

IGNEA SAGITTA
THE FLAMING ARROW

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THE FLAMING ARROW

BY NICHOLAS,
PRIOR GENERAL OF THE CARMELITE ORDER
1266-1271

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION BY
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INTRODUCTION

It was in February 1270 or 1271¹—just over seven centuries ago—that Nicholas of Narbonne, Prior General of the Carmelite Order, put his signature to a long letter addressed to his brethren, which he himself entitled *Ignea Sagitta—The Flaming Arrow*.

The *Ignea Sagitta* is the earliest document we possess originating within the Carmelite Order (for the Rule is of external origin); it is the first of very few belonging to the thirteenth century. For this reason alone, apart from its content, it would be of considerable interest. But when one considers its author's office, that his theme is the essential nature of the Carmelite vocation, and that he gives us both a partial commentary on the Order's Rule² and a vivid description of contemporary Carmelite life, the *Ignea Sagitta* assumes a quite exceptional importance for the student of either the Order's history or its spirituality.

One might go further still and venture the opinion that, as perhaps the most vigorous apology for the eremitical life produced during the Middle Ages, and comparable with such celebrated writings as the *Golden Epistle* of William of St. Thi-

¹ The work is dated February 1270. However it is quite probable that Nicholas followed the *stilus gallicus*, which treated Easter Day as the first of the year, so that his 1270 would be 1271 by modern reckoning.

² See Alberto M. Martino, O.Carm., *Il commento della Regola nel Carmelo antico in Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 2 (1948) pp. 99-122; the author treats of Nicholas pp. 100-101.

erry (from which Nicholas quotes) or St. Bruno's *Letter to Ralph le Verd* (of which one passage in particular is reminiscent), it possesses an importance that exceeds the bounds of merely Carmelite history or spirituality and entitles it to a place in the literature of the spiritual and monastic life as such.

Yet it was not until 1962 that the complete text of this remarkable document was made available in print. We owe it to a Dutch scholar, Fr. Adrian Staring, O.Carm., who has brilliantly reconstituted Nicholas's letter from sources which at first sight might have seemed far from encouraging.³

Even though the full Latin text is now available, however, it may perhaps be doubted whether the *Ignea Sagitta* has found many readers. The Latin in which it is written does not read easily; the work is rambling and disjointed, with little apparent logical progression; it is not without tedious *longeurs* and repetitions; and its rhetorical devices and typically mediaeval use—or abuse—of Scripture, together perhaps with its acrimonious tone, do little to commend it to the modern reader. Not that it is altogether without literary merit. In caustic mood Nicholas shows a certain wit. He can draw a lively picture of those less edifying aspects of religious life he is bent on castigating, witness his description of a gallivanting community returning home at nightfall for a good gossip accompanied' by liquid refreshment (Chapter 8), or his devastating portrait of the Or-

³ See *Nicolai Prioris Generalis Ordinis Carmelitarum Ignea Sagitta*, ed. A. Staring, O.Carm., in *Carmelus* 9 (1962) pp. 237-307.

der's ignorant but ambitious preachers (Chapter 4); nor is the *Ignea Sagitta* wanting in passages of real eloquence and beauty, inspired by the author's genuine love for the solitary life.

It's literary characteristics apart, however, it is as a spiritual document that the *Ignea Sagitta* deserves our closest attention. If Nicholas shows himself a somewhat fierce advocate of Carmel's solitary and contemplative traditions, it is not because he is "a tyrant of solitude nor a literal defender of an observance in which he has been formed; he is simply an authentic contemplative possessed of a keen sense of the mystery and the demands of contemplation," as the late P. Francois de Ste. Marie pointed out.⁴ P. Francois goes on to say that, though the *Ignea Sagitta* can hardly be called a *summa* of thirteenth century Carmelite spirituality, "the essential points are sufficiently well indicated and developed for us to be able to find in its entirety a spiritual doctrine of the surest kind, and the principles which, three centuries later, would serve as a basis for the works of St. John of the Cross... In these pages the contacts with St. John of the Cross are numerous. Almost all the sanjuanistic themes are already present: the absolute transcendence of God to whom creatures can bear no proportion, the theological virtues which alone can truly unite the soul with the divinity, purity of conscience, attention to God alone, prayer, mortification of the senses and the tongue, warfare against the three enemies of the

⁴ Francis de Ste Marie, OCD, ed., *Les plus vieux textes du Carmel*, 2 ed. Paris 1961 (Coll. *La Vigne du Carmel*), p. 154.

sold..."⁵ No manuscript of the *Ignea Sagitta* is at present known to which St. John of the Cross might have had access, but one cannot escape the impression of a more than fortuitous kinship between the respective authors of *The Flaming Arrow* and *The Living Flame*.⁶

In these days of postconciliar "return to sources" the *Ignea Sagitta* could have an added importance for Carmel. The primary source for our specifically Carmelite spirituality and life is undeniably The Rule of St. Albert—the Rule to which it was St. Teresa's dearest wish to be absolutely faithful. There is no document, however, that takes us closer to the Rule than the *Ignea Sagitta*. Its author must already have been born when the Rule was first drafted in the first decade of the thirteenth century, and he wrote only twenty-three years after the promulgation of the "Innocentian" Rule.⁷ Few surely could claim greater authority than Nicholas where the interpretation of the Rule is concerned.

It is not impossible that this thirteenth-century writer might be able to help us solve some of the grave problems that beset the Carmelite Order today. One of these is the spread of individualism to the detriment of the common life: might not the

⁵ Ibid. pp. 154-155.

⁶ Both St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avilamake use of the simile 'like an arrow of fire to describe certain strong impulses of divine love. Cf. *The Spiritual Canticle* (2nd redaction) I, 17, and *The Interior Castle*, VI, 11, 2.

⁷ The Rule as revised and promulgated under Innocent IV on 1st October 1247. For a history of the Carmelite Rule see my introduction to *The Rule of St. Albert*, Aylesford & Kensington 1973, pp. 11-41.

solution lie, paradoxically, as Nicholas, in Chapter 8, seems to suggest it lay in his day, in a greater fidelity to, and respect for, the solitude, silence and retirement of the individual ? Vocations ? Might not Nicholas once again have the answer? "As long as you persevered in solitude in your contemplations, your prayers and holy exercises, with profit to yourselves, the renown of your holiness, wafted abroad like a perfume, far and wide, over city and town, brought wonderful comfort to all whom it reached. And it attracted many, in those days, to the solitude of the desert, edified by its fragrance, and drawn, as though by a cord of tenderness, to repent of their misdeeds." (Chapter 3.) Yes, the *Ignea Sagitta* might well repay dose study.

THE AUTHOR

Nicholas "the Frenchman"—*Nicolaus Gallicus*—or Nicholas of Narbonne (either the city or the region of southern France then known by that name) was elected Prior General of his Order in 1266.

He resigned his office in 1271, apparently as a gesture of protest against these tendencies, which he had deplored in the *Ignea Sagitta*, and as Prior General he found himself unable to check.

It has been asserted that he spent on Mt. Carmel itself the years of his religious life previous to his election, that he had been Provincial of the Holy Land or Vicar General for the Orient, and so on. There is nothing intrinsically improbable about these assertions, but none of them must be regarded as more than speculative: there is no firm evidence to support them, and the passages in the *Ignea Sagitta* which they profess to explain are, to say the least, enigmatic.

After his death, which later sources state to have taken place at Orange, though the year is unknown, Nicholas enjoyed a reputation throughout the Order for sanctity of life. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries he was venerated under the title of blessed and even saint, and his name appeared in the Order's liturgical calendars: his feast was kept on April 2nd. The

fact that his tomb was unknown and that there were no relics seems to have been responsible for his cult having died out.

His erudition is apparent from the *Ignea Sagitta*. He shows familiarity not only with Scripture and the Liturgy, but also with Canon Law and the Fathers, classical and contemporary literature, Aristotle and the mediaeval monastic writers, etc. He is conscientious rather than inspired in his observance of the rhetorical rules, which were *de rigueur* in a letter such as the *Ignea Sagitta*. His employment of the *cursus* the fixed rhythmical cadence with which each period or clause must close—is laboured and unimaginative: he uses the *cursus velox* (e.g., *pérmanens in aetérnum, péperit abortívum*) with curious monotony, almost to the exclusion of the other formulae. However, in spite of this aural deficiency and a certain mechanical quality in the use of other rhetorical devices, there can be no doubt that Nicholas was, by the standards of his day, a well-educated man.

John Bale, the sixteenth-century English Carmelite writer to whom, apostate though he became, we owe the preservation of much that is of value to the Carmelite historian, attributes two other works to Nicholas, besides the *Ignea Sagitta*: a collection of letters sent out from Oxford (which, Bale tells us, Nicholas visited in 1266) to various members of the Order exhorting them to constancy, and a collection of popular sermons. Neither work has survived, but it is significant that Nicholas, who shows himself so severe a critic of the incompetent preachers in the Order, who evidently a man of some experience in the field himself.

THE BACKGROUND

The Carmelite Order had originated as a group of Latin-rite hermits in the wadi es-Siah on Mt. Carmel in Palestine. Between 1206 and 1214 they had requested Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, resident at nearby Acre, to provide them with a rule of life (*vitae formula*) which he did, thus giving them canonical status as a *collegium*. This rule of life gives us a picture of a typical hermit community, living solitary lives in individual cells—caves and simple huts—where they spent their time in prayer except when attending to other duties. Those who could read said, in their cells, the psalms appointed for the various canonical hours; those who could not said an appointed number of Our Fathers. Stress was laid on work, and they were reminded in St. Paul's words that "whoever is not willing to work should not be allowed to eat either." No doubt they cultivated the ground adjacent to their cells, and engaged in traditional eremitical crafts such as basket or mat making. (All hermits of the western tradition at this time attached to poverty, communal as well as individual, and to self-support, an importance even greater than that attributed to solitude or retirement.)⁸ They must also have received, from pilgrims, a certain quantity of alms, and their prior was charged with the distribution of "such

⁸ See L. Genicot, *L'eremitisme du XIe siecle dans son context economique et social in l'Eremitismo in occidente nei secoli XI e XII; atti della seconda settimana internazionale di studio Mendola, 30 agosto-6 settembre 1962*, Milan 1965 (*Miscellanea del Centro di Studi Medioevali IV*), pp. 47-48; Cf. Also C. Violante, *Discorso di apertura*, *ibid.* pp. 13-17.

things as the Lord may have given" to the community. Meals were prepared and eaten in solitude. The only communal building was an oratory, where they were bidden to hear Mass daily—a fact which argues the presence of a certain number of clerics among them—and to meet each Sunday for community business, spiritual colloquy and fraternal correction. They kept the degree of fast and abstinence customary in such communities, and were exhorted to silence, complete except between about nine in the morning and mid-afternoon.

Many hermits at this time did carry out a certain apostolate of preaching, but this is not likely to have been the case on Mt. Carmel. St. Albert's rule of life does not contemplate absence from the cell except for daily Mass and the weekly conference, and indeed a Bull of 1229 indicates that those who left the settlement "to celebrate the divine mysteries and receive orders" needed subsequent absolution from apostasy and dispensation from canonical irregularity.⁹ It is also difficult to imagine where they could have gone to preach in any case. They would hardly have been welcome in Acre or other neighboring towns, which were crammed with clerics of every kind, and language would surely have been an insurmountable barrier between them and the Saracens or the natives of the area. When we first meet them then, about 1210, the Carmelites are solitaries living in a remote mountain valley, many of them illiterate laymen, hard-working at lowly manual tasks, strictly contemplative and en-

⁹ Gregory IX, *Providi* more, 5 Apr. 1229.

closed. But their way of life, institutionalized by Albert's *vitae formula*, was soon to be threatened.

It was a time when new forms of religious or quasi-religious life were proliferating, and in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council sought to control the situation by forbidding further foundations unless made under the Rule of St. Benedict or that of St. Augustine. What of Albert's *vitae formula* and the hermit brothers whose lives it governed? In the face, no doubt, of a challenge, recourse was had to the Holy See, and in 1226 pontifical recognition was eventually obtained, albeit in the form of a simple indulgence for the observance of their rule of life "which you say you humbly received before the General Council."¹⁰

But other pressures were also at work. A threat appeared against the cherished eremitical poverty of the brothers of Mt. Carmel. Exactly what form it took is not altogether clear, but it seems likely that an attempt was made, either by a faction within the community or by some external agent, to introduce illicitly a superior whose ideas on poverty were rather less rigorous than those traditional among hermits. Gregory IX was evidently asked to intervene, and in 1229 issued a Bull which formally prohibited the possession by the community of anything, apart from their place of residence or "desert," except certain domestic animals. This was done explicitly to protect the high contemplative ideals and life-style of the brethren.

¹⁰ Honorius III, *Ut vivendi normam*, 30 Jan. 1226.

The Bull also ordains "that no one is to presume to institute a prior in that desert" unless duly elected in accordance with their rule of life; and finally, almost incidentally, as if to reinforce the preceding points, the Pope confirms their rule by apostolic authority, and imposes its perpetual observance "in that place." Whatever the threat had been it had been averted, at least for the time being.

But life on Mt. Carmel became far from peaceful, and before another decade had passed Saracen encroachments in the area, and perhaps consequent economic difficulties, had suggested the advisability of establishing settlements in the European countries where most of the brethren must have originated. From 1238 Carmelite deserts began to appear in Cyprus, Sicily, England and Provence.

Here an unforeseen result of Gregory IX's Bull *Ex officii nostri*¹¹ became apparent, in that it prevented the Carmelites from acquiring lands of any extent, so that although they were obliged by their eremitical *propositum* to avoid towns and cities, where they might have been able to make some kind of a living by selling artifacts and receiving alms, they were deprived also of the possibility of supporting themselves by agriculture as the monks of St. Benedict did.

Not that all their settlements had been made in the deepest solitude. Of the first two foundations made in England, in

¹¹ Gregory IX, *Ex officii nostri*, 6 Apr. 1229.

1242, one was remote indeed—Hulne—but the other, Aylesford, lay beside a busy highway and a ford over the Medway. And it seems to have been the English Carmelites who set the trend towards city foundations. Technically, perhaps, the London house, established in 1247, was outside the ancient city walls, and was therefore "suburban," but London had long since ceased to confine itself within its walls. After 1250 such foundations became the norm for the Carmelites.

But 1247 had been truly an epoch-making year for the Carmelites, for they had held their first General Chapter, probably at Aylesford, at Pentecost. They had for the first time, modeling themselves very evidently on the Dominicans, elected a prior general who was no longer simply the superior of the desert on Mt. Carmel, though he probably continued to hold that local office as well; and they had organized themselves into four provinces: the Holy Land, Sicily, England and Provence. The prior general, it now seems, was Godfrey, possibly an Englishman, and two other Englishmen, Reginald and Peter, were sent to the papal court at Lyons with proposals for the adaptation of Albert's rule to western conditions. Innocent IV lost no time in commissioning two Dominican prelates to carry out the adaptation and by September 1st their work was complete. The Pope confirmed their "clarifications, corrections and mitigations" on October 1, 1247, in the great Bull *Quae honorem Conditoris*.¹²

¹² See my introduction to *The Rule of St. Albert*, pp. 23-27.

It has been claimed that "the Carmelite Rule as modified by Innocent IV authorizes a fully mendicant life, with regard both to its particular type of poverty and to an itinerant apostolate. With Innocent IV the Hermits of Mount Carmel are definitely mendicants by Rule and not merely in fact." Also that "the religious typology envisaged in the Rule modified by Innocent IV is not predominantly eremitical save in appearance."¹³ With this theory, let it be said at once, the present writer is categorically in disagreement.¹⁴ On the very day he issued *Quae honorem Conditoris* Innocent IV issued also another Bull in favour of the Carmelites which seems to go out of its way to emphasize their hermit status and their continued avoidance of city foundations.¹⁵ It seems altogether more likely to have been the General Chapter of 1250 which resolved to pursue a definite policy of making foundations in the cities, and that of 1253 which determined to seek apostolic permission for the Carmelites to preach and hear confessions.¹⁶

The revised Rule of Innocent IV—the Innocentian Rule as it is called—did however make two considerable changes in Carmelite daily life by introducing the common recitation of the Divine Office, and a common refectory. There seems to

¹³ C Cicconetti, O.Carm., *La Regola del Carmelo: origine, natura, significato*, Rome 1973, pp. 298 and 478.

¹⁴ See my review of the above work in *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 24 (1973) pp. 428-432.

¹⁵ Innocent IV, *Frequens paganorum incursus*, 1 Oct. 1247. See the above review, and also my introduction to *The Rule of St. Albert*, pp. 23 and 64.

¹⁶ Innocent IV, *Devotionis augmentum*, Aug. 24, 1253, grants this permission for the first time. It was only after 1250 that city foundations became the norm.

have been no intention at this time of abandoning the traditional separate eremitical cells, and the clause of the Rule imposing them was retained unaltered. That in fact it was often not observed on the pretext of lack of space, once city foundations had become the norm, we learn from the *Ignea Sagitta* (Chapter 8), and we find the General Chapter of 1281 recalling the brethren to its observance "as far as possible."¹⁷ But the communal Office and meals did represent a considerable shift towards the cenobitical.

The Innocentian Rule also introduced a clause explicitly permitting foundations, which were to be made "in solitary places (in eremis) or where you are given a site that is suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order," and the *Ignea Sagitta* (Chapter 7) may perhaps be our best guide as to what the legislator's original intention here was, written as it was only 23 years later. "By this addition the places it is right for us to live in are expressly and clearly determined, so that unsuitable and inconvenient sites should not lead to the introduction of a way of life foreign to our Order, and of dangerous innovations that might cause it, in time, to throw aside its observances and thus despoil itself of the glory of its primitive state." This clause was, however, undoubtedly used as the pretext for the city foundations, against which Nicholas fulminates as abusive.

¹⁷ *Constitutiones Capituli Londinensis anni 1281*, ed L. Saggi, O.Carm., in *Analecta O.Carm.* 15 (1950) p. 210. 1

By 1253 then, only 15 years after establishing their first foundations in the West, the Carmelites appear to have turned, probably under considerable economic pressure, partly away from their strictly eremitical and contemplative form of life towards a life-style modeled, in part at least, on that of the two great Mendicant Orders, and in particular on that of the Dominicans, on whose Constitutions they seem to have based their own. They seem, too, to have already become predominantly clerical, though their clerics must have received their orders before entering the Carmelite brotherhood. (We have no record of a Carmelite being presented to a bishop for ordination before 1267, and there were no organized studies in the Order before 1271.) There seem to have been few, if any, of real intellectual ability among them if Nicholas the Frenchman is to be believed (*Ignea Sagitta*, Chapter 4) and this is hardly surprising if they came from the secular clergy, whose cultural level at this time was particularly low,

From a solitary, lay, contemplative life of prayer and manual work in the desert towards a more communal clerical city life and an ill-prepared apostolate—this seems to have been the inexorable drift of Carmelite life between 1238 and 1270 when Nicholas the Frenchman wrote his *Flaming Arrow*.¹⁸

¹⁸ See Joseph Baudry, OCD, *Le Carmel medieval devant le choix "desertville"* in *Carmel* (Venasque) 1977/4 pp. 293-304.

To complete our picture of the Order to which the *Ignea Sagitta* was addressed two further elements must be taken into consideration: extremely rapid growth, and great instability.

To give some idea of the rate of growth: 16 houses were founded in England alone between 1242 and 1271, and they were to be 30 before the end of the century. A corresponding expansion was taking place in France, Italy, Germany and the Low Countries. To the original Province of the Holy Land seven others were added before Nicholas was to resign his Generalship in 1271: Sicily (1242), England (1242), Narbonne, i.e., Southern France (1245), Rome (1256), France, i.e., Northern France (1265), Germany (1265), and Lombardy (1271); before 1300 they were to be followed by Aquitaine (1282), Spain (1297) and Ireland (1297).

The expansion of the Carmelite Order was, of course, modest compared with that of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, but even so it was by modern standards phenomenal. Many of those who sought admission were no doubt to be found among the "poor scholars," barely literate boys of ten or twelve, who flocked to the university cities: the religious houses exercised charity and hospitality on a large scale among these hordes of ragged and penniless children in the mid-thirteenth century. (The Carmelites, though not attending the schools until 1271, quite early made foundations near such centers of learning as Cambridge (1247), Oxford (1253), Paris (1259), and Bologna (1260). It stands to reason, however, that among so

many entrants there must have been not a few without any real vocation to the religious life at all, let alone to a life of solitude and contemplation.

It is not in the least surprising that these movements of urbanization, cenobiticisation, clericalisation, apostolicisation and indiscriminate recruiting should have been seen by Carmelites of the "old school" like Nicholas as so many threats to the eremitical and contemplative traditions which they regarded as their most precious heritage. Feeling must have run high between the promoters of the "mendicant" tendency and the conservative "contemplatives." Nor was it a clear-cut question of survival: the future of the mendicants themselves must have seemed to many a precarious one, for at the time Nicholas held office they were undergoing vigorous attack from the secular clergy. (Nicholas' own literary style, curiously, is reminiscent of that of one of their principal opponents, William of Saint Amour.) The Carmelites, moreover, not only found themselves attacked as mendicants—even though they were not fully aligned with the two great Mendicant Orders and lacked many of their privileges—but also, in common with the Augustinian Friars and 22 other orders which the Second Council of Lyons was to suppress in 1274, as rivals by the Franciscans and Dominicans. The Order and its members were in a perplexing situation, and it is not surprising that many took advantage of the ease with which it was possible at the time to transfer from one order to another, and became either Franciscans, and therefore uncompromisingly mendicant and apostolic, or Cis-

tercians, wholly monastic and contemplative. This state of doubt and the consequent "leakage" from the Order may well have been in Nicholas's mind when he emphasized the positive character of the Carmelite Rule in Chapters 7 and 8 of the *Ignea Sagitta*.

Would it have been possible for the Order to have survived except by throwing in its lot with the mendicants? The fact that there were men like Nicholas who opposed this tendency, and houses like Hulne in Northumberland where a contemplative life continued to be lived down to the Reformation—and longer still on the Continent—seems to argue that an alternative course would not have been out of the question. It is interesting to speculate how the history of the Order would have developed if Carmel had chosen, in that moment of crisis, to follow a different path.

THE LETTER

The *Ignea Sagitta* is cast, rather oddly for a letter, in quadramatic form. Nicholas sets the scene, so to speak, in the Prologue, with a kind of allegorical "vision" of the Carmelite Order (which, strange to say, he never once mentions openly by name) as the Mother, standing between her "legitimate sons," those who are faithful to her eremitical contemplative tradition, and her "stepsons," the innovators. Nicholas feels moved by this imaginary spectacle to address in turn the Mother, the stepsons, and the legitimate offspring.

He turns first, in Chapter 1, to the Mother and, in terms borrowed from the *Lamentations*, bids her grieve for the decadence her stepsons have brought upon her; though he has griefs of his own he would willingly air, he declares at the end of the chapter, he feels constrained to speak first of the Mother's woes. In Chapter 2 he renews his exhortation to the Mother to take cognizance of her pitiful state, so sadly in contrast with her former beauty, and the Mother replies. Free use is again made of verses from the *Lamentations*.

In Chapter 3 he exhorts her to call on her true sons to put matters right; then, in her name, he turns upon the stepsons with a withering condemnation of their hypocrisy and shortsightedness in exchanging the desert for a life of so-called zeal for souls in the city. Chapters 4 to 12 continue at length this

address to the stepsons'—reproachful, hortatory and supplicatory by turns—in the name of the Mother.

In Chapter 4 he charges them with presumption in undertaking a ministry to which they are not called and for which they are not prepared, thus involving the rest of the Order in their guilt. In Chapter 5 he calls in question their motives for wishing to frequent the cities: were they not protected from carnal temptations in the desert? As Scripture bears witness, it is in solitude that God reveals himself to men. (Chapter 6) Where the Rule is concerned, only solitary places are suitable for its observance (Chapter 7) and the occupations the Rule prescribes to be carried out in separate eremitical cells are not possible in the city. (Chapter 8) The rewards to be gained by fidelity to the solitary cell are infinitely preferable to the deadly warfare of the city. (Chapter 9) Those who have descended from "the Mount of the Circumcision of the Slices" (Carmel) to dwell in the city, have thus endangered their salvation (Chapter 10) and should return to the desert, the beauties of which are far more conducive to union with God than the din and squalor of the city. (Chapter 11) Those who drink from the chalice of Babylon—the world—drink damnation, while the Lord's chalice holds true spiritual sweetness. (Chapter 12)

In Chapter 13 Nicholas, as he promised in the *Prologue*, addresses the pusillanimous among the true sons of Carmel, who seem by their silence to consent to the infidelity of the stepsons;

if the latter refuse to return to the desert, he will then cite them before the Supreme Judge.

Finally, in Chapter 14, Nicholas gives vent to his personal griefs: he regrets the time spent in fruitless labour as Prior General, when he could have been laying up merit for himself in the cell of a solitary, and he repents of his presumption in undertaking—albeit under obedience—an impossible task. Nevertheless all that he has done has been with the best of intentions.

The *Ignea Sagitta* ends on a note almost of despair: to govern the Carmelite Order is to plough with ox and ass "who will not pull together under the same yoke." Nicholas would have been consoled had it been revealed to him that the values he defended would not, in fact, ever be entirely lost sight of by the Order, that it would always have its houses of purely contemplative and eremitical life; that one day a vast army of women—who for Nicholas seem to have been good for nothing but to "turn wise men into fools, strong men into weaklings, and saintly men into apostates" (Chapter 10)—would make Carmel the largest of all contemplative Orders; that it would produce a succession of contemplative figures, illustrious or hidden, of both sexes, among them two of the greatest mystics the Church has ever known, both to be proclaimed Doctors of the Church for the sublimity of their spiritual teaching, and a third who, by her faithfulness to the hidden ways of the contemplative life, would be regarded as a major luminary of the Twentieth Century.

THE TRANSLATION

Nicholas' verbose and convoluted style—which the *cursus* does nothing to simplify—makes translation into a modern language far from easy. In the interests of intelligibility the translator is driven to simplify a construction here, to suppress a reduplicative adjective or adverb there. There are phrases, too, where the meaning remains obscure, perhaps because of an unidentified allusion or an imperfectly transmitted text. On the whole, however, the reader may regard this as a faithful rendering—as faithful as is compatible with readability.

Quotations from Scripture always present a difficulty when translating a mediaeval text. It is, of course, the Vulgate that is quoted (though not the Clementine Vulgate) and the meaning in question frequently differs considerably from the literal meaning: Nicholas even thunders at his opponents on one occasion—with a certain relish perhaps at the ingenuity of his adaptation—"Non sic, impii, non sic... iudicio procedendum!" Each text must be dealt with as it comes along, and the best solution usually is a judiciously adapted use of the older translations from the Vulgate.

All Scriptural allusions are indicated in the notes, even if the point of contact is purely verbal and becomes obscure in translation. Thus the reader will at least be conscious of the degree to which the *Ignea Sagitta* is impregnated with Scripture.

THANKS

My thanks are due in the first place to Fr. Adrian Staring, O.Carm., for his kind permission to use his critical text, introduction and notes. Most of the additional notes here have also been supplied, through Fr. Staring, by one of his confreres. Much of the historical information contained in this, my own introduction, has been drawn from Fr. Shoring, by one of his confreres. Much of the historical information of other ways.

I should also like to thank Fr. Kilian Healy, O.Carm., for the present opportunity to revise and reprint this translation, first circulated privately in 1970.

IGNEA SAGITTA
THE FLAMING ARROW

*Here begins the Letter called THE FLAMING
ARROW, by Brother Nicholas, sometime Prior
General of the Order of the Brothers of Blessed Mary
of Mount Carmel; in which Letter he mourns the
Order's primitive spirit, utterly passed away.*

PROLOGUE

- 1 Nicholas, in his poverty, bids all his fellow prisoners¹⁹ health and the counsel of the Holy Spirit forever.²⁰
- 2 The sight of that devoted Mother of mine²¹ who conceived me as one dead²² and brought me forth before my time²³ between her degenerate stepsons²⁴ on the one hand and those wrongful prisoners who are her true children on the other, moves me to minister to each, with the help of God's grace, what each stands in need of.²⁵
- 3 Our Mother I shall do my best to awaken, with my sobs of lament, from her heedless slumber, so that she may take account of her deformed condition and mend it.

¹⁹ Cf. Rom. 16:7.

²⁰ Cf. Ps. 32:11.

²¹ It is as the Mother, *mater piissima, Mater religiosissima, mater delectissima*, etc., that the Carmelite Order figures throughout *The Flaming Arrow*. Those members of the Order who have remained faithful to its original spirit are her "true sons—*fili legitimi*," while those who have compromised that spirit by engaging in the active ministry etc. are the "stepsons—*privigni*."

²² Cf. Ps. 50:7.

²³ Cf. I Cor. 15:8.

²⁴ I have here followed a conjectural reading suggested by Fr. Staring: *ruinantes* for *ruminantes*.

²⁵ "*Singulis necessitatibus (. . .) succurrere singulorum.*" The phrase echoes the Carmelite Rule in its prescription that each shall receive from the Prior according to his needs: "*Et distribuantur (necessaria) unicuique per manum Prioris (. . .) inspectis aetatibus et necessitatibus singulorum.*" See *The Rule of Saint Albert*, Aylesford and Kensington 1973, p. 84.

4 Before the stepsons, so fallen away through want of wit that their efforts bid fair to ruin both themselves and our Mother—stepdame as they see her—I intend to place arguments cogent enough to persuade them to turn back in shame from their erring paths to the right way.

5 And to the true sons, silent till now in faint-hearted dissimulation, God grant that I may, since opposites are better seen to be such when placed side by side²⁶ give courage to speak out with me in condemnation of the foolish doings of the stepsons, and in favour of the state proper to the Order.

6 I humbly ask these true and lawful sons to restrain their indignation while I roundly rebuke the pride of the stepsons for the shame it has brought upon us; nor would I have the stepsons grow angry for, as God is my witness—who hears wills, not words²⁷—it is for their own benefit, for their salvation, to call them out of danger, that I rebuke them.

7 In this desire of mine it is my heart's love that goes out to every one of you without exception, for it is a shame common to all of us that I want to do away with. But I know—and although I would spare myself this burden if I could, I cannot—that this letter, fittingly named **THE FLAMING ARROW** for its bright, sharp truthfulness, welcomed as it

²⁶ Cf. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* III, 17, III, 12 and III 9.

²⁷ "*Teste Deo cui voluntas loquitur*"; cf. the Collect of the Mass *Ad Postulandam gratiam Spiritus Sancti*, in the pre-1970 Roman Missal.

may be by the lawful sons whose faces are towards the light,²⁸ will seem hateful to the stepsons, whose ill deeds it will show to be the deeds of those who hate the light.²⁹

²⁸ 1 Jn 1:7.

²⁹ Cf. Jn. 3:20.

CHAPTER I

8 "How the gold has grown dim, the finest of colours is changed, the stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street!"³⁰

9 Alas, Mother who brought me forth, holiest of Orders! You were rightly named of old from the eminence of your exalted, unequalled knowledge of spiritual circumcision³¹ — and now the Prophet laments over you: do you not weep on your own account? Alas, Mother! Jeremiah, aghast, proclaims your ruin, wailing, weeping, lamenting: do you not wail with the wailer, weep with the weeper? Alas, Mother! Why do you hide your grief for your children's fall, while the Prophet, a stranger, does not cease to grieve openly on your behalf? Only weigh the Prophet's words of lament, Mother, and rivers of tears will gush from your eyes and course down your cheeks!

10 Have you forgotten that you were rightly counted as "gold," in your former state, for the excellence of your devotion? For just as gold is more precious than other metals, so were you distinguished among all the Orders for the greater sureness of your secret contemplation.

³⁰ Lm. 4:1.

³¹ St. Jerome, in his work on the meaning of Hebrew names, gives the meaning of "Carmel" as "knowledge of circumcision."

11 Was not your "colour" then "fine" above all others, radiant with the purest chastity, ruddy with the flush of modesty?³² Was not your holiness such in the sight of all that all desired to gaze on the ravishing beauty that was yours ?

12 Were not your sons in the past rightly called "stones of the sanctuary," solid in their steadfastness, hewn true by their resolute perseverance, becomingly polished by their harsh penances, and coloured, this with the hue of this virtue, that with the tint of that—all resplendently prepared by the labour, of the supreme craftsman for the glorious building of the heavenly city of Jerusalem?³³

13 Alas! Remembering these past glories in the light of your present state, I fear for the future' lest the sinfulness of your sons lead to the outright conversion of this gold into lead....³⁴

14 A divine decree lays down, it would seem, that those who have abandoned their rightful state and have sinned in common, severing, by their lack of stability, the bond of peace,³⁵ should suffer in common a common disgrace. Jeremiah then, thus continues his lament: "Jerusalem has sinned grievously, and therefore has become unstable; her enemies have seen her and have mocked at her Sabbaths; all that honoured her

³² Cf. Song 5:10.

³³ Cf. the hymn "*Urbs Ierusalem beata*," now restored, for Evening Prayer II of the Dedication of a Church in the *Liturgia horarum*.

³⁴ Some words are evidently wanting here in the Latin text.

³⁵ Cf. Eph. 4:3.

have despised her, because they have seen her shame; her friends have despised her, and have become her enemies."³⁶

15 Take heed, Mother, take heed of all these things: they refer to you—you who, brimming over with peace, as you were in former times, could rightly be called "Jerusalem";³⁷ if you heed these things you can do no other than groan, than weep, than sigh, as you weigh cause against effect.

16 Mark too the woeful change that has come over that "colour" of yours, once so breathtaking in its beauty. For this too the Prophet laments over you, saying: "From the daughter of Sion all her beauty has departed, her princes have become like rams that find no pasture"³⁸—pasture, that is, in the spiritual sense, spiritual consolation. Well indeed does he liken to "rams" your "princes"—those who hold sway over you—for they destroy the peace of the flock, putting concord to flight and sowing endless dissension and scandal by the following of their own judgment and will—the two "horns of the proud" that must be broken in the end by the Lord.³⁹ The Psalmist has words for them: "Contempt was poured out upon their princes, and he made them wander in the trackless wastes."⁴⁰

³⁶ Lm. 1:8; 1:7; 1:8; 1:2.

³⁷ Cf. the hymn referred to in note 33, the second line of which is "*dicta pacis visio*" (called "vision of peace"). "Vision of peace" is St. Jerome's interpretation of the name "Jerusalem."

³⁸ Cf. Lm. 1:6.

³⁹ Cf. Ps. 74:11.

⁴⁰ Cf. PS. 106:40.

17 Let us turn again to the next passage: "The stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street." Those "stones" your true sons were, while, mortared together in unfeigned charity,⁴¹ they held aloof from the least violation of what they had vowed when they made profession, while yet they strove (at home in their cells, not wandering the streets) to "ponder God's law" and "watch at their prayers,"⁴² not because they were compelled to, but happily, moved by joy of spirit. Alas! Now, torn loose from the mortar of charity by discord and instability, pitifully "scattered at the head of every street," they are "stones of the sanctuary" no longer. But though no "stones of the sanctuary," stones they must still be called, for their stone hard obstinacy. Etymologically too they are stones, "wounding the feet":⁴³ their own finer sentiments and those of other people. Not "stones of the sanctuary" indeed, but "stones of offense," "stumbling blocks"⁴⁴ is the right name for them, for many are those whose sensibilities they hurt and whose consciences they offend by their instability.

18 Since "the zeal of your house has eaten me up,"⁴⁵ most religious of Mothers, I can only heave tear choked sighs of overwhelming sorrow when I consider this state of yours.

⁴¹ Cf. II Cor. 6:6.

⁴² Two scriptural phrases (Ps. 1:2 and I Peter 4:7) which feature in the central precept of the Carmelite Rule. See *The Rule of St. Albert*, p. 82-83.

⁴³ St. Isidore's false etymology of the word "*lapis*": "*Lapis autem dictus, quod laedet pedem.*"

⁴⁴ Cf. I Pet. 2 :8; Is. 8:14.

⁴⁵ Ps. 68:10.

And, where my own interior life is concerned, when I realize how much time I have lost I find anguish wherever I turn, and no amount of consolation can assuage my grief.

19 Thus my sorrow has a twofold cause—though either one would have seemed enough for my shrinking soul to bear. And though various reasons could be brought forward on behalf of the one or the other, when it came to deciding which of these grief's had the prior and principal claim to be voiced, I finally determined that your affliction, being of more general concert, deserved to be considered first.

CHAPTER II

20 "Who will give my head a fountain of tears," so that, "weeping day and night,"⁴⁶ groaning, sighing, I might stir up him who first planted you against those who have uprooted you from the "fruitful land" of solitude, and transplanted you, a pitiful object, into a land that is "a salty waste because of the wickedness of its inhabitants"⁴⁷—"who will stand with me against the workers of this iniquity?"⁴⁸

21 Tenderest of Mothers, who can console me at the sight of you, fallen among thieves in your descent from Jerusalem to Jericho?⁴⁹ How I grieve for you, how I grieve! There is no help for you "Oh that I might die of grief! My soul is so crushed with sorrow at the sight of you, robbed while you journeyed, wounded, and left half dead, that it cannot go on living! Who will feel compassion for you?⁵⁰ "Who will heal you?" Who will console you? "Who will take pity on you?"⁵¹All, indeed, have passed by unheeding, nor is there anyone you may look to for healing except the Samaritan of the Gospel, should he take pity on you and come to your aid in your sufferings, to pour wine and oil into your wounds.

⁴⁶ Jer. 9:1.

⁴⁷ Ps. 106:34.

⁴⁸ Ps. 93:16.

⁴⁹ Cf. Lk. 10:30.

⁵⁰ Lm. 2:13.

⁵¹ Jer. 15:5.

22 If only you would make the effort to examine, with your eyes as wide open as mine are, the state which was yours of old, and which your sons, become strangers, hardened in their estrangement, and staggering ever further from their rightful path,⁵² have woefully distorted—have so distorted indeed, if the truth must be told, as to have utterly destroyed! Can anyone now who counts himself a son of yours, holiest of Mothers, fail to grieve over you?

23 Remember with sighs—and, sighing, remember yet again—the dignity, the holiness that were yours in your primitive state; your worthiness, your fame in the eyes of all, in the days when you never failed to regale your hermits, our saintly forefathers, with spiritual sustenance of the richest, in pasturage unequalled, and to lead them forth to waters of unparalleled refreshment.⁵³

24 And now turn to a consideration, which will, I do not doubt, bathe you afresh in tears. The sinfulness of your sons—stepsons rather—has made you such that you are a burden to everyone. Jeremiah, then, may well continue his lament, and say to you: "How your noble sons, and those who were clothed with the finest gold, are counted as earthen vessels, the work of a potter's hands! Your prophets have seen false and foolish things for you; they have not laid bare your wickedness to move you to repentance. Let your tears run

⁵² Cf. Ps. 17:46.

⁵³ Cf. Ps. 22:2.

down like a torrent day and night; give yourself no rest, the apple of your eye no respite. Arise, Judah, in the night, at the beginning of tile watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord; lift up your hands to him for the life of your little ones, who have fainted from hunger at the head of every street."⁵⁴

25 *The Mother speaks:* "My son, alas! The sight of your Mother, plunged in grief, should move you to console her. Why do you make it your concern instead to augment her grief by urging her to further lamentation? Am I not well aware, son, that my children's sinfulness has, in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah 'made me desolate, wasted with sorrow all day long? Look, Lord, and behold, for I have become vile. You have heard my voice: do not turn your ear away from my sobs and cries. You have made me an outcast, refuse among the peoples. Hear, I beseech you, all you peoples, and behold my sorrow! The Lord has taken away all my mighty men out of my midst, he has turned the tide of affairs against me, to destroy my chosen men. For these things do I weep, my eyes stream with tears, because the comforter, the one who might relieve my soul, is far away from me. My priests and my elders pined away in the city, as they sought food to relieve their souls. My children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed. My loved ones wandered in the streets, they were defiled with blood. How shall I bring back those I have nourished? My enemy

⁵⁴ Cf. Lm. 4:2; 2:14; 2:18-19. In Nicholas's text "*lauda*" in 2:19 has evidently become corrupted to "*Iuada*".

has consumed them. The wickedness of my people has become greater than the sin of Sodom, for the daughter was overthrown in a moment, and there was nothing left of hers for thieving hands to take.⁵⁵

26 *The son resumes:* Alas, Mother! Why have I lived to see this day, when I must look upon your shame, your confusion, powerless to offer you any redress since there are none to share my concern?

⁵⁵ Another mosaic of texts: cf. Lm. 1:13; 1:11; 3:56; 1:18; 1:15-16; 1:19; 1:16; 4:14; 2:22, 4:6. In Nicholas's text "*caeci*" in 4:14 has been corrupted to "*cari*".

CHAPTER III

27 Listen, then, to your son's advice: call together, like a loving Mother, your true children; warn them, charge them to submit to the divine will, and make it their duty to put in order that state of yours which has been deformed, under the pretext of a greater good, not by the right hand of the Most High⁵⁶ but by the actions of proud men. As for the stepsons, they must be taught how hard it is to kick for long against a goad that is never blunted,⁵⁷ how insane, how dangerous it is to salvation, to persist in obstinate resistance to the dispositions of God.

28 They will perhaps reply, only too ready to give birth to the arrogance they have conceived, in some such deceitful manner as this: "We have not the least intention of resisting the divine will, but of conforming to it, for our purpose is to edify the people of God, preaching his word, hearing confessions, giving advice, and performing other good works, to our own profit and that of our neighbours. This, rightly and properly, is our wholehearted desire. This is the reason—and a very good one—why we left the desert's solitude to come and carry out these works amid the throngs of the cities."

29 See, Mother, see the pride of your stepsons! Surely you can never have been even a stepmother to such as these!

⁵⁶ Cf. Ps. 76:11; 114; 115.

⁵⁷ Cf. Acts 9:5.

Never a thought do they give to you, to spare you confusion and shame. No, blindly, sophistically, they argue on, endangering—nay, damning themselves!

30 May it please you then, beloved Mother, to let your son answer in your place while you grieve, for the words well up within me and my zeal constrains me.⁵⁸ Let me tell on your behalf the truth no enemy will be able to contradict.

31 Fools!⁵⁹ What use is this veneer of apparent truth with which you try to gloss over your protestations? Do you imagine that he from whom no secret lies hidden⁶⁰ can be deceived by such nonsense—indeed, such lies? You falsely assure anyone who is ready to believe you that it is so as to be able to profit both yourselves and your neighbours, by putting into act what in times past you were privileged to experience, that you have abandoned your desert life and come into the cities. Let me point out to you that you achieve neither of these aims in the city, while both were fully accomplished in the solitude of your former days.

32 As long as you persevered in solitude in your contemplations, your prayers and holy exercises, with profit to yourselves, the renown of your holiness, wafted abroad like a perfume, far and wide, over city and town, brought wonderful comfort to all those it reached; and it attracted many, in those

⁵⁸ Cf. Job 32:18.

⁵⁹ "O minus sapientes!" cf. II Cor 9:23.

⁶⁰ Cf. the former collect *ad postulandam gratiam Spiritus Sancti*.

days, to the solitude of the desert, edified by its fragrance, and drawn, as though by a cord of tenderness⁶¹, to repent of their misdeeds.

33 But now, conducting yourselves as worldlings among worldlings, you profit neither yourselves nor them. Indeed in not profiting you lose, and you offend the people, the very ones you are so anxious to please, by inflicting on them the poisonous stench of your ill fame.

34 Have you not, as the Prophet puts it, "mingled with the heathen, and learned their works, and served their idols," so that these things have "become a stumbling block" to you?⁶² If only they were a stumbling-block to yourselves alone! But no, you make active use of them and cause others to stumble as well, hardened in the belief, shameless, as you are that their stumbling is of no account. Yes, you have "learned the works" of the heathen, but your consciences will never cease to reproach you for it; and so Jeremiah, pitying the barren drudgery your Order is condemned to, pronounces this lament: "She has dwelt among the heathen, and has found no rest."⁶³

35 You can judge for yourselves whether you have found rest! Mark my words: the Lord has "given you up to your base mind"⁶⁴ and for your sins has robbed you of sound under-

⁶¹ Cf. Hos. 11:4.

⁶² Cf. Ps. 105: 35-36.

⁶³ Cf. Lam. 1:3.

⁶⁴ Cf. Rom. 1:28.

standing. Though like seeks like⁶⁵ as the saying goes, it is when they know them to be different from themselves in the holiness of their lives that those in the world truly love and honour religious. When they see that they are no different from themselves in their vicious ways, they may sometimes praise them to their faces, but behind their backs they deride them and hold them up to ridicule, for they rightly deem them of little worth.

⁶⁵ Cf. Sir. 13:19.

CHAPTER IV

36 Where among you, tell me, are to be found preachers, well versed in the word of God, and fit to preach as it should be done?

37 Some there are, indeed, presumptuous enough, in their craving for vain glory,⁶⁶ to attempt it, and to trot out to the people such scraps as they have been able to cull from books, in an effort to teach others what they themselves know neither by study nor by experience. They prate away before the common folk—without understanding a word of their own rigmarole—as bold faced as though all theology lay digested in the stomach of their memory, and any tale will serve their turn if it can be given a mystical twist and made to redound to their own glory. Then, when they have done preaching—or rather tale telling—there they stand, ears all pricked up and itching⁶⁷ to catch the slightest whisper of flattery. But not a vestige do they show of the endowments for which, in their appetite for vainglory, they long to be praised.

38 What is it indeed but a foolish craving for human praise and the vainglory it occasions that moves men like these to preach, devoid, as they are of learning and right conduct alike? If they achieve anything at all by their words, they bring it to naught again by their example. The ambitious pre-

⁶⁶ Cf. Gal. 5:26.

⁶⁷ Cf. II Tim. 4:3.

sumption, the consummate impudence of these unlettered creatures, whose moral conduct deserves nothing but contempt, in trying to usurp the office of preaching, is not only an abuse: it is sheer absurdity!

39 It is no less a matter for wonder that these same illiterates I speak of are breathlessly eager to be appointed physicians—useless ones though they make—of spiritual wounds and maladies, in the hearing of confessions. Ignorant alike of theology and law, they are unable to distinguish between one form of leprosy and another,⁶⁸ loose what should not be loosed, and bind what should not be bound.⁶⁹ A fine doctor indeed who thinks he can cure everyone's ills, every sort of disorder, with one and the same medicine and what medicine!

40 It is hard to refrain from laughter at hearing you, woefully incapable as you are of giving even yourselves good advice, say that your aim is to do good to those who seek counsel from you. You it is who should take counsel—and from other counsellors! Then you might perhaps clap hand over mouth, and keep those foolish words of yours, unprofitable, unseasoned as they are by any trace of good sense, close confined in the chamber of your heart.⁷⁰ Otherwise, simpletons, you will only add to your own shame for your arrogant presump-

⁶⁸ Cf. Deut. 17:8, which is cited by the *Decrees of Gratian*, one of the sources of Canon Law, from which Nicholas seems to be directly quoting.

⁶⁹ Cf. Mt. 16: 19; 18:18.

⁷⁰ Cf. Job 21:5; 29:9; Sir. 5:14.

tion will rightly earn silent reproof from the wise, and contempt from all who see through your shallowness.

41 Make the round of the Provinces, examine all their members, and tell me, on your return, how many there are in the Order who are worthy and capable of preaching, hearing confessions, and giving counsel, as befits those who dwell in cities. If you say there are many you will be wide indeed of the truth. I who have made the round of the Provinces and become acquainted with their members must sadly admit how very few there are who have knowledge enough or aptitude for these offices.

42 Do you remember how Abraham, desiring in his pity to turn aside the sentence of God, began with fifty, and gradually came down to ten, as he begged the Lord in the humblest of terms to deal mercifully with the sinful multitude, even if it were for the sake of only ten just men? Why then are you not afraid to do the contrary, and drag such a multitude of poor wretches, from every part of the Order, to the brink of imminent peril, into countless occasions of eternal damnation, for the sake of just such a small number.

CHAPTER V

43 Misguided deceivers of your brethren, present and to come, the foundation of your argument is false. Be silent for very shame! Let me give you the true explanation.

44 Is it not the dragon's tail—symbolizing fleshliness—the tail which, we read in the Apocalypse,⁷¹ dragged the third part of the stars from heaven and flung them to earth, that has torn you from the heaven of that high contemplation which not long since prospered and flourished in the holy solitude of the desert? Not only has it flung you to earth—into earthly attachments—but it seems to have plunged you far deeper—oh unending shame⁷²—into an abyss of occasions of sin and unseemly roavings.

45 This you recognize in your consciences, hardened" and erring though they be; you know it as well as I do but, like all fools who think it shame to acknowledge the truth, you deny it and, for fear of contradicting yourselves, maintain the contrary—boon companions to him of whom the Prophet says: "The words of his mouth are mischief and deceit; he would not understand that he might do well."⁷³

⁷¹ Rev. 12:4.

⁷² Cf. I Tim. 4:2.

⁷³ Ps. 35:4.

46 What is this new Order that has appeared in the cities, tell me? Answer me—though you must surely blush as you do so—in what useful occupation are you engaged there? I will spare you the embarrassment of telling the truth, and will answer more truthfully than you would yourselves. Two by two you roam the streets of the city from morning to night, you scurry hither and tither; and your master is he who “prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.”⁷⁴ Thus, in you, to your utter disgrace, is the prophecy truly fulfilled; “On every side the wicked prowl.”⁷⁵

47 For your correction I must rebuke you. Let me draw back the cloak a little, and lay bare the true reason for these perambulations of yours, these roving, which are so frequent.⁷⁶ The main reason for your wanderings is to visit not orphans but young women, not widows in their adversity but silly girls in dalliances beguines, nuns, and highborn ladies. Once in their company you gaze into each other's eyes⁷⁷ and utter words fit for lovers, the downfall of right conduct⁷⁸ and a snare to the heart.

⁷⁴ Cf. I Pet. 5:8.

⁷⁵ Ps. 11:9.

⁷⁶ “. . . *non pupillos sed puellas, non viduas in tribulatione existentes, used fatuas iuenculas Ibis colloquentes. . .*”—the word-play cannot be reproduced in English. There is a reference to Jas. 1:27, which is completed a few lines later.

⁷⁷ “. . . *alter in alterius iactantes lumina vultus. . .*”; cf. Ovid, *Heroides* III.

⁷⁸ I Cor. 15:33.

48 Of you and your kind was it prophesied in the Psalm: "They went before in the midst of young maidens playing timbrels."⁷⁹ This is no "religion pure and undefiled before God and the Father" in which to "keep oneself unspotted from this world!"⁸⁰

49 Alas, dear brothers! You are covered from head to foot with the mire of this world. How can you suppose yourselves unspotted? I grant indeed that from your point of view no spot is visible, since you are uniformly befouled. But examine your filthy state more closely in the mirror of conscience, and I am quite sure each one of you will say with the Prophet: "Draw me out of the mire that I may not stick fast. Deliver me from those that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the tempest of water drown me, nor the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit close its mouth upon me."⁸¹

50 Listen then, hermits who, named as you are from the desert,⁸² prefer to dwell in the heart of the city. Listen, I say, not to me but to the Prophet: "I have seen wickedness and strife in the city" he says; "day and night shall wickedness go about it on its walls. Toil and injustice are in its midst, extortion and fraud do not leave its streets."⁸³

⁷⁹ Ps. 67:26.

⁸⁰ Cf. Jas. 1:27 (see note 73 above).

⁸¹ Ps. 68:15-16.

⁸² The Latin word *eremita* from which our "hermit" comes means "a desert dweller," from *eremus*, a desert.

⁸³ Ps. 54:10-11.

51 What a safe dwelling you have! How secure, guarded as it is every hour, every minute,⁸⁴ without and within, by so many, such vigilant sentinels! There on the walls Wickedness keeps sharp watch: none of those within can stay sheltered from her heat.⁸⁵ She circles about the citizens, intent on branding each one with her mark.⁸⁶ Others there are who keep a like watch in the midst of the city and in its streets, the minions of Wickedness, whose names the Prophet enumerates in general in this Psalm: Strife, Toil, Injustice, Extortion, and Fraud. The Prophet, as you hear, names in general six of the sentinels of the city. It is only the fact that there is no end to their number that prevented him, no doubt, from entering into greater detail.

52 Think how ironic it is, brethren, to call your dwelling safe. Think how many sentinels, or rather cruel captors there are on guard about you, among you, in pursuit of you, always and everywhere in the city. But do not be deceived on that score into foolishly supposing that their object is to protect and defend you, that they are not your enemies: it is as captives in their prison that they watch over you—that is how you are safeguarded in the city!

53 But now raise your eyes and see how, in the desert, the Lord delivers and defends those who dwell there by the might

⁸⁴ ". . . horis, momentis omnibus. . ."—a line from the hymn *Signum crucis mirabile*.

⁸⁵ Ps. 18:7.

⁸⁶ For this personification of Wickedness, cf. Prov. 7:12-13 and 9:14; Rev. 13:16.

of his arms from the snares of the enemy, casting an impregnable wall about them.⁸⁷

54 In the desert heavenly guardians stand with us in battle array,⁸⁸ in the desert the angels, our fellow-citizens, posted as sentinels on the ramparts of our desert-founded city, never cease, as they faithfully keep watch, night and day, to praise the name of the Lord;⁸⁹ and thus we may boldly proclaim with the Prophet: "Blessed be the Lord, for he has shown his wondrous mercy to us in a fortified city."⁹⁰

55 We could be happy there together, hidden in the desert, in the possession of a true city—a true fellowship, that is, of citizens,⁹¹ but you, not content with that, are doing your best to divide and destroy our fellowship, in your hankering after another kind of city.⁹²

56 In the meantime you have plumbed the depths of wretchedness, for you have turned back from freedom to slavery, from sanctified repose to the unending toil of your wanderings, from the desert, in short, where you partook of the

⁸⁷ Cf. the fifth Responory at Matins for the Sundays of November in the former Roman Breviary.

⁸⁸ ". . . *caelestes excubiae nobiscum stant in acie. . .*"—a quotation from the sequence formerly given in the Carmelite Missal for the feasts of the Apostles, *Supernae Matris gaudia*.

⁸⁹ Cf. the fourth Responory at Matins for the Sundays of November in the former Roman Breviary.

⁹⁰ Ps. 30:22.

⁹¹ "... veram civitatem, id est civiurn unitatem...."

⁹² Cf. Heb. 13:15.

man of devotion, to Egypt, where you were tormented of old, labouring with clay and brick, as slaves to Pharaoh—the devil.⁹³

⁹³ Ex. 1:14; Jud. 5:10.

CHAPTER VI

57 Was it not our Lord and Saviour who led us into the desert, as a mark⁹⁴ of his favour, so that there he might speak to our hearts with special intimacy? It is not in public, not in the market place, not amid noise and bustle that he shows himself to his friends for their consolation and reveals his secret mysteries to them, but behind closed doors?

58 You are misguided indeed if you think the Lord willingly converses with those who seek comfort in worldly vanities or the fleeting pleasures of sense, amid a swarm of vices or the clamour of such evil thoughts as divide a man from God, whose will it is that every one should "know how to control his own body in holiness and honour,"⁹⁵ free from all sin and every occasion of sin. The consolation of God and that of the world cannot dwell together, cannot even approach each other,⁹⁶ for, as St. Bernard says: "Divine consolation is a delicate thing, not given to those who admit any other."⁹⁷ I find it beyond all comprehension that, unable to enjoy both, you should have chosen the consolation of the world.

⁹⁴ Hos. 2:14.

⁹⁵ I Thess. 4: 3-4.

⁹⁶ Cf. note 2 to Chapter 13, below.

⁹⁷ From Abbot Godfrey's *Declamations from the sermons of St. Bernard*.

59 You who flee solitude and spurn the consolation it has to offer, would you hear how the Lord has shown by his works the high esteem in which he holds it?

60 To the solitude of the mountain did Abraham, unwavering in faith and discerning the issue from afar in hope, ascend at the Lord's command, ready for obedience's sake to sacrifice Isaac his son;⁹⁸ under which mystery the passion of Christ—the true Isaac—lies hidden.

61 To the solitude of the mountain was it also that Abraham's nephew, Lot, was told to flee for his life in haste from Sodom.⁹⁹

62 In the solitude of Mount Sinai was the Law given to Moses, and there was he so clothed with light that when he came down from the mountain no one could look upon the brightness of his face.¹⁰⁰

63 In the solitude of Mary's chamber, as she conversed with Gabriel was the Word of the Father Most High¹⁰¹ in very truth made flesh.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Cf. Gen. 22:1-12; Rom. 4:16-22.

⁹⁹ Cf. Gen. 19:15-30.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ex. 34:28-35; II Cor. 3:7. It is remarkable that Nicholas does not include Elijah among his Old Testament examples.

¹⁰¹ "*Verbum Patris altissimi*," a quotation from the hymn *Iesu Salvator saeculi*. Cf. for this passage St. Ambrose's Commentary on *St. Luke*, II, 8 formerly lesson 8 at Matins for the feast of the Annunciation.)

¹⁰² Lk. 1:26-38.

64 In the solitude of Mount Thabor it undoubtedly was, when it was his will to be transfigured, that God made Man revealed his glory to his chosen intimates of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰³

65 To a mountain solitude it was that our Saviour ascended alone, in order to pray.¹⁰⁴

66 In the solitude of the desert did he fast forty days and forty nights together, and there did he will to be tempted by the devil¹⁰⁵ so as to show us the most fitting place for prayer, penance, and victory over temptation.

67 To the solitude of mountain or desert it was, then, that our Saviour retired when he desired to pray; although we read that he came down from the mountain¹⁰⁶ when he wished to preach to the people or manifest his works. He who planted our Fathers¹⁰⁷ in the solitude of the mountain thus gave himself to them and their successors as a model, and desired them to write down his deeds, which are never empty of mystical meaning,¹⁰⁸ as an example.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Mt. 17:1-18; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mt. 14:23, Mk. 6:46; Lk. 6:12; Jn. 6:13.

¹⁰⁵ Mt. 4:1-11, Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13; Heb. 2:18; 4:15.

¹⁰⁶ Lk. 6:17. Cf. St. Ambrose's *Commentary on St. Luke* v. 6 (formerly lesson 7 at Matins of the Common of many Martyrs outside Eastertide, second choice).

¹⁰⁷ I.e., Our Lord: cf. Chapter 2, para. 1, above.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. St. Gregory, *Homily 22 on the Gospels* (formerly lesson 7 on the Saturday within the Easter Octave).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. I Pet. 2:21.

68 It was this Rule of our Saviour, a Rule of utmost holiness, that some of our predecessors followed of old. They tarried long in the solitude of the desert, conscious of their own imperfection.¹¹⁰ Sometimes, however, though rarely, they came down from their desert, anxious, so as not to fail in what they regarded as their duty, to be of service to their neighbours, and sowed broadcast of the grain, threshed out in preaching, that they had so sweetly reaped in solitude with the sickle of contemplation.¹¹¹

69 Where was it that the disciples received the Spirit, the Paraclete? As they roamed the streets, or as they sat by themselves on Mount Sion? As they busied themselves about idle

¹¹⁰ ". . . *proprium imperfectum cognoscentes* . . .", cf. Ps. 138:16. The phrase could also bear the meaning "deepening their knowledge of their own imperfection."

¹¹¹ Fr. Benedict Zimmerman (Benoit-Marie de la Croix, OCD) in *Les Saints Déserts des Carmes Déchaussés*, Paris 1927, p. 6, takes this passage as referring to the early Carmelites, quoting it as proof of the "mixed" character of the Carmelite life from its beginnings. He is followed in this by Francois de Ste. Marie, OCD, in *Les plus vieux textes du Carmel*, 2 ed. Paris 1961, p. 152; by "Jean le Solitaire" (i.e., Louis Lallement) in *Aux sources de la tradition du Carmel*, Paris 1953, pp. 168-169, and by Thomas Merton in *Disputed Questions*, New York 1960, pp. 218-263: *The Primitive Carmelite Ideal*. Fr. Adrian Staring, however, in his own Introduction to his critical edition of the *Ignea Sagitta*, p. 257, writes: "The question is, who are 'our Fathers,' 'their successors' and 'some of our predecessors'? Nicholas, like the First Rubric of the 1281 Constitutions of the Order, seems to have considered all the monks of ancient times as predecessors of the Carmelite Order, even though he does not speak of them as successors of the Prophet Elijah. He also considers as such the disciples of Our Lord, those whom he 'desired to write down his deeds as an example.' Throughout this chapter Nicholas is giving examples of 'how the Lord has shown by his own works the high esteem in which he holds solitude,' although he has to concede that our Lord himself, and 'some of our predecessors' came down from the solitude of the mountain to preach. It is evident from the tenor of the work as a whole that he was not holding this up as an example to be followed."

matters which were no concern of theirs, or as they gave themselves up wholeheartedly to prayer?¹¹²

70 What spirit have you received so far, tell me, you rovers, vagabonds of the town, amid the city's bustle and din? Not the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, it would seem, not the Spirit of Counsel and Fortitude, not the Spirit of Knowledge and Piety, nor the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord.¹¹³ No indeed! It is the spirit of confusion¹¹⁴ and pride that you have received—you is brim-full of it! Surely your own consciences, little given, as they are to scruple, bear witness to that? You are fellows now—are you not?—to him who, in the words of the Prophet, "conceived sorrow and brought forth iniquity."¹¹⁵

71 "Happy the man who takes warning from the perils of others!"¹¹⁶ Beware lest you run headlong into the danger of him whom the Prophet goes on to describe, for he says: "He has opened a pit and dug it, and has fallen into the hole he has made. His sorrow shall be turned on his own head, and his iniquity shall come down on his own crown."¹¹⁷

¹¹² Acts 2: 1-4.

¹¹³ Is. 11:2-3.

¹¹⁴ Is. 19:14.

¹¹⁵ Job. 15:35; Ps. 7:15.

¹¹⁶ A quotation from the fable of the wolf, in the version of Gualterus Anglicus.

¹¹⁷ Ps. 7:16-17.

72 I cannot pass over in silence the testament which our Saviour left to his disciples and their followers¹¹⁸ before he ascended to the Father on Mount Olivet.¹¹⁹ There can be no salvation without it, for Augustine says: "He who will not observe the testament of peace cannot come into the inheritance of Christ."¹²⁰ Tell me, with regard to this testament, where is your peace? Where is your concord? Are you not rent asunder by dissensions and divisions, torn limb from limb, and your members daily cast out and scattered like dust?

¹¹⁸ From the context the reference is evidently to Jn. 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

¹¹⁹ Acts 1:12.

¹²⁰ Sermon 97 in the Appendix to St. Augustine's works.

CHAPTER VII

73 Make a balance of your consciences, you who have broken faith with your profession and set your Rule at nought. Do your best to be impartial as you weigh therein the vow you freely made.¹²¹ Once you have thus weighed it fairly, give your Creator his due, and keep what you vowed according to the promise your lips have uttered.¹²²

74 Be careful! Be on your guard! Do not let a single disjunctive proposition continue to lead you astray—for you will find written in our Rule: "You may make foundations in solitary places, or where land is given to you which is suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order."¹²³ When you read these words, have you no interest in finding out what they mean? They are not to be interpreted at the whim of any fool that comes along, but in the sense a right-minded person finds in them after reasonable consideration, with due concern for the truth, and with no distortion of their meaning. The text does not simply read: "In solitary places, or where land is given to you;" it goes on: "which is

¹²¹ The earliest Carmelite profession formula we possess dates from 1281- a decade after the *Ignea Sagitta* was written-and reads: "I, brother n. make profession and promise obedience to God and blessed Mary, and to you, brother N., Prior General of the Hermit Brothers of the Order of Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel, and your successors, according to the Rule and Constitutions of the said Brothers, until death." (*Analecta O. Carm.* 15 (1950) p. 229.)

¹²² Cf. Ps. 65:14.

¹²³ See *The Rule of Saint Albert*, p. 81.

suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order."

75 By this addition the places it is right for us to live in are expressly and clearly determined, so that unsuitable and inconvenient sites should not lead to the introduction of a way of life foreign to our Order, and of dangerous innovations that might cause it, in time, to throw aside its observances and thus despoil itself of the glory of its primitive state.

76 But what was feared has indeed befallen Us,¹²⁴ for the friars of the present day all read "anywhere" in place of "where," and leave out the qualifying clause; they completely ignore the first part of the disjunctive proposition, "in solitary places," and (with no small loss to themselves) take notice only of the second part, without its qualifying clause. The argument they thus construct, proceeding as it does from a qualified to a completely unqualified universal proposition, is a sophism which involves the manifest falsehood of the conclusion. "You may make foundations where land is given to you that is suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order—therefore wherever land is given to you." Is that a convincing argument? Conclusion and antecedent seem to have changed places!

¹²⁴ Cf. Job 3:25.

77 Not so, wicked ones, not so¹²⁵ should you form your judgments! You must take the qualified clause with its qualification, and make a serious effort to discover the constitutive elements of "the observance proper to our Order." If he does that the discerning enquirer will see at once what kind of site will favour that observance and is "suitable and convenient," and what kind will make it difficult, and is therefore unsuitable and inconvenient.

78 We have undertaken by our profession to live according to a Rule that abounds with observances. A brief consideration of that Rule is therefore not out of place.

79 There are three general practices to which our profession obliges us: obedience, chastity, and the renunciation of ownership.¹²⁶ These are common to the profession of all Orders. As far as these practices are concerned there is no difference between the Orders except in their dress; they are all essentially one, as it were, at long as they are equally strict, and all that observe the same practices with equal strictness are worthy of equal merit.

80 But in our Order, as in every other, others that are more particular reinforce these general practices, and by these the Orders are distinguished one from another, some being stricter than others. With regard to these practices any

¹²⁵ "*Non sic, impii, non sic indicio procedendum*"—a play on the opening words of Ps. 1:4.

¹²⁶ Cf. *The Rule of Saint Albert*, p. 79.

religious who has asked permission, even if it has not been granted, is allowed by common law to transfer from one Order to another to gain the benefit of a more perfect way of life.¹²⁷

81 "How great are your works! Your thoughts are very deep."¹²⁸ "The dull man cannot know these things indeed, nor the fool understand them."¹²⁹ Who has known the mind of the Lord whose wisdom is beyond measure, or who has been his counsellor?"¹³⁰ For the Lord, whose providence is unerring in its dispositions,¹³¹ designedly set some in the desert with Mary, when it was his purpose to array the garden of the Church Militant with a diversity of Orders, and others with Martha in the city.¹³² Those endowed with learning, industrious in the study of the Scriptures, and of adequate moral probity, he established in the city, so that they could exercise their zeal in nourishing the people with his word.¹³³ Those of a simpler cast, however, those with whom he holds secret colloquy,¹³⁴ he marked out to be sent into the desert

¹²⁷ The Canon Law of the time allowed this: "A religious prompted by zeal for a more holy life may transfer to a stricter Order, having first asked permission of his superior, even though it is refused. . ." (*Decretals of Gregory IX*, Ch. 18, III, 31).

¹²⁸ Ps. 91:6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 7.

¹³⁰ Rom. 11:34; Ps. 146:5.

¹³¹ Cf. Collect for 7th Sunday after Pentecost in the former Roman Missal.

¹³² Cf. Lk. 10: 38-42.

¹³³ Cf. Sir. 44:3-4.

¹³⁴ Cf. Prov. 3:32. 70.

with the Prophet who said: "Lo, I have journeyed afar in flight; I fixed my abode in the wilderness. I awaited him who saved me from faintheartedness, and from the tempest."¹³⁵

82 He uses the word "Lo" demonstratively, to draw attention to his words, as if to say: "See what I have done, and do likewise¹³⁶ yourself. In my flight from the turmoil of the world I did not stay to dwell within the walls of the city, nor in its suburbs, nor amid its outlying gardens nor anywhere in the neighbourhood, but I journeyed afar in flight, and fixed my abode in the wilderness.' And I 'fixed my abode' there is truth: I did not return to the city after a few days, as they do now, but I fixed my abode in the wilderness,' awaiting 'him who saved me from faintheartedness and from the tempest.'"

83 With such special care has the Lord provided for the guidance of all religious, whether in the desert or in the city, that in his infinite wisdom he has given them all, through those best qualified to draw up their Rules, their own distinct ways of life—the ways he knew to be best suited to each of the Order in the circumstances its members would find themselves in.

¹³⁵ Ps. 54:8~9.

¹³⁶ Cf. Lk. 10:37.

CHAPTER VIII

84 Let us then examine carefully our own form of life, the form we profess¹³⁷ to follow. Let us apply our minds to a close scrutiny of it, to find out whether our salvation demands that we live in the desert or in the city.

85 The Holy Spirit knows what is best for each man. Was it not for a purpose that he laid down in our Rule that "each one is to have a separate cell"?¹³⁸ It does not say "contiguous," but "separate," in order that the heavenly Bridegroom and his Bride, the contemplative soul, might converse the more secretly as they repose therein.¹³⁹ Not without reason indeed was it thus ordained by the gracious disposition of divine mercy, but so that we simple folk, unwary as we are in battle, might be hidden more effectively, in our solitary cells, from the threefold warfare—of sight, that is, of hearing, and of speech.¹⁴⁰ God intended us to be sheltered there from these combats, and to have an easier war to wage, with only our evil thoughts for foes.¹⁴¹ Our modesty need suffer no

¹³⁷ Cf. *The Rule of St. Albert*, p. 79.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 81.

¹³⁹ Cf. St. Jerome, *letter 22, to Eustochium 5*: "Let the secrets of your chamber keep you always within; there let your Bridegroom ever entertain you."

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Abbot Smaragdus, *Diadema monachorum*, cap. 21: "He who sit tranquilly in solitude is delivered from a threefold warfare: of hearing, that is, of speech, and of sight."

¹⁴¹ Cf. St. Peter Damian, *Apologeticum de contemptu saeculi*, cap. 25: {In the cell} our only continual struggle is with our thoughts."

suspicion of corruption if, in the shelter of our cells, we strive to keep our souls unsullied, persevering, clean of heart, in holy meditation.¹⁴²

86 Chastity, whether of mind or body, is not proof against idleness, and so the Holy Spirit would have us ever busy at some spiritual task, as befits the servants of Christ. For this is the command he gave us in our Rule: "Each of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering God's Law day and night, and keeping watch at his prayers unless some other duty claims his attention."¹⁴³ Do you not see? If we mean to live up to our profession, as I said, we must have separate cells. Regular observance necessarily obliges us to have them, so that we may stay in them, pondering God's Law day and night, and keeping watch at our prayers unless some other duty claims our attention.

87 But you city dwellers, who have exchanged your separate cells for a common house, what spiritual task do you perform, there in full view of one another, what are your holy occupations? When do you ponder God's Law and watch at your prayers? Does not all the vanity you see or hear, say or do, as you wander hither and thither all day long, come back to your memories at night? Do you not busy those memories of yours with lawless and unclean thoughts, so that your distracted minds can ponder nothing else?

¹⁴² Cf. *The Rule of St. Albert*, p. 89.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 83.

88 How happy you would be, each one of you, if you could truly say to our Saviour with the Prophet: "How I have loved your Law, O Lord! It is my meditation all day long."¹⁴⁴ And this too: "I have held back my feet from every evil way so that I may keep your words."¹⁴⁵ Alas, brethren! These things you cannot say and speak the truth! Join me then in bewailing your lot, and in grief learn wisdom. Ponder the words of the same Prophet regarding your idle ways: "He has plotted mischief while upon his bed, he has set himself upon every way that is not good, and he has not spurned evil."¹⁴⁶

89 I know that when you come home from your roving and rambling, there and then the rumors begin to fly. The hubbub grows louder, disagreement makes its appearance, quarrels arise, offence is taken, envy springs up, hatred is conceived, plots are hatched, and often these words of strife end in fist-cuffs and blows. "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity"¹⁴⁷—idle brethren in a single house! But just as that house divides those it unites in body from the love of God and neighbor, and scatters them, so do the separate cells unite by bodily separation those they shelter from strife, and bind them together in that love.

¹⁴⁴ Ps. 118:97.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 101.

¹⁴⁶ Ps. 35:5.

¹⁴⁷ Ps. 132:1.

90 Perhaps some of you will say: "Although we live in the city, we have separate cells, or mean to have them by and by." "Why this waste?"¹⁴⁸ I reply. What use to you in the city are cells that none enters except at bedtime, so that he might sleep and rest in greater security? As I said, you scurry about the lanes and streets¹⁴⁹ of the city at random all day—do you not?—and as soon as you get home, down you sit, cheek by jowl, to exchange rumors and gossip. Why, your whole day's labour is vanity!¹⁵⁰ You reserve your empty cells for sleep alone—do you not?—and spend a third of the night, if not half, in foolish chatter and immoderate tipping. Cells are of no use to those whose thoughts and pastimes are vain. They are for those who make prayer their business.

91 A professed member of our Order who has been allotted a cell has the obligation, whenever he finds himself out of his cell, of examining his conscience as to whether he is excused by a lawful duty. And if he does not find a reasonable excuse, he is obliged to return to his cell. If he scorns the protests of conscience and declines to return, let him know that he is breaking faith with his profession.¹⁵¹

92 In the cell, however, the less perfect might grow weary of spirit if spiritual employments were prolonged beyond

¹⁴⁸ Mk. 14:4; cf. Mt. 26:9.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Song 3:2.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. I Cor. 15:58.

¹⁵¹ Cf. St. Teresa, *Maxims* 19: "Do not stay outside your cell: leave it only for a good reason, and then, as you do so, ask God for grace not to offend him."

measure, so it has pleased divine providence to add to them, in second place, bodily toil, so that, as one duty succeeds another, all our time may be spent to our own profit and our Creator's glory. This further provision reads: "You must give yourselves to work of some kind, so that the devil may always find you busy."¹⁵² Our twofold occupation in solitude, then, engages both body and soul, and while body and soul are busied turn and turn about, the bulwark of our castle—chastity—is fortified, every moment of our time is well spent, and our gain in terms of merit is incalculable.

¹⁵² *The Rule of St. Albert*, p. 89.

CHAPTER IX

93 And now, admirable as they are, I must pass over the injunctions of our Rule concerning obedience and the renunciation of ownership; but I will mention a few of the things which I think are of help to us in the observance of chastity.

94 Although we—and our chastity—have three cruel adversaries to contend with, as we sing in the Prose: "World, flesh and devil attack: us, each in its own way,"¹⁵³ no sane man can doubt, I think, that it is the flesh which fights hardest of all, through concupiscence, to overcome the spirit.¹⁵⁴

95 Ah, how safe is that delicate flower, the chastity we have vowed to observe, in the shelter of the cell! In our solitary cell we are shielded from the threefold warfare I have mentioned, and have only our lawless thoughts for foes.¹⁵⁵ In the cell our spiritual employments keep idleness at bay, so that our modesty can come to no harm from that quarter. In the cell we have for our gentle preceptor the Holy Spirit, who guards us against deception, and teaches us what we should avoid, as we read in the Proverbs: "By instruction the storerooms shall be filled."¹⁵⁶ In the cell we are given a glimpse of the priceless,

¹⁵³ "*Mundus caro, daemonia/diversa movent proelia*," from the sequence of the Mass of the Apostles, in the ancient Carmelite Missal.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Gal. 5:17.

¹⁵⁵ See notes 135 and 136 to the preceding chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Prov. 24:4. The similarity between *cella*, the cell, and *cellaria*, the word used for "storerooms" is responsible for the choice of this text.

the incomparable treasure of contemplation, balm of the soul, so that we might spurn the fleeting things of earth and rapidly become consumed with desire for it.

96 For we read in Isaiah: "Hezekiah showed them his storehouse of aromatic spices, of silver and gold, of sweet odours and precious ointment."¹⁵⁷ All these things, and much else besides, are shown to us spiritually, in our solitary cell, by our true Hezekiah. We are brought by the King of Kings into his wine cellar, and charity is set in order in us.¹⁵⁸ Well indeed can our cell be called a wine cellar, for there the Holy Spirit soberly inebriates those who are faithful to their cell with the wondrous wine of devotion,¹⁵⁹ until they fall asleep on the glorious bed of sweet contemplation.

97 But, say what I might, I can never speak highly enough of the cell. Nothing can interpose itself between the cell, and heaven itself: short indeed is the road from one to the others!¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Is. 39:2. Again, the use of *cella* in the sense of "storehouse" is responsible for the use of the text.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Song 2:4. *Cella vinaria* is the Latin for wine cellar.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. the lines: "Laeti bibamus sobriam/ebrietatem Spiritus" from the restored hymn *Splendor paternae gloriae* (*Liturgia horarum*, Heb. I, feria II ad Laudes mat. per annum).

¹⁶⁰ ". . . *inter cellam et caelum nulla scio medium* . . ." writes Nicholas—yet another verbal association. Cf. *The Golden Epistle* by William of St. Thierry (English version by W. Shewring, London 1930), I, cap. 1: ". . . nor is the way long or difficult from cell to heaven for the prayerful spirit or the dying man. The direct ascent from cell to heaven is often made."

98 You have heard some of the privileges—only a few of the very many,—which fall to our happy lot if we are faithful to our cell. "O how great is the abundance of your sweetness, O Lord, which you have hidden for those who hide themselves!"¹⁶¹ Joyfully hidden as we are from the vanity of the world in our solitary cell, the true delights of paradise are ours, which so refresh and recreate the interior man that he ever thirsts, and yet is ever satisfied by them.

99 You however, who are not to be found in your cells but amid the uproar of the clamorous city,¹⁶² have for your lot the vain riches of the world which can do nothing to satisfy you, for repletion only breeds disgust.¹⁶³

100 Show me if you can, hermit-citizens (who do an injustice to each of these terms by abusively associating it with its opposite) show me what paltry privileges you have—or think you have.

101 What? You hang your heads in silence? Much as it pains me then to increase your shame—though shame is the medicine you need—I will answer for you.

102 Rovers, vagabonds, you spurn the solitary cell, and scornfully toss aside every one of the privileges it contains; and a

¹⁶¹ Cf. Ps. 30:20.

¹⁶² ". . . *non in cella sed procella* . . ."—another piece of word-play.

¹⁶³ Cf. St. Gregory, *Homily 36 on the Gospels* (formerly lessons 7-8 at Matins for the Sunday within the octave of Corpus Christi).

bad bargain indeed do you strike in thus exchanging the happiness that awaits you in the cell for the dangers that lurk in the city. Are you not exposed, in the clamorous din of the city, to the threefold warfare I have spoken of, and a host of others, and you weak and unarmed? And are you not so mortally wounded that from the soles of your feet to the crowns of your heads¹⁶⁴ there is not a trace of soundness or health to be found?

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Is. 1:6.

CHAPTER X

103 Why have you imperilled your salvation by your rash descent from¹⁶⁵ the Mount of the Circumcision of the Vices to the treacherous slopes of Gilboa,¹⁶⁶ where the mighty ones of Israel fell, and which knew no drop of the dew or rain of grace?¹⁶⁷ Why did you come down from the mountain, unwary bargainers? And why indeed have you not the courage to ascend once more? You show great foolhardiness on both scores, but on the second more than on the first; for though I reckon it great imprudence to run voluntarily into danger, I think it unwise still, finding oneself in some danger from which one may easily withdraw, to settle down there for good, of one's own free will.

104 Abraham and Isaac, as I said, ascended the mountain, but you, true asses, wait below with the ass!¹⁶⁸ Do you know what you are waiting for? The Prophet can tell you: "My heart waited for reproach and misery"¹⁶⁹—reproach in this life and, unless you repent, eternal misery in the next!

¹⁶⁵ ". . . *de Monte Circumcisionis vitiorum* . . .", see note 31 to Chapter 1. The title of ch. 57 of the *Diadema monachorum* of Abbot Smaragdus (see note 135 to Chapter 8) is *De circumcissione vitiorum*.

¹⁶⁶ ". . . *in montes Gelboe qui dicuntur lubrici* . . ."; this is St. Bede's interpretation of the name "Gelboe" or "Bilboa": slippery.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. II Sam. 1:19,21.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Gen. 22:5, and Chapter 6 above.

¹⁶⁹ Ps. 68:21.

105 Moses speaks with the Lord on the mountain, and you, overwhelmed by the waters of temptation,¹⁷⁰ adore the golden calf below with the people in their sin.¹⁷¹ "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord," asks the Prophet "or who shall stand in his holy place?"¹⁷² And he answers himself straight away: "He who has innocent hands and a clean heart."¹⁷³ Do you desire to ascend the Lord's mountain, or stand in his holy place? If so, why do you seek innocence for your hands in guilty doings, and cleanness for your hearts in an unclean place? In the city, you are seeking God in the midst of filth. Do you really think you are likely to find the one you are looking for in surroundings so completely opposed to him? It is from a mount that the mounts must mount to the Mount, I tell you¹⁷⁴—all those who deserve to be called "mounts," in other words, on account of the excellence of their lives, will go from strength to strength¹⁷⁵ in a steady ascent from the Mount of the Circumcision of the Vices, until they reach, as they surely will, the Mount which is Christ.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Ps. 105:32; Ex. 17:7, Num. 20:13.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Ex. 32:4.

¹⁷² Ps. 23:3.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 4.

¹⁷⁴ "*Dico vobis, quod de monte monies in montem oportet ascendere. . .*"

¹⁷⁵ Ps. 83:8: ". . . *de virtute in virtutem*," which could also mean "from virtue to virtue."

¹⁷⁶ Cf. the Collect for St. Catherine of Alexandria, and the new Collect for Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

106 There is another question which I cannot forbear to ask, so great is my astonishment at the extent of your folly: is your flesh of brass¹⁷⁷ or your spirit of iron, that you have no fear of the arrow of lust in your frequent dealings with women? For they turn wise men into fools, strong men into weaklings, and saintly men into apostates. Are you more perfect than David, do you think, who, beside himself at the sight of a woman, threw law to the winds and committed adultery and murder?¹⁷⁸

107 Remember, city rovers, the truth the Gospel tells us: it was through closed doors that our Saviour came, in very truth, to the apostles.¹⁷⁹ You need not think, fools that you are, that Jesus will come to you until you close the doors of your outward senses; for while those doors stand open the way lies clear for a whole swarm of temptations, and our Saviour, who abhors the society of such enemies as these, will not deign to enter.

108 Do you not remember what the Prophet said: "Turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity"? Why then do you dwell in a place where everything you see is vanity? Can you turn your eyes in any direction from your own house, through window or door, or even the merest crevice, without seeing

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Job. 6:12.

¹⁷⁸ II Kings 11.

¹⁷⁹ Jn. 20:19, 26.

vanity.¹⁸⁰ If you were saints, indeed, though you live in the city you would have no wish to cast forbidden glances at what it is not lawful to desire.¹⁸¹ For the Prophet says: "You will not suffer your holy one to see corruption."¹⁸² By "see" he means, "feel," for corruption fatal both to the inward and the outward man may be contracted by sight alone. Well might any of you stepsons say, with Jeremiah: "My eye has laid waste my soul for the sake of all the daughters of my city."¹⁸³

109 Who can so "hedge in his ears with thorns"¹⁸⁴ in the city that they may not drink in poisonous words, and tales that stir up base passions? Numberless are those who fall in this way and meet their spiritual death. I or who is so wise in the government of his tongue, the member "no man can tame,"¹⁸⁵ or is so discreet in his use of words that he will not, as soon as he finds himself in conversation among a crowd, say something out of place? The garrulous tongue babbles on to its own damnation, detracting, contradicting, censuring, sowing discord, boasting, spreading slander and lies, and I know not what else, all of it damnable. And thus conscience is violated, the soul meets its death,¹⁸⁶ the hearers are scandalized, and the majesty of our Creator is offended.

¹⁸⁰ Ps. 118:37.

¹⁸¹ Cf. St. Gregory, *Morals* XXI, ch.2: "It is not fitting to look upon what it is not lawful to desire."

¹⁸² Ps. 15:10.

¹⁸³ Lam. 3:51.

¹⁸⁴ Sir. 28: 28.

¹⁸⁵ Jas. 3:8.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Wis. 1:11.

CHAPTER XI

110 And now that you have heard the things that lead to damnation, I will tell you some of the wonderful privileges, which are ours in the desert. It is unbelievable how much consolation, outward and inward, they bring.

111 In the desert¹⁸⁷ all the elements conspire to favour us. The heavens, resplendent with the stars and planets in their amazing order, bear witness by their beauty to mysteries higher still.¹⁸⁸ The birds seem to assume the nature of angels, and tenderly console us with their gentle carolling. The mountains too, as Isaiah prophesied, "drop down sweetness" incomparable upon us, and the friendly hills "flow with milk and honey"¹⁸⁹ such as is never tasted by the foolish lovers of this world. When we sing the praises of our Creator, the mountains about us, our brother conventuals, resound with corresponding hymns of praise to the Lord, echoing back our voices and filling the air with strains of harmony as though accompanying our song upon stringed instruments. The roots

¹⁸⁷ *Solitudo*, which can mean either the state or the place of solitude, the desert. It is the word translated by "wilderness" in the text from Isaiah quoted in the following paragraph (see note 186).

¹⁸⁸ A possible allusion to St. Augustine, *Confessions* Bk. 10 ch. 6: "I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, but they told me, 'Neither are we the God whom you seek' [...] I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave." Cf. also *Ibid.* Bk. 11 ch. 4.

¹⁸⁹ The text is actually from Joel 3:18, and honey is not mentioned, but no doubt a reminiscence of Ex. 3:8 and other texts has crept in, through the Advent antiphon "In illa die..." (now at Morning Prayer, Advent, Sunday I).

in their growth, the grass in its greenness, the leafy boughs and trees—all make merry in their own ways as they echo our praise;¹⁹⁰ and the flowers in their loveliness, as they pour out their delicious fragrance, smile their best for the consolation of us solitaries. The sunbeams, though tongueless, speak saving messages to us. The shady bushes rejoice to give us shelter. In short, every creature we see or hear in the desert gives us friendly refreshment and comfort; indeed, for all their silence they tell forth wonders, and move the interior man to give praise to the Creator—so much more wonderful than themselves.

112 Isaiah writes in figure of this joy that is to be found in solitude or in the desert: "The wilderness shall rejoice and shall flourish like the lily; it shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise."¹⁹¹ And we find in the psalms: "The beautiful places of the wilderness shall grow lush, and the hills shall be girded with joy."¹⁹²

113 But, in the city, the elements teem with such corruption that you too are contaminated and direly infected. Worldly vanity, meretriciously bedecked, keeps the interior man in bondage to the things of this world as surely as in prison, and does not suffer him to rise to heavenly thoughts.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Is. 55:12.

¹⁹¹ Is. 35:1-2.

¹⁹² Ps. 64:13.

¹⁹³ Cf. Rom. 7:22-23.

114 For melodious birdsong you hear men and women brawling, as well as their animals—mostly dogs and pigs—and an unspeakable din rings in your ears persistently. For green grass and leafy branches you have muddy streets to tramp each day. For the scent of fragrant flowers, your nostrils drink in pestilential draughts of the intolerable stench of depravity.

115 All the alluring vanities of the city conspire to drown you in a cesspool of vices, for whoever sets out to preach pleasure, be his teaching never so deceptive, and will make converts.

116 Alas, brothers, why let yourselves be led astray by the world's vanity? Have you not read what St. James wrote in his Epistle: "Whoever will be a friend to this world becomes an enemy of God"?¹⁹⁴ If you had living faith, and hope with eyes for the sufferings of the next world, the vain fascinations of this wicked world¹⁹⁵ would never be able to deceive you. Hear and understand¹⁹⁶ then what St. Paul said so well about Moses, writing to the Hebrews. He holds him up as an outstanding example, and warmly commends the liveliness of his faith and the firmness of his hope for our imitation: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin; considering abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth

¹⁹⁴ Jas. 4:4.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Gal. 1:4.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Mt. 15:10.

than the treasure of the Egyptians, for he looked to the rewarder."¹⁹⁷

117 Jeremiah too, seeing the trumpety wickedness of this delusive world, summons you in pity to put it behind you: "Flee from the midst of Babylon," he says, "and go forth from the land of the Chaldaeans,"¹⁹⁸ which in a spiritual sense means a happy flight from the midst of the confusion of this perilous world. And lest you should delay in your flight, the same prophet insists, explaining why you should flee: "Flee from the midst of Babylon," he tells you, "and let everyone save his own soul,"¹⁹⁹ as if to say: "If you wish to save your souls make no mistake: you must flee from the midst of Babylon —from the confusion, that is, of this perilous world." Babylon, which means "confusion,"²⁰⁰ is in Egypt,²⁰¹ but the Chaldaeans too, "demons" or "breasts,"²⁰² represent the danger and hazardousness of this world; for the demons of worldliness turn the heads of those living in the world with pleasure, as with the pleasant flavour of breast milk, and suckle them so assiduously that it is hardly ever possible, however eloquently one

¹⁹⁷ Heb. 11:24-26. Nicholas writes rewarder" in place of "reward."

¹⁹⁸ Jer. 50:8.

¹⁹⁹ Jer. 51:6.

²⁰⁰ St. Jerome's interpretation.

²⁰¹ Cairo was known by the Crusaders as "Babylon," so Nicholas's geo- graphical confusion is understandable. There is possibly a connection in the writer's mind with the final paragraph of Chapter 5 above.

²⁰² Again, St. Jerome's interpretation.

may preach to them, to wean them away from this bitterness, which they falsely suppose to be sweet.

118 I am filled with wonder on your account—so overcome with wonder, in fact, that my wonder exceeds all bounds. Can there be any one among you who does not wish to save his soul? Each of you surely, though his deeds may belie the fact, does desire, does aspire to save his soul. Why then, if you really want salvation, do you put your trust in the wretched things of earth, and labour so hard in despite of what you want, in despite of your own happiness?

CHAPTER XII

119 See the golden chalice of Babylon that makes all the earth drunk! Jeremiah speaks of it: "All the nations have drunk of her wine, and have staggered"²⁰³ so helplessly in the wild confusion of this world's vanity that they have dragged you with them into their vicious ways. You have obviously drunk your fill of the poisonous draught. Who in his senses, fully aware of his actions, could want to drink such bitter, tainted wine? For of this wine it is said in Deuteronomy: "Their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps, which knows no remedy."²⁰⁴

120 If you were to examine this wine, all unstrained as it is, in a glass vessel—in purity of conscience, that is—you would never again put such filth to your lips. Of this turbid wine the Prophet says: "But the dregs thereof are not emptied away; all the inhabitants of the earth shall drink";²⁰⁵ earthbound worldlings, that is, who drink nothing from the Babylonian chalice in this life except the poisonous lees, as you have heard, and, doomed in the life to come—unless before their temporal death they shall by God's preventing grace have drunk of the wine of compunction²⁰⁶—to drain the bottomless chalice of torment, shall drink fire and brimstone for all

²⁰³ Cf. Jer. 51:7; Rev. 18:2-3.

²⁰⁴ Deut. 32:33.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Ps. 74:9.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Ps. 59:5.

eternity.²⁰⁷ Of this chalice the Prophet says: "Fire and brimstone and storms of wind shall be the portion of their cup."²⁰⁸ How dreadful is that fire, fed by the unfailing brimstone from which it springs, and fanned by storms of wind! How pitiless is that draught of molten brimstone that ever flows all aflame into the sinner's chalice! How loathsome is the utter torment of that chalice, the sum of all the torments the Prophet's words promise one by one, each a horror beyond all horrors, to worldlings!

121 Let each of you then who clasps "the world and the things that are in the world"²⁰⁹ lovingly to his bosom note well how hard it will be to drink in hell that chalice of torment, as the damned surely must.

122 But how different, sweetest Jesus, is your inebriating chalice, how goodly.²¹⁰ How happy are those who have fled from Egypt through the Red Sea, which has drowned their pursuers.²¹¹ Once inebriated, in the solitude of the desert, by the wonderful sweetness of your chalice, they will never stoop to drink again from the golden chalice of Babylon. None so happy as those who can say in good conscience: "The Lord is

²⁰⁷ Cf. Rev. 14:10-11.

²⁰⁸ Ps. 10:7.

²⁰⁹ Cf. 1 Jn. 2:15.

²¹⁰ Ps. 22:5.

²¹¹ Cf. Ex. 14:21-29, 1 Cor 10:1.

the portion of my inheritance and my cup; it is you who will restore my inheritance to me."²¹²

123 The wise solitaries of the desert who have learned from John, see that "the whole world is seated on wickedness"—that is on an "evil fire"²¹³—and that new dangers are daily added to those inherent in the wickedness of these latter days; they see how great is the evil of these perilous times, and that it is ever on the increase from the beginning of the world until the end of time; and they make haste to flee in terror from before its face. Fearing that they might perhaps be led astray by the evil of this wicked world, seductive as it is, they bind fast their interior man, in their desert solitude, by the "threefold cord" of faith, hope and charity, "which is not easily broken,"²¹⁴ to that firmest of rocks which is Christ,²¹⁵ so that the outward man may not break loose. Each of them, resolute in his flight from the dangers of the world longs to be so indissolubly united to Christ, the corner stone,²¹⁶ that he might say effectively with the Prophet: "It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord."²¹⁷

²¹² Ps. 15:5.

²¹³ “. . . *totus mundus in maligno, id est 'in malo igne,' positus est. . .*”; cf. I Jn. 5:19.

²¹⁴ Cf. Eccles. 4:12.

²¹⁵ Cf. I Cor. 10:4.

²¹⁶ Cf. Eph. 2:20.

²¹⁷ Cf. Ps. 72:28.

CHAPTER XIII

124 Each of those who have abandoned solitude, when he hears this, will answer his accusers thus: "I admit that it is to our irreparable loss that we have left our sweet solitude for the cities, but it is not due to my wickedness, the sin is none of mine.²¹⁸ I am on my own; I cannot protest; I must keep quiet; I am obliged to consent." And thus they argue inductively, each from his own individual case, to a false assessment of the general state of affairs, and reach conclusions that are against their own interests.

125 False fellowship! Guilty consent! Blameworthy silence! They deceive each other, confound each other, injure each other, by the trivial excuses they make for each other in public, while all the time conscience is gnawing away in secret at each one of them. The truth, in brief, is that they are stoking the fires for themselves in Hell! What is the use of admitting the truth, if their behavior continues to be based on falsehood?

126 Aristotle proves me right when he says that two opposites can not both be present simultaneously in the same subject.²¹⁹ Quite obviously truth and falsehood can never dwell together, even for a moment, without disagreement, even if they are pronounced by those who, as the Prophet puts it, "have

²¹⁸ Cf. Jer. 16:10.

²¹⁹ From the *Peri Hermeneias*. Aristotle's term is "contraries."

spoken with a double heart,"²²⁰ in an attempt to reconcile one meaning with the other.

127 How guilty you are, how blameworthy, how deep in damnation, poor wretches! Is not your own damnation enough for you that you must pave the way for your successors' damnation too? For your successors will make the same vow as you have made, and will boldly do the opposite of what they have promised, after the example that you, their predecessors, have set them.²²¹

128 Alas! Why not acknowledge the great danger of your scandalous state? If only you could see your own peril you would lament with Jeremiah, saying: "Let us examine our ways, and search, and return to the Lord. We have done wickedly and provoked you to wrath, and therefore are you inexorable. Our persecutors were swifter than the eagles of the air; they pursued us upon the mountains, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! For this our heart is sorrowful, for this our eyes have grown dim."²²² And on the heels of this lament would come a prayer, in which you would humbly ask the Lord: "Enlighten our eyes that they may never sleep in

²²⁰ Ps. 11:3.

²²¹ Nicholas is presumably referring to the fact that obedience was promised in the profession formula "according to the Rule and Constitutions" of the "Hermit Brothers of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel." (See note 116 to Chapter 7 above.)

²²² Lam. 3:40; 3:42; 4:19; 5:16-17.

death, lest at any time our enemy might say: 'I have prevailed against them.'"²²³ "Renew our days as from the beginning."²²⁴

129 With regard once more to this company of stepsons: if they do come to acknowledge their peril in these words, and ask our merciful Saviour's forgiveness, in a spirit of humility,²²⁵ for their past misbehaviour, they will have to beware of falling into the same fault in the future; for if they intend to make light of their retraction and go on without hesitation to put their Mother to shame and damn themselves and their successors, here and now I will serve them with a peremptory summons to appear before the Supreme Judge, of whom the Prophet says: "You are terrible, and who shall resist you? Your wrath endures."²²⁶ Let them stand trial and answer for the violence they have committed in their arrogance against our Mother, against themselves, and against their successors.

130 My cause is a just one; they need not be so stupid as to think that, however hard they oppose me, I shall lose my case for lack of proof. It is their false, superficial opinion that will be ruled out of court, for there will be witnesses to confront them: I have already called on heaven and earth to testify against them; I will call on them again,²²⁷ and will not cease to call on them.

²²³ Cf. Ps. 12:4-5.

²²⁴ Lam. 5:21.

²²⁵ Cf. Dan. 3:39.

²²⁶ Ps. 75:8.

²²⁷ Cf. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; and I Mac. 2:37.

CHAPTER XIV

131 My tearful lament over your condition, Mother, has been drawn out to a greater length than I intended, for so many things have come to mind to spur me on; it has made me forget the tears and sobs and sighs for my own sad lot, which I postponed on account of your troubles. God knows that I have spared myself no effort up to the present in labouring hard for the good of all your children, fruitless as my labours have been. Do not be surprised then if body and soul, wearied beyond measure, long to seek relief in tears. Let me now begin my own lament, so that grief may be consoled by grief. For as grief is grief's own medicine,²²⁸ I gladly weep on my own behalf, so that, grieving, I may on my own behalf be glad; for though penetrated to the depths of my soul by sorrow, if I could I would hide the face of grief and don festal attire.

132 Ah me! I have so many reasons for sorrow—so many that I know not where to begin my lament! I cannot stand to marshal my words; I can only groan through my tears! Who can forbid my grief? For I see that I have made no contribution to the common good in all this time, while I have not been acquiring any merit for myself either. Alas for me, unhappy wretch! I have wasted so much time on both scores! Alas for me, wretch that I am: what is the fruit of all my labours? In-

²²⁸ A quotation from the anonymous 12th-century *Disticha Catonis*.

substantial as a cobweb!²²⁹ Alas, why did I not realize this? I know not what to say, cannot tell what to do: I am reduced to stupefied silence. There can be no recovering a single moment of the time I have lost. I have spent it uselessly, and now I must go back and begin again when I should be drawing to a close. By now I should have been able to look forward to the end of my days in happiness, not in my present state of daily trepidation. For now, at the end of my life, I must make a painful beginning of the work I ought to have completed. Why did I sow seeds, both for you and for myself, on the sea-shore, where there can be no hope of fruit? What harvest is there for me to lay up from my sowing? Hosea will answer, if you will not: "You have sown a wind and shall reap a whirlwind."²³⁰

133 Would anyone in his senses willingly await a harvest like that? Yet it is for this that I have waited—in vain—until I knew for certain that both seed and fruit were worthless. Is there anyone save you, holiest of Orders, of whom I may justly complain in this matter? Is it not my ardent love for you—excessive perhaps—that has kept my soul in such a state of infatuation that I hardly knew who I was, what I was, where I was, or what I should do?

134 Out of devoted love for you it was that I sailed the seas and journeyed from country to country, that I spent my time

²²⁹ Cf. Is. 59:5; Hos. 8:6.

²³⁰ Cf. Hos. 8:7.

and wore out my body; and all my persistent labour for your good, in the face of opposition from your stepsons, has been in vain, for I have brought you no profit. Apart from the merit of my good intentions, then, I count as lost all the heavenly treasure I could have been laying up all this time in a solitary cell.

135 Blessed be the Saviour of the world, who brought me back to my senses, awoke me in his mercy from my deep sleep²³¹ with the wind of great adversity²³² and gave me sober judgment²³³ as far as was possible with regard to my knowledge of myself and of my works! If only this wind, which rises in the North and sweeps southwards, had blown through my garden²³⁴ twenty years since! Where now there are stinking weeds there would perhaps have been sweet-scented flowers.

136 But I have been complaining of you, Mother, when it is myself I should have been complaining of, myself I should have been impugning. How could I have presumed, how dared to govern you, I who have never learned to govern myself? How could I have had the audacity to set myself up as a teacher before I had learned to be a pupil,²³⁵ and calmly to

²³¹ Cf. Jon. 1:5.

²³² Cf. Mt. 14:30.

²³³ Cf. Rom. 12:3.

²³⁴ Cf. Song 4:16.

²³⁵ Cf. *The Decrees of Gratian* c.2, D.49: "He who appoints an unlearned man in place of a learned, and makes him a teacher who is hardly capable of being a pupil, offers nothing but a blind beast."

pass rash judgment on others before I had learned to examine my own conscience? Alas, Mother! Why did I undertake, in all obedience, to till your field, when it was against the precept of the Law about the ox and the ass²³⁶—who will not pull together under the same yoke—that I have had to plough? Alas! What has been done cannot be undone. For me there can be no going back by the way I have come, to correct my faults. But in one way at least I have gained: from my past experience I have learned always to be cautious in the future.

137 Spare your penitent son then, Mother, and be merciful; forgive him. For although, through stupidity and weakness, he may have offended you in some matters, you must not, I beg of you, impute this to his will, which has always been devoted to you.

²³⁶ Cf. Dent. 22:10.

138 GIVEN AND EXECUTED in the year of our Lord one thousand two hundred and seventy, in the month of February, on Mount Enatrof, terrible to enemies; there is the house of God and the gate of Paradise.²³⁷

~FINIS~

²³⁷ For the date see Introduction, note 1. It has been suggested the "Mount Enatrof" (which is a fictitious name) might be Fortanie (or Fortamie), a Carmelite desert in Cyprus; spelled backwards these names give "Einatrof" or "Eimatrof," which could easily have become transformed, especially as the name was unfamiliar, into "Enatrof." Even this spelling varies considerably in the different texts of the *Ignea Sagitta*. (See Fr. Staring's *Introduction*, pp. 253-4; Fr. Joachim Smet, O.Carm., is responsible for the suggestion.)—For the phrase "Terrible to enemies" etc., cf. Gen 28:17 and Ex. 19:18.

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