that he inculcated with a certain special care how much they were bound to flee the vanities of the world. Indeed, his solicitude was not closed within these narrow bounds. For he thought it to be especially his duty to confirm them in the doctrine which they had already learned while he was teaching, after they had received baptism. Wherefore, from the very beginning of this writing he shows (Chap. 1, n. 1 and seq.) how prone human frailty and desire are to slide

back gradually into worldly follies: how arduous it is to persevere in a holy purpose; and therefore they must strive with hands and feet, as if in an untiring race, to flee vanities and, placed above them, to contend unceasingly for perfection. He proves that nothing else was signified (Chap. 2, 3, and beginning of 4) in the old law by those six cities of refuge which were open to those guilty of involuntary homicide: in which matter he dwells longer than privately in any other. Then he declares (Chap. 4, num. 17) in what this flight consists; and he proves how glorious, useful, and necessary the same is for them, by the examples of the Patriarchs, Prophets, the Apostle, and even of Christ the Lord Himself (Chap. 4, num. 19 and 20), but that it must be swift (Chap. 6, num. 32). He teaches (Ibid.) that its course and goal is the highest and unchangeable good, that is, God Himself; and therefore they ought to be more sharply excited by no other stimulus (Chap. 7, num. 37 and seq.) to escape from the world, where by divine permission sin and malice have persisted until now, and from where Christ Himself did not wish to extirpate those things, although He condemned their author, the devil.

But since it could be objected to him by those new Christians that they were bound by certain chains through which it was in no way permitted for them to flee from the world; he opens to them (Chap. 8, num. 45 and seq.) the reason why, not deserting the world in body, they could fly away from it in spirit, adhere to God alone, observe His precepts, and seize every opportunity to progress

further in the way of virtue. Finally, he places a crowning touch to this disputation by exhorting most vehemently and eloquently (Chap. 9, num. 51 and seq.) that they should not enter into any future society with the world to which they had once in baptism declared a solemn divorce so that it might have its own affairs, persuaded of course that in themselves no longer the old man ought to appear, but that new life which they had received in the generating fount where, having died together with Christ, they at the same time also revived with Him. Furthermore, if it is clear from the epilogue of the work that Ambrose had a discourse for men recently initiated by baptism, the same is no less manifest both from its beginning (Chap. 1, 7, 8) and from the middle. And yet, this very thing, no less than the other parts of the same commentary, shows clearer than midday light that it consists of sermons, or rather of one sermon, which he undoubtedly pronounced during the paschal feasts around the year 387, in which we observed the preceding books to have been composed. Whether, however, the title *On Fleeing the World* was given to this same little book by Ambrose, the authority of Augustine, by whom it is so praised (Lib. II, cont. Julian. Pelag., c. 8; and lib. IV cont. duas Epist. Pel., cap. 11), does not allow it to be placed in controversy. It should not be concealed, however, that in some manuscripts it is found inscribed *On Esau and the Flight of the World*. But what gave occasion to the addition, we do not see at all. We must therefore stand by the now received inscription.

Although Hagar the fugitive provided the subject for Philo's book *On Fugitives*, the Holy Prelate nevertheless used his help profitably in several places, as for example where he treats of the patriarchs Jacob and Joseph (Chap. 4 and 8), and of the six cities of refuge (Chap. 2 and others). Here, however, you will notice two things not unworthy of being observed; one indeed which has already been noted by us, namely that Ambrose converted whatever he borrowed from that Jew into Christian uses, and confirmed it by various reasons and testimonies sought from the New Testament: the other truly is that the reason why the same Prelate so willingly drew from the commentaries of Philo was this, that evidently many heads of that doctrine could be reduced with easy labor to the tenets of the Christian religion; of which thing indeed a most clear example is supplied by what is discussed in this book (Chap. 2 and 3) concerning the divine Word.

SAINT AMBROSE, BISHOP OF MILAN, ONE
BOOK ON FLEEING THE WORLD. (C)

417 CHAPTER ONE.

That man cannot flee earthly allurements and desires unless divine protection be present. How many impediments he suffers from the senses; and how it is necessary for him to prefer sad things to joyful ones, since in these nothing but vanity is found. Finally, that he who wishes to be saved must ascend above the world.

1. Our discourse is frequent concerning the fleeing of this world (See S. August. lib. II contr. Jul. Pelag., cap. 8, and lib. contr. duas epist. Pel., cap. 11); and would that the affection were as cautious and solicitous as the discourse is easy. But what is worse, the desire of earthly allurements frequently creeps in, and an outpouring of vanities occupies the mind; so that what you strive to avoid, this you think of and revolve in your soul: which is difficult for a man to beware of, but impossible to cast off. Finally, the Prophet testifies that it is more a matter of a vow than of an effect, by saying: Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to avarice (Ps. CXVIII, 36). For our heart and our thoughts are not in our power, which, having been poured out unexpectedly, confound the mind and soul, and draw them elsewhere than you have proposed; they recall them to secular things, insert worldly things, bring in pleasurable things, weave in alluring things; and in the very time in which we prepare to elevate the mind, by inserting empty thoughts, we are for the most part cast down to earthly things.

2. Who, moreover, is so blessed as to always ascend in his heart? But how can this be done without divine help? In no way, surely. Finally, the Scripture says above: Blessed is the man whose help is from thee, O Lord; the ascents are in his heart (Psal. LXXXIII, 6). Blessed clearly is he whom delight does not recall, whom pleasure does not incline, who does not look back to lower things; which not even Lot's own wife could escape. 418 Admonished by which example, the

Apostle, forgetting the things that are behind, and desiring those things which are before, was hastening to the prize, and deserved to arrive; because he saw Christ before him, by whom he was called to the crown of justice. But he arrived who denied himself, so that he might gain Christ. Finally, he himself did not live, but Christ lived in him.

3. For who, among so many passions of this body, among so many allurements of this world, can keep a safe and untainted footstep? The eye looked, and turned away the sense of the mind: the ear heard, and bent the intention: the odor inhaled, and impeded the thought: the mouth tasted, and brought back a crime: the touch felt, and kindled a fire. Death entered through the window, said the Prophet (Jer. IX, 21). Your window is your eye. If you see a woman to lust after her, death has entered: if you hear meretricious discourses, death has entered: if luxury should capture your senses, death has penetrated. And therefore he who wishes to ascend, let him follow not the joyful things of the world, not the pleasant things, not the delectable things, but those full of sorrow and weeping; for it is better to go into the house of mourning, than into the house of joy. Finally, neither would Adam have descended from paradise, unless he had been deceived by delight.

4. Beautifully, therefore, David, who had experienced the dangerous sights of man himself, calls that man blessed whose whole hope is in the name of God (Psal. XXXIX, 5). For thus

he does not look back to vanities and false mad-
nesses, if he always intends upon Christ, always
looks upon Christ with his interior eyes. Whence,
turned again to Him, he says: Turn away my
eyes, that they see not vanity (Ps. CXVIII, 37).
The circus is vanity, because it profits nothing:
the speed of horses is vanity, because it is lying
for salvation: the theater is vanity: every game
is vanity: All things are vanity, says Ecclesiastes,
which are in this world (Eccles. I, 2). Finally, he
who wishes to be saved, let him ascend above the
world, let him seek the Word with God, let him
flee this world, let him leave the lands. 419 For
he cannot perceive that which is, and is always,
unless he first flee from here. Whence also the
Lord, wishing to approach God the Father, said to
the apostles: Rise, let us go hence (John XIV, 31).

CHAPTER II.

That the fleeing of the world is taught by the
law concerning the cities of refuge, of which four
things are discussed; first, why they were chosen
from the portion of the Levites: second, why six in
number: third, why three of them beyond the Jor-
dan, and as many in the land of Canaan: fourth,
why the homicide is ordered there to expect the
death of the high priest. All of which are accom-
modated to various virtues.

5. The law also teaches you that the world
must be fled, and God followed. For what else
does it teach when it says: You shall appoint
for yourselves cities for refuge, and they shall
be refuges for you, whither every homicide may

flee who has struck a soul unwillingly (Num. XXXV, 11)? And below: Six cities for refuges shall be for you, three cities you shall give beyond the Jordan, and three cities you shall give in the land of Canaan (Ibid., 13 and 14)? Openly indeed these refuges were proposed for those fleeing this crime of homicide. But let us consider more deeply. There are four things which warn that the secrets of this reading are to be looked into more profoundly. One, for what reason from these cities which fell to the Levites in their portion by lot, six cities were given for refuge to those laboring under the crime of homicide, and why the cities of the other tribes were not also deputed to this task. Second, for what reason six in number; for not idly does this number seem to be prescribed, neither of more nor of fewer cities. Third, why three cities were disposed beyond the Jordan, and three in the Canaanite region, which would be for refuge to those sinning. Fourth, why the enumeration and definition of time has been included, within which the homicide shall dwell in the city of refuge, until the high priest dies, and after the death of the high priest the homicide shall return to the city of his habitation (Ibid., 25). Concerning each, therefore, it is necessary to speak, and to resolve the questions in the order in which we have proposed them.

6. Fittingly, therefore, it must first be explained that the cities of the Levites were given for refuge. For it is clear that it was congruously provided; because the Levites are fugitives from this world, so that they may please God, they

leave their country, parents, children, all kinship, that they may adhere to God alone. Finally, it was also said to Abraham: Go out from your land, and from your kinship, and from the house of your father (Gen. XII, 1). But perhaps you say: He was not a Levite. But he had Levi in his loins, as we read written to the Hebrews (Hebr. VII, 10). And the Lord says to the Levites, when he says to his disciples, that is, to the apostles: If anyone 420 wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Luke IX, 23). Although it has already been said to all: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for adoption (I Pet. II, 9). The fullness came, the remnants ceased. For Christ called all; it is certainly open to all, so that all may follow; for all the kingdom is proposed, and eternal life.

7. Therefore, he for whom God is his portion (12, quaest. 1, c. Cui portio), ought to care for nothing but God, lest he be impeded by the duty of another necessity. For what is conferred upon other offices, this is plucked from the worship of religion, and from this our office. For this is the true flight of a priest, the abdication of domestic affairs, and a certain alienation of the dearest ones; so that he who desires to serve God may also deny himself to his own. Rightly, therefore, did the sanction of the eternal law commend fugitives to fugitives; so that those who have forgotten this world may receive those who, condemning their own sins and works, seek forgetfulness of their former life, and desire to abolish

the secular things they have done. A minister of His holy altar, therefore, is a fugitive from his own. Whence the Lord, as if the prince of priests, giving a pattern to the Levites in His Gospel, said: Who is my mother, or who are my brothers? (Matth. XII, 48). That is, I do not acknowledge a mother, I do not recognize brothers, I ignore neighbors. My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it (Ibid., 50). A minister, therefore, knows only the word of God, since he knows those in whom the Word of God operates. And therefore he is an exile from the world, a fugitive from the body, a fugitive from passions, he abdicates all things for himself, so that he may remain alone, as Elijah said: And I am left alone (III Kings XIX, 14). But he was not alone with whom Christ was. And the Lord Himself was left alone: But I am not, He said, alone, because the Father is with me (John XVI, 32).

8. There is also that cause because the Levites are ministers of God. And therefore their cities are deputed by law for fleeing homicides, because to them belongs the right to execute divine mandates concerning those who have committed a mortal crime. The Church does not know how to publish her own laws. She knows how a priest should obey the Dominical command. Hear the Levite saying: I have delivered such a man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh; that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. V, 5). Struck therefore by the Levitical sword, let the sense of the flesh die in us, that our soul

may live. For unless the sense of the flesh dies, there can be no fruit of eternal life.

9. Moreover, there are six refuges of cities, so that the first city is the knowledge of the Word, and the form of living according to His image. For whoever shall have entered that knowledge is safe from punishment, according to what the Lord also said: Now you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you (John XV, 3). And elsewhere: 421 And this is eternal life, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (John XVII, 3). This, therefore, is the city like a metropolis, to which the other five cities of the Levites are adjacent. The second city, the consideration of the divine operation by which the world was created. The third city, the contemplation of royal power and eternal majesty. The fourth city, the intuition of divine propitiation. The fifth city, the contemplation of the divine law, which prescribes what must be done. The sixth city also, the portion of the law which prescribes what must not be done. How great an abundance of divine mercy, how great the riches of His piety, so that considering the pursuits of individuals and the frailties of the human condition, by which even unwilling and reluctant we are led to fault, and frequently commit non-voluntary offenses overcome by allurements, He proposes various refuges to us, namely of six cities; so that by the same number by which the world was formed, by that same number a remedy might be provided against worldly vices and the shipwrecks of this world.

10. The first remedy, therefore, is that if fault should creep into any man of good purpose, he, without any delay, if he wishes to have perfect security, should hasten to that citadel of all things, where the Word of God is in that paternal bosom, that is, in the secret and recess of God, where the fount of wisdom is, whence he may draw the immortal drink for eternal life instead of death. The second remedy is, that he who cannot pre-taste the knowledge of that good, and is slower either in talent or in the comprehension of faith; since by the swift vigor of the mind and the sharpness of talent one strives toward the heights of knowledge, let him at least consider the works of the Lord, and from these things which have been made, let him contemplate the author of so great a work; since from these goods which are in the constitution of this creature (for they are very good (Gen. I, 31), as the Lord said), that highest and eternal good is comprehended. What order of things? What discipline? What grace? Is not by these, however slow, the talent provoked to love its author? For if we love our parents because they generated us: how much more ought we to love the creator of our parents, and our author? Therefore the operative virtue of God, even if it is not seen, is yet estimated from His works, and His works bring forth the operator, so that he who is not comprehended may be understood. Whence also the Lord says: If you do not believe me: believe at least the works (John X, 38). Good therefore is also this city for refuge, which testifies to the grace of its builder, and excites our

affection, so that we may be more desirous of Him who seems to have conferred so great a beauty of this fabric upon us. The third order is the contemplation of royal power, so that we may be subjected to the king, if we do not defer honor as to a parent. For by fear of the presiding one, he who is ungrateful for salvation often becomes obedient to power; so that he may acknowledge the necessity of sobriety, who was unwilling and unable to acknowledge the grace of piety. Necessity, therefore, corrects him whom piety ought to have provoked.

11. These are the three cities beyond the Jordan, given for refuge to a more perfect prudence; so that first we may flee fault by the induction of the mind, conformable to the image of God. For thus we were created, God saying: Let us make man in our image and likeness (Gen. I, 26). This, therefore, is the law of that first city. 422 Then if through the frailty of the flesh and the allurements of the world we cannot so form our mind, let us lighten sin by reverence of paternal generation and the assiduity of offspring. For charity covers a multitude of sins. He, therefore, who could not be in the image of God, let him be in the fullness of charity. That city excludes fault, this one dissolves it. This finally is the law of the second city: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength (Deut. VI, 5). But if again there are those of narrow and minute soul, who cannot receive the abundance of charity and grace, you have the third city; so that the dread of divine power may

make you sober, and fear may bend you. And this is the third law: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve (*Ibid.*, 13). These, therefore, are the principal virtues, and therefore of few, not of more, placed above the Jordan; so that you may express as an image the archetype, love as a son the father, adore as a subject the king.

12. But those who have crossed the Jordan—moreover, the descending of Jordan is said of them—those therefore who have descended from those higher virtues to these lower things, that is, in whom integrity, charity, and humility have wavered, have refuges nearer to man which they may seek; so that those who are liable to offenses, and bent by non-voluntary vices, may hope that the Lord can be reconciled to them if they seek pardon; they may hope that they can be corrected if they follow the precepts of the heavenly Testaments, by which we are either informed toward innocence or recalled from fault. These cities within the Jordan, therefore, are following, so that we may propitiate God to ourselves, follow what He orders, and avoid what He prohibits. Let there be, therefore, the ambition of propitiating the divinity, the obedience of following what is prescribed, and the caution of declining the interdicted prevarication, by which we may venerate the propitiatory mercy of God and His nomothetic providence, either by the compliance of institutes or the declination of interdicts.

13. The fourth remains, which he says concerning the death of the high priest: Because until that time the homicide shall be in the city of refuge, until the high priest dies (Joshua XX, 6). In which, according to the letter, the interpretation sticks. First, the flight itself is defined by lot rather than by the equity of any examination: then, in equal causes, an unequal event; for it could happen that on the day following the refuge of that homicide, the high priest might die. What kind of sentence is that under uncertainty? Therefore, because the letter sticks, let us seek spiritual things. Who is this high priest, but the Son of God, the Word of God, whose advocacy we have for us with the Father, who is free from all voluntary and accidental offenses, in whom consist all things which are on earth, and which are in heaven? For all things are constrained by the bond of the Word, and are contained by His power, and consist in Him; since in Him all things were created, and in Him dwells all fullness. And therefore all things remain, because He does not allow those things which He Himself constrained to be dissolved, since they consist in His will. For all things, as long as He wishes, He coerces and rules by His command, and binds by a natural concord. The Word of God lives, therefore, and especially lives in the souls of the pious, nor does the fullness of the divinity ever die. For the eternal divinity and the eternal virtue of God never die. Surely it dies to us if it is separated from our 423 soul, not that it is corrupted by death, but that our mind is dissolved and stripped from its

conjunction with it. For the true death is the separation of the Word and the soul. Finally, the soul immediately begins to be open to voluntary sins.

CHAPTER III.

He demonstrates that the types of virtues mentioned in the previous chapter are not so much shadowed as they are expressed in the Apostle, by collecting various testimonies from the same.

14. We have these types of virtues, not shadowed but expressed in the Apostle, where he says: So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and to the Greek. For the justice of God is revealed in it, that is, in him who believes (Rom. I, 15 et seq.). Finally, he added: From faith unto faith, as it is written: But the just man liveth by faith. In whom, therefore, is the justice of God revealed, except in him who is conformed to the image of the Son of God? You have the first precept according to the image of God. Second, because His invisible things are understood through those which are made, that is, His eternal virtue and divinity are known by His works; this is the operative virtue. Third, concerning the imperial power, because the Word of God is royal, and judicial, and full of priestly justice, preserving the remuneration of good acts and the retribution of evil ones for those coming to His judgment, concerning which the Apostle

says: But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them who do such things (Rom. II, 2). And so, he who has known the truth and justice of God ought not to do those things which are worthy of death. The propitiatory goodness of God follows surely, concerning which he says: Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and longsuffering? Know thou not that the goodness of God leadeth thee to penance? (Ibid., 4)? That is, it ought to lead thee. He provokes thee, because God is good, so that thou mayest hope for the indulgence of thy sins. For He who is ready to forgive does not wish to avenge. He also subjoined the legislation, that is, the nomothetic (law-giving); so that if anyone is dissolved by the contemplation of divine goodness, and is provoked more to negligence than to penance, he may follow the law. For whosoever, he says, have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law: and whosoever have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law (Ibidem, 12).

15. Moreover, the law is twofold, natural and written. Natural in the heart: written on tablets. All, therefore, are under the law, but the natural one. But it is not for all that each one should be a law to himself. But he is a law to himself who does spontaneously those things which are of the law, and shows the work of the law written in his heart. You have what things are good of the law; which, however, we ought not only to know or hear perfunctorily, but also to do. For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the do-

ers of the law shall be justified. You have known also 424 what things are evil. First, nature itself is the mistress of a good work. You know that one must not steal, and you beat your servant if he commits a theft against you; and if anyone has affected your wife, you think he must be pursued. What, therefore, you reprehend in others, you commit yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal? You who say not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? The law followed also, which was given through Moses. But through the law is the knowledge of sin. Have you also received what you should decline, and do you do those things which you know are prohibited? But what does the law work, except that all the world should become subject to God; because it was not only brought to the Hebrew, but it also called the stranger, nor did it exclude the proselyte. But because the law could stop the mouth of all, it could not convert the mind, therefore the last remedy of that last city was owed, in which there would be a salutary refuge; so that the death of the prince of priests might free us from all dread of death, and strip us of fear (See St. Aug. book IV, against two letters of the Pelagians, chap. 11).

16. Who is that one, except him of whom it is read: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sin of the world (John I, 29). Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiator through faith in his blood to the showing of his justice (Rom. III, 25). Moreover, receive that he himself is the great prince of priests. The Father swore concerning him, saying: Thou art a priest

for ever (Ps. CIX, 4). Rightly for ever, because all other temporal ones are under sin, but this one has an unchangeable priesthood: all are under death, but this one is always living; since how could he who can save others perish himself? For such a one, he says, it behoved us (Heb. VII, 26). A correct elocution. Since even among those who had a choice of words and elocutions, such is found, someone saying: A place loftier than it behoved the victors (Sallust, book I Hist.). Which I have not passed over for this reason: so that we may know that the Apostle uses natural words rather than vulgar ones, or those according to art. For such a one, he says, it behoved us as a prince, a priest, just, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. This is therefore the Word, which dwelling above the heavens illuminates all things. Whence also he is read as anointed naturally by God the Father (Acts IV, 27); because he is the true light, which illuminates every man coming into this world. This is the Word of God, in whom is the great priesthood, whose intelligible garments Moses (Exod. XXIX, 5 et seq.) describes in that vestment of the prince of priests, which he clothed the world with by his virtue, and as if dressed in it, he shines in all things. For he clothed the kinship of the human race through the taking up of this body, and ineffable charity, pouring himself into all by the spirit and fullness of his divinity, of whose fullness we have all received; so that we may know the charity of Christ which surpasseth knowledge, and may be filled unto all the fullness

of God. For Christ is the head of all, from whom the whole body is produced, and is joined by a mutual connection to itself, receiving its increment unto the building up of charity. This is therefore the Word 425 which surpasseth, which says to Moses in the building of that ark of the testimony: Thou shalt put into the ark the testimonies whatever I shall give thee, and thou shalt make a cover of a propitiatory (Exod., XXV, 16, 17). And below: Thou shalt put the propitiatory upon the ark above, and thou shalt put the testimonies which I shall give; and I will make myself known to thee from there, and I will speak to thee from above (Ibid., 22), that is, from there where he is above the heavens, where he is with the Father, from there I will speak to thee.

CHAPTER IV.

What it is to flee the world, with an exhortation to it and to fleeing its contagion. That this flight is glorious is shown both by the examples of many Fathers, and especially of holy Jacob. How happily it turned out for him to have fled thus; and why Laban could find nothing of his own with him.

17. Let us therefore approach, supported by the suffrage of faith and uplifted by its oars, to that seat of grace, fleeing this world and its contagion. But this is to flee: to abstain from sins, to assume the form of virtues according to the likeness and image of God, and to extend our strengths to the imitation of God according to the measure of our possibility. For the perfect man is the image and

glory of God. Whence also the Lord says: Be you perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect (Matth. V, 48). This is therefore to be like God: to have justice, to have wisdom, and to be perfect in virtue (De Poenit. dist. 2, chap. Similem). For God is without sin. And therefore he who flees sin is according to the image of God. There is no doubt, therefore, that he who abstains from sin, flees. Whence also the Apostle cries out: Flee fornication (I Cor. VI, 18). For the allurements of sins pursue us, lust pursues us: but do thou flee as if from a furious mistress, who if she catches thee, allows thee to rest neither day nor night, but agitates, burns, and inflames. Flee avarice, lest it catch thee within. Flee envy, which is accustomed to lacerate not only others, but much more him whom it has possessed. Flee perfidy, lest it involve thee in its nets. Whence also the Lord says: And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another. But if they shall persecute you in the other, flee into another. Amen I say to you, you shall not finish the cities of Israel, till the Son of man come (Matth. X, 23). For although he seems to persuade us to flight on account of the infirmity of the flesh: yet he flees better who flees secular allurements; so that he is not held by the solicitude of his riches, nor by the contemplation of treasure, nor by the desire of this life; but with a direct intention of mind he hastens to the glory of the heavenly kingdom, hurries to the crown, and is not recalled from the passion of his body by the looking upon earthly things.

18. Flight, therefore, is death either celebrated or shadowed. 426 And perhaps he expresses those cities of legitimate refuge; so that we may flee to the summits of virtues, which he dispenses elsewhere for rewards to the good usurer, saying: Because thou hast been faithful in a little, thou shalt have power over ten cities (Luke XIX, 17). The old law knew cities: but because He fulfilled the law, who could say: I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill (Matth. V, 17), He grants a more perfect number of remuneration.

19. Let us not, therefore, be ashamed to flee. For this flight is glorious, to flee from the face of sin. Thus Jacob fled, his mother persuading him. For Rebecca said: Rising up, flee into Mesopotamia (Gen. XXVII, 43). Thus also Moses fled from the face of King Pharaoh, lest the royal court should defile him, lest power should ensnare him. Finally, he esteemed the reproach of Christ more precious than the riches of Egypt. Thus David also fled from the face of King Saul, from the face of Absalom. Finally, in fleeing he added increments of piety, who both spared the waylayer and asked for the safety of the parricide. Thus also the people of the Hebrews fled, so that their faith and life might open a way for them among the waves. That flight was a path of innocence, a way of virtue, an assumption of piety. I dare to say, thus Jonah also fled into Tarshish, not by a flight of body but by an ascension of mind, who ascended even to the likeness of Christ, so that he might become a type of Christ. For as Jonah was in the whale's belly three days and

three nights: so shall the Son of man be, he says, in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (Matth. XII, 40). For if he had not fled thus, he would never have been heard from the whale's belly.

20. But if you doubt, let Rebecca teach you how blessed is the flight which Jacob undertook. Rebecca persuaded him. And flee, she said, into Mesopotamia (Gen. XXVIII, 2 [actually XXVII, 43]); Isaac says: Rising up, go into Mesopotamia, into the house of Bathuel. In hymns or oracles by many (as was written before us) Bathuel is called wisdom, but by Latin interpretation, it is signified as the daughter of God. Jacob is sent, therefore, into the house of wisdom, and is admonished to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, who dwelt in Haran, which signifies caverns, in which is the appearance of the senses, which are as if in the caverns of the body, as sight in the eyes, hearing in the ears, smell in the nostrils, taste in the mouth. For he who is delighted by this world, and exults in the pleasures of the body, is liable to the passions of the senses, and dwells and stays in these. Whence Rebecca tells him he must dwell with him for a few days, not for a long time; lest he be colored by bodily pleasures and caught by the allurements of the world.

Moreover, she persuades him to dwell there, so that he may more studiously learn the sense of the discipline of virtue, and as if certain sites and regions of the flesh, so that he may know himself, and know the vehemence of the flesh, for what and for what cause 427 he was created, and in

what manner each sense works. He who shall see, he says, a woman to lust after her (Matth. V, 28). The eye sees badly thus. Let the eye see, therefore, and perform its duty; let it not be directed to a fall by the command of a slippery mind, so that it brings back a vice instead of an office. A brief time, therefore, is given for knowing the senses, or rather for experiencing them, and perhaps the first beginnings of a tenderer youth; and immediately he is recalled, lest he totter longer on the slippery place, and the interior footsteps of the soul be submerged by a certain divided inundation of this body and world. But when he has either experienced or stood on unstable and uncertain and moist ground, he is recalled by his mother, patience or perseverance, who says: I will send to thee, and fetch thee from thence (Gen. XXVII, 45); so that even there in the slippery place you may find a safe harbor of wisdom, which does not allow you to fluctuate as if in a shipwreck, and having returned, you may know how to persevere around the worship of God, and you may be in a congregation of nations, signifying that by his faith the Church of the nations was to be gathered.

Instructed, therefore, by these disciplines of patience and perseverance (Gen. XXIX, 23 et seq.), Jacob having set out acquired for himself a union from wisdom, the consort of his purpose, rich with the dower of prudence, with whom he might run through the times of life without any offense. Having added, therefore, the treasure of wisdom, he instituted for himself a flock of vari-

ous sheep: but that rational one, shining with the diversity of very many virtues. Whence also he cut back the boasting of his flesh (Gen. XXXII, 25), which the numbness of the thigh signifies, saving the interpretation of the sacred mystery. By these virtues, therefore, as if by certain steps, his mind ascended into heaven, and he knew the secrets of God, and was confirmed and filled; so that Laban searching his house might find nothing inane, nothing empty with him, no idols, no effigy of vanity. For with him there was not an image, but the truth: not an effigy of sloth, but the solid form of justice, and a true, intelligible expression of virtue. And so Laban thoroughly searched his spiritual house, and did not find effigies. For it was full not of figures, but of realities (*negotiorum*).

23. Moreover, he could have found the foundations and summits of virtues, unless he had brought down the blindness of his heart and the darkness of a perfidious mind. Finally, the Sodomites, suffused with that blindness of wickedness, could by no means find the door of holy Lot. For whence could an impious mind see either the exit or the entrance of a holy man? The Lord Himself also says in the Gospel: For the prince of this world cometh, and in me he findeth nothing (John XIV, 30). How could he find nothing in him in whom the fullness of divinity dwelt, and dwelt corporally, from whom virtue went out and healed all? How could he find nothing in the solidity of virtue, the abundance of wisdom, intelligence, and justice? You yourself said, O

Lord: I am full (Isaiah I, 11); you yourself said: Put thy hand into my side, and be not faithless, but believing (John XX, 27). He who did not believe put his hand, and found thee as his Lord and God. You are not empty, therefore, but that prince of this world is blind and inane, who knows not how to discern except his own, knows not how to find except his own; those things which are of Christ, he knows not how to acknowledge.

428 24. Or if it is thus as many have it: He shall find in me nothing, this is, he shall not find in me malice, because malice is nothing: he shall not find a dead thing, because He is not dead. But how should he find a dead thing in him who vivifies the dead, and calls those things which are not as those which are? He shall not find, he says, sin in me, who took away the sin of the world. For how does he have nothing, who has all things? And, what is more, he has all things which the Father has, as he himself says: All things that the Father hath are mine (John XVI, 15).

CHAPTER V.

Why we ought to flee from here, and how to pass through with Moses, so that we may see God, loosening the shoes of our feet: how also to leave the shadow of this life, and with holy David, if not as an eagle, at least as a sparrow; if not to heaven, at least to fly out to the mountains.

25. Let us therefore flee from here, where there is nothing, where everything that is thought to be magnificent is inane, where even he who thinks himself to be something, is nothing, and

is not at all. I have seen, he says, the impious highly exalted, and lifted up above the cedars of Lebanon, and I passed by, and lo, he was not (Ps. XXXVI, 35). And do thou pass by as David, pass by as a good servant, so that it may be said to thee: Pass over, sit down to meat (Luke XVII, 7). Pass through as Moses, so that thou mayest see the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and mayest see a great sight. This is a great sight, but if thou wishest to see, loosen the shoe of thy feet, loosen every bond of iniquity, loosen the belts of the world, leave the shoe which is earthly. Therefore Jesus destined the apostles without shoe, gold, and silver, lest they should carry earthly things with them. For he who seeks good is praised not in a shoe, but in the velocity and beauty of his feet, the Scripture saying: How beautiful are the feet of them that preach peace, of them that preach good things (Isaiah LII, 7)! Loosen, therefore, the shoe of thy feet, so that they may be beautiful for preaching. He said, loosen (Exod. III, 5), not bind. Loosen, so that thou mayest pass through, and that impious one whom thou didst admire on earth, thou mayest find to be nothing there, and to be able to do nothing. Pass through, therefore, that is, flee from the lands where there is wickedness, where there is avarice. Therefore David says to thee: Decline from evil, and do good (Ps. XXXIII, 15). To decline is surely to flee. Moreover, evil is on the lands, good is in heaven. Whence also he added: Inquire after peace, and follow it. Peace is in heaven. Finally, coming from heaven he says: My peace I give to you, my peace

I leave to you (John XIV, 27). Therefore, because evils are to be fled and declined; moreover, evils are on the lands, iniquities are on the lands: let us flee earthly things, lest iniquities catch us, which also caught holy David, as he himself testifies saying: My iniquities have caught me, and I was not able to see (Ps. XXXIX, 13); for this reason, that by the smoke of iniquity the eye of the soul is blinded, lest it see those things which are bright. So therefore Laban also was not able to see the good things of Jacob, nor the prince of this world the glory of Christ.

26. But perhaps thou mayest say: Why therefore was Jacob sent to Laban, if Laban is reprehensible? If we consider the name, he is called white (*candidus*) in Latin. Jacob is ordered to go out, therefore, to more splendid things. But because 429 he was carnal, we better understand the more splendid things of this life. As if not yet perfect, he goes first to him, in whose light he might exult for an hour. Moreover, he had worse sons, that is, a more tolerable name than works. And therefore both by the counsel of his mother, and by a divine oracle, and by the will of Jacob himself, the lover of discipline, he is quickly deserted and left.

27. Moreover, holy Rachel, that is, the Church, or prudence, hid the idols, because the Church knows not the inane ideas and vain figures of idols: but she knows the true substance of the Trinity. Finally, she abolished the shadow, she manifested the splendor of glory. Let us leave the shadow, therefore, who seek the sun: let us

desert the smoke, who follow the light. Iniquity is smoke; because as smoke is to the eyes, so iniquities are to those using that life. Life is a shadow: for this our life on earth is a shadow, as Job said (Job VIII, 9). What is more here but temptations? All time is in solicitude, all life in troubles. We walk, he says, in the midst of snares (Ecclus. IX, 20). And another complained of the snares extended for him but hidden in the way in which he walked (Ps. CXLI, 4), lest being caught he should fall. He wished to flee like a sparrow: but as yet the snare was not broken. Flight, he says, hath perished from me (Ps. CXLI, 5). He had his wings weighed down by that dark water in the clouds of the air, and perhaps he was not able to fly out. Finally, he sought to receive those wings so that he might fly out and rest, as it is written: Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest (Ps. LIV, 7)? For where there is flight, there is rest. Finally, he says elsewhere: If you sleep among the midst of lots, the wings of a dove are silvered (Ps. LXVII, 14).

28. But perhaps thou mayest say: How therefore does he say here that flight has perished from him, who above had said: If I take my wings before the light (Ps. CXXXVIII, 9)? Is it contrary? Far be it. For many are the contests of the just. Does the athlete wrestle only once? How often after many crowns he is conquered in another contest! How often he who had often conquered sometimes fluctuates and sticks in uncertainty! And it often happens that the strong encounters the strong, and greater contests arise where there

are greater proofs of strength. Therefore David, where he sought flight so that he might evade the adversary, and did not find his wings, fluctuated in a doubtful contest. Since where he has his wings in his power, the title of the psalm is unto the end (Ps. CXXXVIII), that is, to the perfection and consummation of victory. Finally, as a victor he says: Lord, thou hast proved me and known me: thou hast known my sitting down and my rising up (Ibid. 1). Deservedly he had the faculty of flying, who had received the wings of resurrection. But here he is yet in the cave, that is, in the flesh, in a certain cavern of this body, with King Saul, the son of hardness, and contending with the power of that intelligible prince, who is not seen, but is understood. Whence also the title of the psalm is understanding (Ps. LIV), which however David being placed in the flesh concluded: but that he might conclude, he merited by asking. Finally, he began from the voice of prayer.

Add that, that that psalm is said from the person of the Savior; this one from the person of David, who in 430 power had not victory, but hoped for it from Christ; and yet he himself after he expanded his hands to God, as the wings of his soul, and fled to the Lord, and asked for the deduction of the Holy Spirit, by which he might know the way through which he could ascend, saw the heavens bowed so that Christ might descend, and prayed that he might lift him with his hand. Or perhaps for this reason he no longer sought his wings, because having been made more perfect he desired the hand of Christ.

30. He who wishes therefore to be lifted by the hand of Christ, let him fly out himself before, let him have his wings. He who flees the world, let him have wings; and if he has not his own (lest perhaps he alone has his own who has the power of flying), if his own, I say, he has not, let him receive from him who has. He who flees the world, therefore, flies: Behold, he says, I have gone far off flying, and I abode in the wilderness (Ps. LIV, 8). David therefore flew out as a night-raven in a dwelling, as a solitary sparrow on a house. But if thou refer it to Christ, he flew out in the passion of his body, so that under the shadow of his wings he might protect the peoples of the nations. He flew out by his divinity, he remained by his body, and he dwelt in the desert; so that the children of the desolate might be more than of her who had a husband. Let us therefore follow that body, so that we also may rise again. For where the body is, there also are the eagles.

31. He who cannot fly as an eagle, let him flutter as a sparrow. He who cannot fly to heaven, let him fly to the mountains, let him flee before the valley-lands, which are quickly corrupted by moisture, and let him pass over to the mountains. The nephew of Abraham passed over to the mountain of Zoar, and was made safe: but she who was not able to ascend, being leaned back by a feminine affection, lost her safety. Approach the eternal mountains, the Lord says through the prophet Micah: Arise from hence, because there is no rest for you here. Because of filthiness you are corrupted with a corruption, you have suffered

persecution (Micah II, 9 and 10). And the Lord says: Then they who are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains (Luke XXI, 21), where there is Mount Zion, and the city of peace, Jerusalem, constructed not with earthly but with living stones, and ten thousand Angels, the Church of the firstborn, the spirits of the perfect, and the God of the just, who in His blood spoke better than Abel. For the latter cried for vengeance, the former for indulgence: the latter accused the sin of his brother, the former remitted the sin of the world: the latter betrayed the crime, the former covered it according to what is written: Blessed are they whose sins are covered (Ps. XXXI, 1).

CHAPTER VI.

The reason why he who wishes to flee should flee swiftly: to where he must flee; and to what good we ought to raise our souls.

32. But let him who flees flee swiftly, lest he be overtaken: let him swiftly despoil this world, as the Hebrew did Egypt. Let her who is in labor give birth; lest, with a womb of the mind burdened and weighed down by iniquities, she be unable to flee: and let him flee not as if carrying a nursing child, but as one unencumbered: not bearing a little one, but presenting one perfect in Christ; let him flee not as if at leisure on the sabbath, but as a worker in business: nor as if sterile in the cold, but as abundant in the harvest. For this reason it was said: Pray that your flight be not in the winter, or on the sabbath (Matt. XXIV, 2). This flight, therefore, is fertile in virtues, not empty of merits. This

flight knows not the cold of fear, the trembling of death, the contraction of anxiety, the idleness of dissolution, the holidays of wantonness, the torpor of slowness: but it requires the diligent traveler of the heavenly life, the strenuous competitor for the superior kingdom, the rich farmer, who gathers his fruits, and by gathering carries them away.

33. For what else is required of you, O man, except that you fear the Lord, seek Him, walk after Him, and understand His ways (Deut. X, 12)? In what, he says, shall I lay hold of the Lord? If I lay hold of Him in burnt offerings? Not in ten thousand kids, not in thousands of rams, not in the fruits of impiety is the Lord reconciled, and sins redeemed: but in a good life is the grace of the Lord laid hold of. It has been announced to you, he says, O man, what is good, or what the Lord requires of you. What else, except that you do justice, and love mercy, and be prepared to go with the Lord your God? Therefore the Gospel says to you: Arise, let us go hence (John XIV, 31). The law says to you: After the Lord your God you shall walk (Deut. XIII, 4). You have learned how you may flee from here, why do you delay? The Gospel says to you again: O generation of vipers, who has shown you to flee from the wrath to come (Matt. III, 7)? And he says this to those who were coming to the baptism of repentance.

34. Therefore repentance is a good flight: the grace of God is a good flight, into which there is an assumption of the one fleeing: the desert is a good flight, to which Elijah, Elisha, and John the

Baptist fled. Elijah fled from the woman Jezabel, that is, the outpouring of vanity, and he fled to Mount Horeb, which signifies drying up; so that the carnal flow of vanity might be dried up in him, and he might know God more fully. For he was at the brook Cherith, which is knowledge, where he might draw the flowing abundance of divine knowledge, thus fleeing the world, so that he did not even seek the food of this body, except that which the ministering birds had brought; although his food was mostly not earthly. Finally, for forty days he walked in the strength of the food which he had received. Surely so great a prophet was not fleeing a woman, but the world. Or did he fear death, who had offered himself to the one seeking him, and who said to the Lord: Take away my soul (III Kings XIX, 4), enduring the weariness of this life, not the desire for it? But he was fleeing the secular allure, and the contagion of a stained way of life, and the sacrileges of an impious and prevaricating nation.

35. Solomon also, in the figure of that woman, sets forth the corruption of this world, and teaches that the arts of the harlot are to be avoided (Prov. VII and others). This is the strange and fornicating woman, from whom he exhorts you to guard yourself. Do not decline your heart to the ways of the world, but place it in the hand of the Lord, in which is the heart of the king. For he who rules himself, which is more than commanding others, his heart is in the hand of God, and whither God wills, He turns it. No wonder if He turns it to good, who is of perfect

goodness. Let us be, therefore, in the hand of God, that we may seek the good, that incorruptible and unchangeable good, of which the prophet Amos says: Seek the good and not the evil, that you may live: and so shall the Lord God Almighty be with you (Amos V, 14). How did you say: We have hated evil, and loved good? Where therefore the good God is, there are the good things, which David desired to see, and believed he would see, as he himself says: I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living (Ps. XXVI, 13). For those are the good things which remain always, which cannot be corrupted by the change of time or age.

36. He is in those good things who has sought and found God. For where the heart of a man is, there also is his treasure. For the Lord is not accustomed to deny the good gift to those who pray. Therefore, because the Lord is good, and especially good to those who wait for Him, let us adhere to Him, let us be with Him with our whole soul, with our whole heart, with our whole strength; that we may be in His light, and see His glory, and enjoy the grace of supernal delight. To that good, therefore, let us raise our minds, and let us be in it, and live in it, let us adhere to it, which is above every mind and every consideration, and enjoys perpetual peace and tranquility. Moreover, peace is above every mind and above every sense. This is the good which penetrates all things, and we all live in it, and depend upon it: but it has nothing above itself but is divine; for no one is good, except God alone. What therefore

is good is divine; and what is divine is good. And therefore it is said: When You open Your hand, all things shall be filled with goodness (Ps. CIII, 28). For through the goodness of God all things are deservedly bestowed upon us as good, with which nothing of evil is mixed. These good things the Scripture promises to the faithful, saying: The good things of the land you shall eat (Isa. I, 19). Let us be like that good, therefore, that we may obtain the things which are good. The good which is without iniquity, and without deceit, and without harshness, with grace, with piety, with sincerity, and benevolence, charity, and justice. And so goodness, like a fertile mother, embraces all virtues.

CHAPTER VII.

That the reason why we should flee from here is very great, since this is the proper seat of malice; and likewise what it is to flee. That malice does not perish here, and for what reason. Concerning the condemnation of the serpent, and how it differs from the sentence passed upon man. An explanation of the same sentence is added.

37. There is, therefore, no small cause why we ought to flee from here, so that we may pass from evils to good things, from uncertain things to those that are faithful and full of truth, from death to life. The Lord Himself also, by saying: I have set before you good and evil, life and death (Deut. XXX, 15), demonstrated that the good is life, but eternal life. For if this life is subject to

the world and its malignity, surely that life is good which is not corrupted and changed, which degenerates by no vice, and which is acquired by virtue. Let us flee, therefore, the malice of this world, in which the days themselves, he says, are evil (Ephes. V, 16); and let us flee diligently. And therefore Isaiah cries out: Strengthen the weak hands, and the feeble knees (Isa. XXXV, 3), that is, the knees not of the body, but of the soul, be strengthened; so that the step of the mind, directed toward the highest parts of heaven, may be lifted up, so that the conduct may be more solid, the life more mature, the grace more full, and the prudence more circumspect.

38. For this is to flee: to know whither you tend, to lift oneself up from the world, to lift oneself up from the body; lest again someone should extol himself in vain, and being puffed up by the mind of his flesh, should not hold the head, and it should be said of these: They have fled, and have not seen (Job IX, 25). But this is to flee from here: to die to the elements of this world, to hide one's life in God, to decline corruptions, not to contaminate desires, to be ignorant of the things which are of this world, which begets various sorrows for us, and empties when it has filled, and when it has emptied, it fills. And all these things are vain and empty, in which there is no solid fruit. The rich man is dead, and has nothing; because he is not rich toward God: and therefore he is foolish, because wisdom is the worship of God, but to abstain from evils is discipline.

Who, therefore, would not flee the place of malice, the workshop of wickedness, which knows not how to perish? Finally, it was not without purpose that a sign was placed upon Cain, lest anyone should kill him; that it might be signified that malice is not extinguished and taken away from the earth. Cain feared lest he should be killed, because he knew not how to flee. For malice is increased and heaped up by its very use, and it is without moderation, without end, deciding by deceit and fraud, and it is betrayed by its own deeds and by the blood of the slain, just as Cain also was betrayed. Malice, therefore, dwells on the earth, and wanders here; and therefore we pray that the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. VI, 10), so that here also there may be innocence. Therefore, since malice no longer has a place there, it goes about here, it rages here, and pours itself out, not having been submerged by that worldly flood, nor consumed by the Sodomite fire. Finally, it sprouted more severely afterwards in its nurseries, even laying parricidal and sacrilegious hands upon the very Author of the salvation of all. The law condemns the touch, it does not take away malice. The Lord Jesus Himself condemned sin, but deferred its author; so that there might be one through whom the just might be proved. For because God did not make evil, but the wickedness of the devil inserted it, God deferred vengeance; so that by those whom he had deceived, the devil might be conquered.

Those who were deceived are therefore exercised, both that they may pay the price of their facility, and that they may take up the pursuits of virtue and the industry of caution. Whence he says: Be wise as serpents (Matt. X, 16). Why as serpents? So that he also may be despoiled of his own, and he who wished to strip others may lose the things which are his own, not his poisons, but the merits of nature. Finally, he is cast down when you have ascended. For it is written: I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven (Luke X, 18). Not lightning, he says, but like lightning; because he lost his light, which he had before he wished to take away your light from you. But perhaps you may say that we read also of the Savior, that: As lightning flashing under heaven . . . so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Luke XVII, 24). Well is it here also "as lightning," because He is above lightning. Finally, lightning is from under heaven: but the true light is above heaven. Therefore Satan is as lightning because he lost that which he had: but you have received what you had lost.

41. For the sentence was not relaxed concerning him as it was concerning you. For the grace of Christ which released you, bound him. For the curse remains directed at the serpent because of your deception. For thus it was said to him: Cursed are you above all the cattle of the earth (Gen. III, 14). For he is the common enemy of all, who was the enemy of good things, and he is condemned for those whom he had not yet harmed; since he who harmed man, to whom all those

things were subject, harmed all things. For he broke the common law, by which he himself with the rest was subject to man. Therefore his curse is burdened with the common hatred and execration of all. Moreover, the kind of condemnation is not death, but a long-lasting punishment: On your breast, he says, and your belly you shall walk (Ibid.). For the guilty conscience had to be pressed down, and malice trodden under foot, and the fraudulent secret banished as if from the face of God: at the same time it is shown that malice is earthly, which bends back toward the earth. Finally he added: And earth you shall eat all the days of your life (Ibid.).

Indeed, the nature of the serpent seems to be described by these things, but rather every vessel of malice is described, every serpent of wickedness, who casts himself down upon his belly, and shuts up his poison within himself, and turns it over within his breast, slippery in his thoughts, and walking upon his frauds, entangling himself in his own deceits, always moving and agitating his poisons when he thinks, treading down also his belly, that is, the nursery of his heart. Whence David beautifully says: Sinners are alienated from the womb, they have gone astray from the belly, they have spoken false things. Their fury is according to the likeness of a serpent, like a deaf asp that stops her ears, which will not hear the voice of the charmers; and of the sorcerer, when he is charmed by a wise man (Ps. LVII, 4 et seq.). Because of this also that other beautiful saying seems to be recorded, which we read in the

prophetic book: My belly, my belly is in pain (Jer. IV, 19); because malice is there, where innocence ought to be: and that which ought to be more tranquil in us labors more: and it is trampled upon by the footsteps of wickedness, it is stimulated by claws, it is shaken by a certain process of wickedness and increase, where there is the genital nursery of eternal posterity. Indeed, this seems to be referred to the fact that he grieved that the children whom he created and received had perished, but much more because he did not have the nursery of the word in his belly. Therefore he calls his belly as if most precious. For precious is the womb of the mind, in which the fertile crop of counsels is accustomed to sprout from the seed of the word, and certain members of the whole life and of virtues and disciplines are accustomed to be formed.

But that we may return to the proposal, that God thought that malice should be restrained for a time rather than abolished, He said to the serpent: And I will put enmities between you and the woman, and your seed and the seed of the woman. She shall watch your head, and you her heel (Gen. III, 15). Where there are enmities, there is discord, and a desire to harm: where there is a desire to harm, there malice is placed. Therefore discord between the serpent and the woman implies the malice of discord. Malice therefore has not been taken away. Finally, it was reserved for the serpent that he should watch the heel of the woman and of her seed, that he might harm and pour in his poison. Let us not, therefore, walk

in earthly things, and the serpent will not be able to harm us. Let us take up the Evangelical footwear by which the poison of the serpent is excluded, and his bite is blunted, so that we may have our feet shod for the Gospel. And perhaps for this reason Moses is commanded to loose the footwear of his feet, that he might take up the footwear of the Gospel; or because the preaching of the Gospel was owed not to Moses, that is, not to the prophets, but to the apostles. That is the sentence, which we spoke of above, pronounced against the serpent. Let us consider also what kind of sentence was directed against man.

44. Cursed is he who is the author of the fault: but he who was deceived by another's fraud is not cursed; yet because he did not keep the commandment of God, he is condemned by the labor of his works. Indeed the earth is cursed, but in the works of the sinner (Gen. III, 17); and it is cursed until he is resolved into the earth. For this reason therefore Jesus took up flesh, that He might abolish the curse of the sinful flesh; and He was made a curse for us, so that blessing might absorb the curse, integrity might absorb sin, indulgence might absorb the sentence, and life might absorb death. For He took up death also, that the sentence might be fulfilled, and satisfaction made to the judgment: The curse of the sinful flesh is even unto death. Therefore nothing was done against the sentence of God, since the condition of the divine sentence has been fulfilled. For the curse is even unto death, but after death is grace. We are dead to the world, therefore, why do we still

decide for the world? we are dead with Christ, why do we still seek the acts of this life? We carry about the death of Christ in our body; so that also the life of Christ may be manifested in us. Therefore we no longer live that life of ours, but the life of Christ, a life of innocence, a life of chastity, a life of simplicity, and of all virtues. We have risen with Christ, let us live in Him, let us ascend in Him; so that the serpent may not be able to find our heel on the earth which he might wound.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

How it is permitted that we be held here in the body, yet we can and even ought to flee in mind; lest with the passing figure of this world our works and we ourselves pass away: so that this may not happen, let us not pass over the commands of God, nor the progress of any discipline; just as it is found that many of the ancient saints have done.

45. Let us flee from here. You can flee in mind, even if you are held in the body. You can both be here and be present to the Lord, if your soul adheres to Him, if you walk after Him with your thoughts, if you follow His ways by faith and not by sight, if you flee to Him. For He is a refuge and strength, to whom David says: I fled to you, and I was not deceived (Ps. 76:3). Therefore, because God is a refuge, and God is in heaven and above the heavens: certainly from here one must flee to that place where there is peace, where there is rest from works, where we may feast on the great Sabbath, as Moses said: And the Sabbaths of the

land shall be food for you (Lev. 25:6). For it is a place of feasting and full of delight and tranquillity, to rest in Christ and to see His pleasure. We, therefore, who flee to God, shall we return to the world? We who have died to sin, shall we repeat sins? We who have renounced the world and its use, shall we again stick in its mud?

46. Let us flee from here, because the time is short. Hear how you may flee: And those who have wives, let them be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they wept not; and those who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those who buy, as though they possessed not; and those who use this world, as though they used it not. For the figure of this world passes away (1 Cor. 7:29 et seq.). Therefore, let not our works pass away with the passing figure of the world, lest we also pass away; but let us remain in the truth. If we remain in Christ, we remain in the truth, and we shall remain with Him, and we shall not pass away, but we shall say: The blessing of the Lord be upon you, we have blessed you in the name of the Lord (Ps. 128:8). For those who pass away cannot say this, because they did not say it while passing by the way: The blessing of the Lord be upon you, as the Prophet said. Thus, if we wish our works not to pass away, let us not pass over the commands of God, let us not pass over the diligence of seeking the Lord Jesus, of earning His grace. That woman did not pass Him over who, having entered even into the house of the Pharisee in which Christ was reclining, poured ointment upon His feet.

47. Let us not pass over the progress of any discipline, just as the young man Joseph also did not pass it over; because he was seeking his brothers, and was hastening to that place in which they were pasturing the sheep; and when he had learned that they were in Dothaim, he proceeded there. Now by that word Dothaim is signified a fitting failing (*defectus*), that is, a failing of vain opinions that is not moderate, but perfect and full, in which there is the progress of the soul. For the wise man, when he diminishes, he adds. For secular opinions fail, which are compared to weak women. Whence beautifully, to show that Sarah had come to progress, so that she might generate laughter and joy: The womanly things, he says, ceased to happen to Sarah (Gen. 18:11). Good, therefore, is the failing of desires, the failing of vanity; because it is the addition of truth. Whence also the holy David says: My soul has failed for your salvation (Ps. 118:81). For she was about to give birth who had yielded, and for that reason also God had promised: about to give birth to joy, and to the sober drunkenness of delight: about to give birth before expected, by the speed of the birth of character, having been made for wisdom. Finally, you also have it concerning the other Hebrew women, that the Hebrew women give birth before the midwives come (Exod. 1:19); because the souls of the righteous do not wait for arts and disciplines on account of the kinds of inventions, nor do they require aids for generating: but they pour forth their births spontaneously, and anticipate expectation.

48. Nor was Jacob less diligent in discovering than in executing, to whom when his mother had told him to bring food to his father (Gen. 27:9 et seq.), we see that kinds of definitions were available. For he both quickly discovered, and testified that God was the author of his discoveries, in which both the palm of diligence and the abundance of natural ability (*ingenium*) are signified. First, therefore, is the definition in discovery: what is discovered, is sought: and what is sought, belongs to time: what belongs to time, certainly belongs to diligence. But what anticipates the use of time, God infuses, God gives: what God gives, belongs to nature, not to diligence. Natural ability, therefore, is of the divine gift; but what is of the divine gift, this belongs to nature. Natural ability, therefore, belongs to nature, discovery to diligence: the former is without time, the latter requires time. And therefore the former is present in time, the latter is investigated in a space of time: the former is above us, but the latter is referred to us.

49. Therefore, to the father seeking the food of the word (for man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God: such food Isaac was seeking, such food Peter was hungering for (Acts 10:11 et seq.), when he saw the mysteries of the Gentile people about to believe) Esau did not have the food of a spiritual and faster natural ability at hand. While that one hunts and seeks, and prepares to suggest a very harsh and rustic speech, Jacob anticipates him with a swift discovery, and a mild and nearly domestic

response, ministering a sweet word by which he might soothe and delight him. Whence the father, wondering, said: What is this, that you have found so quickly, my son? Jacob answered: Because the Lord your God delivered it into my hands (Gen. 27:20). The first definition is in the questioning, the second in the answer. Therefore, the father finding all things full which belonged either to natural ability or to diligence, concluded with the consummation of a definition, saying: Behold, the odor of my son is as the odor of a full field, which the Lord has blessed (Ibid., 27). For a field both has a natural ability of fertility and the temporal diligence of cultivation, and deservedly in it is fullness, to which both are not lacking. At the same time, when he added: Which the Lord has blessed, he seems to have preferred the grace of nature to the labor of cultivation. And he confirmed Esau saying: Justly is his name called Jacob. For he has supplanted me now twice, and has taken my birthright (Ibid., 36).

50. But perhaps you may say: In what did he make a delay, who was sent by his father to the hunt? But consider that the father also pronounced that he could not have at hand what was being sought spiritually; and therefore because he was failing in natural ability, he required that he might join the subsidy of diligence. He also admonishes of speed, who says: Take the bow and the arrow (Ibid., 3). Yet he also received the fruit of diligence, who recognized that the gift of natural ability was superior.

51. Nor did he undeservedly bring domestic foods, he who acquired for himself a union with wisdom from the domestic things of his seed. Now good is diligence with wisdom, and discovery with natural ability. Finally, the holy Isaac, having a union of wisdom in readiness, was walking in the field, or rather was being estranged. And let us first be joined to wisdom, and thus let us go out into the field, desiring to seek and to find. For many seek poorly without wisdom. And therefore Cain, because he had not received prudence from God, sought poorly, went out poorly into the field; Abel well, who fulfilled the perfect gift of sacrifice. For good is the sacrifice of wisdom, good is the victim of faith, and of every virtue. Finally, wisdom has killed her victims, and mixed her wine in the bowl. And therefore, so that she might give the drink of faith to the foolish Gentiles, she called them to her bowl, saying: He who is foolish, let him turn aside to me (Prov. 9:4). And to those lacking sense she said: Come and eat of my bread, and drink the wine which I have mixed for you (Ibid., 5). From this bowl Plato thought it should be transferred into his books, to whose drink he called souls: but he knew not how to fill them, he who ministered a drink not of faith, but of perfidy.

CHAPTER NINE.

He urges that we flee from here, just as Jacob fled from his fatherland, and as deer to the fountains; he who desires them must pour out his soul over himself after the example of Susanna. How

Paul and Lot fled; and that we likewise must flee into the heavenly city, until the high priest dies: with whom also our old man ought to die.

52. Let us therefore flee from here just as the holy Jacob fled from his fatherland. For he knew that the true fatherland was the one above. Let us flee like deer to the fountains of waters: which David thirsted for, let our soul also thirst for. Who is that fountain? Hear him saying: For with you is the fountain of life (Ps. 35:10). To this fountain let the soul say: When shall I come and appear before your face (Ps. 41:3)? For the fountain is God: but he who desires this fountain, let him pour out his soul over himself; so that he may leave nothing for the passion of the flesh, but that the soul may overflow everywhere.

53. Susanna beautifully poured it out, so that the fires of the body, the dreads of death, and the desires of life could not evaporate into it. The soul poured out over itself extinguished every carnal desire, every secular pursuit. Which also could have extinguished the flames of the monstrous old men and the impudent elders, unless the flood of lust had overflowed in them. When calumny was intended by them if assent were denied to adultery, Susanna groaned and said: I am straitened on every side. For if I do this, I shall perish in eternal death; but if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands (Dan. 13:22). Yet she judged it better to flee the crime rather than the danger. And so she wept when the crime was charged against her; she wept when they claimed for themselves the judgment of an adulteress

concerning one modest and chaste; not deploring death, but the calumny of chastity. She wept for the injury to religion, and poured out over herself not the body, but the soul. For she would have poured out the body if she had acquiesced to carnal things. Finally, when she was condemned to death, she cried out, as if a judge of the guilty, an arbiter of the calumniators; and by the authority of an innocent conscience she summoned the divine knowledge into judgment for herself, not moved by the fear of death, but by the sublime power of a censuring judgment. Susanna therefore fled the world, and entrusted herself to God, fleeing to that citadel of the eternal city which embraces the whole world, since all things are within God.

Paul also fled so that he might escape through a window, let down in a basket; for he knew that a threefold cord could not be broken: but he fled so that he might preach the Gospel of the Lord in the whole world; and therefore he was caught up into paradise. And let us flee through the window, hearing the precepts of the Lord, and keeping them with a sober vision and with the chastity of the eyes.

55. Let us flee like Lot, fearing Sodomitic crimes more than punishments. For he surely fled the contagions of wickedness more piously who closed the house to the Sodomites: nor, cohabiting, had he known those whose shames he did not know, and whose reproaches he turned away from: nor, fleeing, did he look back at those whose conversations he did not desire. Therefore

he flees like Lot who renounces vices, who abdicates the morals of the inhabitants, who does not look behind him, who enters that heavenly city by the entrance of his thoughts, nor does he withdraw from it until the Prince of priests dies, who took away the sin of the world. He died indeed once: but He dies to everyone who is baptized into the death of Christ; so that we may be buried together with Him, and rise together with Him, and walk in the novelty of His life.

56. You flee well if your heart does not imitate the counsels of sinners and their thoughts. You flee well if your eye flees cups and bowls, lest it become libidinous while it lingers in wine. You flee well if your eye declines another's, so that your tongue may guard the truth. You flee well if you do not answer a fool according to his folly. You flee well if you take away the step of your feet from the mouth of the foolish. For one quickly errs with bad leaders: but if you wish to flee well, make your ways far from their speeches.

57. The High Priest is dead to you, He is crucified for you, so that you may adhere to His nails. For He received you in that flesh, and your sins: the handwriting of your offenses was fixed to that cross; so that you may now owe nothing to the world, which you have once renounced. And rightly you owe nothing, to whom it is available to say: For to me the world is crucified, and I to the world (Gal. 6:14); so that you may now not fear death, if you carry Christ, in whom you can say: Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? (1 Cor. 15:55). For when

that old man of ours was fixed to the cross, sin was destroyed, the sting was blunted, guilt was emptied; so that we may cease to serve wickedness further. For the old man has departed. Now, however, the old man is no longer in us; but there is a new creature, having in itself the likeness of Christ, by whose likeness of death being buried together, we have assumed the image of His life, we have received the wings of spiritual grace.

58. Thus, therefore, fly, so that it may be said of you: Who are these who fly as clouds, and like doves with their young? (Is. 60:8). That your clouds may bedew justice, and the doves may bring forth simplicity. Thus navigate as if crossing the world, not wandering through it, like the ships of Tarshish; so that you may direct your course to the intelligible ports, and carry with you the riches of the sea. Thus hasten, so that it may be said of you: They have become light above the eagles (Lam. 4:19). For you see that one must flee from the wrath to come, which those will be able to decline who, through repentance, shall have placed for themselves the hope of escaping, and shall have drawn the faith of future reconciliation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is the kingdom from ages, and now, and always, and unto all ages of ages. Amen.