

**The Life of
Saint Pachomius**

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[c.290 - 346. Feast Day May 14.]

by Abbot of Tabennisi

an unknown Greek Author

Translated into Latin from the Greek by Dionysius Exiguus, Abbot of Rome. [A Scythian monk who lived in Rome c.500 – 550. ‘Exiguus’ was the name he gave himself. It carries the meaning of ‘small, poor, unimportant’]

Translated into English from the Latin by Benedict Baker <http://www.vitae-patrum.org.uk/>

Prologue by Dionysius

Dionysius Exiguus to my revered Lady, the glorious handmaid of Christ: [Rosweyde conjectures that this was a Roman widow called Galla, who according to Gregory the Great lived the life of a recluse on the Vatican Hill. She died in 550, and is celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on October 5.]

I reply to your respected request, and the valued opportunity it offers, by offering you the Life of Saint Pachomius, faithfully translated into Latin from its Greek source. Your initiative has long been reproaching me for my delay in fulfilling the promise I had made, so it would not be right for me to delay any longer, especially when you are someone who is accustomed to expect a solemn promise rather than a mere good intention. You have eagerly desired to learn more about the disciplines of the blessed Fathers, and by the grace of Christ there is a great number of stories which are there to be read and imitated. Because of the great interest you have shown in gathering together the deeds of each one of them, the credit for this document as a divine gift for future ages is yours.

You have said that you pay a great deal of attention to the virtues you admire so much in the lives of the Saints. Indeed, you have become one with them by the illustrious quality of your own deeds. For it is no use admiring virtue unless you aspire to it yourself. It is by living like the Saints that you show your union with them, just as on the

contrary a life at odds with the Saints is like a great family disruption. It frequently gives rise to terrible family hatreds, senseless disputes, blind and stupid malice which can lead even to the shedding of blood, with the wicked at odds with the good, the avaricious with the generous, the turbulent with the peaceful, the lazy with the industrious, the angry with the placid, the rough with the gentle, the brazen with the modest, the stupid with the wise, the crafty with the simple, the overbearing with the meek. But the Apostle of the Gentiles sounds a trumpet call even more effectively about the nature of these people when he inveighs against the dangers of these present times in the following words: 'For these men are lovers of self, greedy, puffed up, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, impious, without affection, without peacefulness, wrongdoers, incontinent, ungentle, unkind, betrayers, violent, arrogant, who love pleasure more than they love God' (2 Timothy 3.2-3).

Here the most blessed Paul sums up in a few wonderful words what I was saying earlier in a great many words, for he shows how those who love pleasure become captive to the most vicious desires. All sorts of evils arise when God is despised and pleasures are loved. Through a love of pleasure the devil entices and deceives, he titillates in order to bring about ruin, he flatters in order to destroy. To prevent future joy being preferred to the present, heavenly things to earthly, eternal things to transitory, he says, 'Those who love pleasures more

than God, although they may have the appearance of piety, deny the power of all virtue' (Ibid. 5). In other words they are Christians in name but not in deed, and do more damage as enemies in our midst than enemies from outside; as part of the Church they disfigure the members of the Church. The Apostle gives us a forthright warning that we should avoid their company, and be separated from them not just by physical space but by our different standards of behaviour. Nor should anyone be surprised that these vermin are the enemies of the righteous when miserably and deceitfully they don't even spare each other, but quarrel fiercely among themselves. Your holy and glorious father, whose servant I am, has not only proved worthy to endure their attacks patiently and bravely but by his blessed death has triumphed over the whole world for the sake of the Truth who is Christ. He followed in almost every point the perfect rule of life of the Saints, and I earnestly desire to write learnedly and fluently about those rules so that it may be known in every place how your father came to be so famous and glorious, and how the human virtues of someone of this present day are to be admired. By the grace of Christ you stand in his inheritance, and may bequeath it to posterity in the shape of a book.

The Prologue of the Author

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the fount of wisdom and light of true knowledge, the true Word of God the father, by whom all things were made, is aware of our weakness and how prone we are to fall headlong into sin, but of his goodness he has offered us many remedies. Abraham our father was obedient to the commands of God, and in offering his own son as a sacrifice was found pleasing to God. And God swore by himself: 'In blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply you, as many as the stars of heaven in number, and numberless as the sands of the seashore. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (Genesis 22.17-18). And the Apostle has lessons for us concerning this seed, for he says, 'I don't say seeds, in the plural, but seed, in the singular. And this seed is Christ' (Galatians 3.16).

And all the holy Prophets foresaw by the inspiration of the holy Spirit the hidden things of our salvation. Knowing that God cannot lie, they announced beforehand the heavenly medicines that would be available for our illnesses, and prayed continuously that he might look favourably on the human race. And the merciful Lord, who always anticipates our godly desires, never deserts those who seek him with their whole heart, but has fulfilled those promises in these last days by sending his only Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4.4), who suffered in the likeness of our mortal flesh, and by his death destroyed him who had the power

of death (Hebrews 2.14). And while in his divinity it remained impossible for him to suffer, he redeemed us from corruption and destruction. He completed the work of redemption for all people by washing us in the forgiveness of sins and giving us life, drawing every one towards the true faith by means of the teaching of the Apostles. As it says in the Gospel, 'Go and teach all nations and baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28.19), so he has enfolded us into the bosom of his infinite love.

But as the proclamation of the Gospel has shone forth in all lands, and many by the grace of Christ have been adopted as sons, so the enemy of the human race has burned with rage, and waged much more severe and testing battles against the servants of God than he used to. Accursed and faithless, he has striven to do everything he can to obstruct the peacefulness of our journey to the heavenly realms. But his intentions have been foiled and brought to naught, as by the help of the gifts of God his own crafty tricks have been turned against him, bringing confusion to himself and eternal glory to the servants of Christ. For when by the Lord's permission, the pagan Emperors rose up and brought savage and stormy persecutions against Christians everywhere who were battling faithfully and patiently in spiritual warfare, many in Egypt became holy Martyrs, through all kinds of tortures enduring unto death in the name of Christ, and along with Peter the bishop of Alexandria, [Martyred in 311.

Celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on November 26.] gained an eternal crown and obtained the reward of immortality.

And the multitude of the faithful began to increase daily, growing wonderfully in every place. Many churches flourished in zealous memory of the Martyrs, and monasteries most often among that number, practising abstinence as they renounced the world and adorned the secret places of solitude. People from all nations who had begun to believe in Christ were inspired by the sufferings of the Martyrs who had not wavered in their confession of Christ, and by the grace of the Lord they began to imitate the Saints in their life and discipline. They took to themselves this saying of the Apostle, 'They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, needy, straitened, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering alone among the mountains, in caves and holes in the earth' (Hebrews 11.37-38). They sought the quietness of solitude, and by looking for the joyous divine gift of their own salvation through faith, they have furnished an example to others of a more sublime and sacred life.

Freed from all earthly cares, they emulated the holiness of the Angels while still living in this mortal flesh. They scaled the heights of virtue, their brilliance was beyond belief, they were manifestly in no way inferior to the Fathers of antiquity, and their merits were the equal of those who have striven even unto death in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For they have undermined all the powers of those

invisible enemies of whom the Apostle speaks, 'For we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places' (Ephesians 6.12). By forestalling the multiform attacks of the ancient serpent they trod his head underfoot, and obtained those eternal rewards of which it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of humankind, what God has prepared for those who love him' (Isaiah 64.4 & 1 Corinthians 2.9).

The Life

Chapter I

Throughout the whole of that time the outstanding life of blessed Antony was held up as an example for all to follow. He stood out as emulating the examples of Elijah and Elisha and the holy John Baptist, seeking with single-minded zeal the hidden places of the inner desert, where in his love for virtue he lived the life of heaven. The holy Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, bore witness to him with his own pen. He was a worthy and perceptive interpreter of Antony's way of life. At the request of his brothers in Christ he wrote the Life of Antony for the edification of many, and as a model for spiritual men.

In the course of that work he also makes mention of Ammon [Vita Antonii cap.xxxii] who by the grace of God laid the foundations of the life now lived by those brothers in Mount Nitria. He also told us something of how that holy man Theodore, [ibid] when he was with Antony, overcame the multifarious deceits of the devil with single-minded purpose and faith unfeigned before God. And thus in the overflowing grace of God he openly proclaimed what is celebrated in the Psalms, 'You have visited the earth and watered it, you have multiplied its riches' (Psalms 65.10). For joy and gladness has arisen in place of sadness and groaning, happiness and security in place of anxiety and misery.

Hence it is that those wonderful men, our monastic Fathers, have emerged in almost every region. Their names are written in the book of life. At that time there were very few monks in Egypt and the Thebaid, but after the persecutions of those cruel princes Diocletian and Maximian, a multitude of the Gentiles came in, as God had fore-ordained (Romans 11.25). The fertility of the Church was shown forth by its abundant fruitfulness, as the holy bishops with their Apostolic teachings led the way in the journey of faith by the integrity of their own lives.

Chapter II

And it was at this time that Pachomius, who lived in the Thebaid, by the grace of God became a Christian. He came of pagan parents and religion, and is said to have sought after virtue even as an adolescent by means of rigorous fasting. I mention this fact for the glory of Christ who has called us out of darkness into light, and for the benefit of those who may be reading this. For his beginnings in a strict way of life as a young person go a long way towards explaining his later perfection.

Chapter III

While he was still a boy he went with his parents to offer a sacrifice to an idol on the banks of the river Nile. But when the filthy pagan priest tried

to perform his usual sacrilegious rites, the presence of Pachomius prevented the usual manifestations of the demon from happening. The priest stood as motionless as the idol he was worshipping, unable to understand why the demons were not giving their usual response, until at last an evil spirit revealed to him that it was because of Pachomius that the demons had been unusually silent.

"Why has this enemy of the gods come here?" he shouted frantically. "Drive him out! Get rid of him!"

When his parents heard this, they realised that he was parting company with them, and they were grievously upset, not least because he had been declared so forcefully an enemy of the gods. They were at their wits' end to know what to do with him, because he had spat out the wine of the demons' sacrifice before he had even tasted it. They knew that they could not understand it at all, but they just kept quiet. They saw to it that he was instructed in Egyptian learning and moulded in the study of the ancients.

Chapter IV

It was at this time, after the persecutions, that Constantine won supreme command [312 AD] and carried out a campaign against the tyranny of Maxentius. He issued a royal decree that selected youths should be conscripted into military service,

among whom was Pachomius, then aged twenty, as he himself later confirmed. As he was being carried off with others on board ship to foreign parts, they docked one evening in a certain port where the citizens, on seeing how strictly the raw recruits were being guarded, enquired what their situation was, and motivated by the commandments of Christ, took great pity on their miserable plight and brought them some refreshments. Pachomius was very surprised at what they were doing and asked who these men were who were so eager and willing to perform such humble acts of mercy.

He was told they were Christians, who were in the habit of doing acts of kindness to everyone, but especially towards travellers. He learned also what it meant to be called a Christian. For he was told that they were godly people, followers of a genuine religion, who believed in the name of Jesus Christ the only begotten son of God, who were well disposed to all people, and hoped that God would reward them for all their good works in the life to come. Pachomius' heart was stirred on hearing this, and, illumined by the light of God, he felt a great attraction towards the Christian faith. The fear of God was ignited in him, and drawing aside a little from his companions he lifted up his hands to the heavens.

"O Almighty God who made heaven and earth," he said, "if you will hearken to my prayer and show me how to order my life according to your holy name, and free me from my oppressive shackles, then

I pledge myself to your service all the days of my life. I will turn my back on the world and cleave only to you."

He returned to his companions and the next day they set sail from that country. As they sailed about from place to place, Pachomius never succumbed to any of the illicit pleasures of the body or the world which might have tempted him. He was ever mindful of his promise and vow to serve God. By the help of divine grace he had been a lover of chastity from his earliest days.

Chapter V

Once the Emperor Constantine by his godliness and faith in Christ had won the victory over his enemies, he ordered the raw recruits to be released. So Pachomius obtained the freedom he longed for and returning straight away to the lower Thebaid he went to the church in the village of Chinoboscium, where he became a catechumen, and not long after received the grace of being bathed in the life-giving water. On the very night when he was initiated into the sacred mysteries he saw in his dreams a heavenly dew falling on to his right hand and turning into the thickness of honey. And he heard a voice saying to him. 'Take thought, Pachomius, for what this means. It is a sign of grace given to you by Christ.'

From then on he was inflamed with desire for God and grievously pierced by the saving dart of

divine love, which impelled him to give himself entirely to the disciplines and precepts of God.

Chapter VI

He came to hear about a certain anchorite called Palaemon serving the Lord in a remote part of the desert. He sought him out in the hope of being able to live with him. He knocked on his door, asking to be let in. After a while the old man opened up to him.

"What do you want? Who are you looking for?" he asked. He was of a rather intimidating appearance because of the life of strict solitude he had been living for such a long time.

"God has sent me to you," replied Pachomius, "so that I may become a monk."

"You would not be able to become a monk here. It is no light matter to entertain the idea of the chaste life of the true monk. There are many who have come in the past and have soon got wearied, strangers to the virtue of perseverance."

"Not everybody is like that", said Pachomius. "So I beg you, take me in, and in the course of time make trial of my will, and see what I shall be capable of."

"I have already told you, you can't become a monk here. Go rather to another monastery, and when you have learnt enough about how to live a life of abstinence come back, and then I might take you in."

Listen carefully to what I am saying. I live an exceedingly abstemious life, my son. I punish my body with a most severe and difficult discipline. I eat nothing but bread and salt. I abstain from oil and wine completely. I keep vigil for half the night, spending some of that time in formal prayer and some in reading and meditating on the Scriptures. Sometimes, indeed, I keep vigil the whole night through."

This filled Pachomius with the sort of fear a small boy has in the presence of his teacher, but strengthened by the grace of the Lord he was determined to submit himself to hard work.

"If I have the aid of your prayers," said Pachomius, "I trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has given me an example of fortitude and patience, that I shall be made worthy of persevering in your holy way of life for all the rest of my days on this earth."

Chapter VII

With spiritual insight Palaemon then discerned the depth of Pachomius' faith, and at last opened the door to him, took him in, and clothed him in the monastic habit. And so they lived together in the observance of abstinence and prayer. They also wove baskets and worked with their hands as the Apostle instructed (Ephesians 4.28), not only to earn their own living but so that they might have something to give to those in need. When they were

keeping vigil and offering their nightly prayers, if the old man saw Pachomius about to be overcome by sleep, he would take him outside and make him carry loads of sand from one place to another, and by this exercise deliver his mind from the danger of being oppressed by the burden of sleep. He would instruct him as he did this, teaching him how to be diligent in prayer.

"Work hard, Pachomius," he would say. "Watch and pray lest the tempter draw us aside (which God forbid) from this work to which we have put our hand and cause all our work to be in vain."

Pachomius obediently and diligently submitted to all this, daily increasing more and more in the practice of holy abstinence, and giving the keenest joy to the old man, who never ceased to give thanks to God for the way Pachomius was living his life.

Chapter VIII

In due course the most holy day of Easter arrived.

"This feast is celebrated by all Christians," the old man said to Pachomius. "Let us get ready for it ourselves, according to our custom."

Always prompt to obey, Pachomius did what he was asked and contrary to their usual custom took some oil and mixed it with some crushed salt. As well as the oil he prepared lapsanum, that is, wild olives and herbs.

"I have done what your asked, father," said Pachomius, when all was ready. After the usual prayers, the blessed Palaemon came to the table, but when he saw the oil mixed with the salt, he clapped his hands to his head and wept copiously.

"My Lord has been crucified, and am I now to eat olive oil?" he said.

"Can you not just eat a little bit of it?" asked Pachomius

"I can in no way do that," he replied.

So bread and salt was brought for the meal and they sat down together. The old man blessed the food with the sign of the Cross of Christ, and they both humbly gave thanks to God for the food they ate.

Chapter IX

One day, as Palaemon and Pachomius were about to light the fire before the vigil, a brother arrived wanting to stay with them. After they had received him they conversed for a while as usual, when he suddenly stood up and said,

"If you have any faith at all, let fire fall upon this charcoal!" And he began to recite the Lord's Prayer slowly, a bit at a time.

"Stop this madness, brother!" cried Palaemon, who had sensed that the brother was deceived and puffed up by pride. "Do not say anything more!"

But the brother took no notice of the old man's reproof. Carried away even more by his own pomposity, he became quite out of control and brazenly stood on the fire. The fire affected him not one bit, and it was obvious that with the Lord's permission, he was under the influence of the enemy of the human race. What he was thus doing with impunity served only to make his madness worse. As the Scripture says, 'The Lord has sent them into the paths of iniquity' (Proverbs 28.10 & Ecclesiastes 2.16). Next morning he departed quite early, not without giving them a parting reproof.

"Where is your faith?" he cried.

But not long after this the devil saw that this brother had given himself into his hands, and that it would be easy to drive him into whatever evil deeds he wished. So he changed himself into the appearance of a beautiful woman clothed in the most beautiful garments, and knocked vigorously on the door of the brother's cell. The brother opened the door.

"I beg you for help," said the devil disguised as a woman. "I am being pursued by my creditors, and I am afraid they will do me great harm. Please take me into your cell, for I am not able to pay my debts. How grateful I shall be if you let me hide here, for it is the Lord who has guided me to you."

Darkened and mentally blind, totally unable to discern who it was who was saying these things to him, he took the devil inside. The enemy of our existence could see that he was susceptible to all

kinds of depravity, and began to put lustful thoughts into his mind. Before very long he gave in to them, and begged her for her womanly embraces, whereupon the unclean spirit flooded into him and dashed him savagely to the floor. He rolled about there for a while, then lay there as if dead. It was several days before he came to himself, feeling frantically sorry for his acts of madness. He came back immediately to the holy Palaemon and with floods of tears told him what had happened.

"I know, Father," he cried, "I know that I am the cause of my own perdition. You did well to reprove me, and I am cursed for not listening to you. But I pray you, give me the help of your holy prayers, and prevent the enemy from driving me completely to ruin, placed as I am in such great danger."

As he thus poured out his laments and tears, both the holy Palaemon and the blessed Pachomius wept in sympathy, but he was suddenly convulsed by the evil spirit, fled from their presence and rushed out headlong through the desert. When he came to a town called Panos, in his madness he threw himself into the furnace of a bath-house and so came to a miserable end in the flames.

Chapter X

When Pachomius heard about this, he set himself to hold on even more closely to the practice of abstinence, and to remain vigilant in everything that he did, but especially in his prayers, in

accordance with what is written, 'Keep custody of your heart with all diligence' (Proverbs 4.23). The old man was amazed that he not only kept outwardly to his accustomed rule of abstinence, but that he strove inwardly to purify his mind into a heavenly pattern, as the blessed Apostle says, 'Our glory is the testimony of a good conscience' (2 Corinthians 1.12), sure that in this a reward was being prepared for him in heaven. In reading Scripture he endeavoured to commit it to memory, but not indiscriminately. He would dwell on some particular precept, turning it over devoutly in his mind, and then would endeavour to put into practice day by day what his memory had retained.

Above all he strove to excel in the gifts of patience and humility, and most of all in purest love towards God. We learned about these things, and many others, from holy men of God who dwelt with him at many different times. He provided them with an example of godly life, and after reading the divine scriptures he would diligently point out to them the pieces which were relevant to the edification of their souls. There are so many examples of this that it is beyond my powers to describe them, so that I will write no more about them in these present writings. I have not sufficient eloquence to do justice to the merits of such a man.

Chapter XI

Near the mountain where these holy men dwelt there was a desert place where many thornbushes grew. Pachomius often went there to gather firewood, treading on the thorns with his bare feet. But he rejoiced that his feet were pierced with thorns, remembering how graciously our Lord was fixed to the cross with nails. He was greatly attracted to solitude, and would frequently spend long hours by himself in prayer, beseeching God to deliver him from any suspicion of self-deception.

Chapter XII

It chanced one day that Pachomius wandered a long way off from his cell and came to a hamlet called Tabennisi, where hardly anybody lived. After he had spent a long time in prayer in that place, according to his usual custom, he heard a voice from heaven:

"Stay here, Pachomius, and build a monastery. For many will come to you seeking to profit from your instruction. You shall guide them in accordance with a rule with which I will provide you."

And an Angel of the Lord appeared to him, with tablets in his hand, in which were laid down all the details of the sort of life which he was to teach to

those who came to submit themselves to his direction. Tabennisi still keeps to this same rule today, using the same diet and wearing the same habit, and observing carefully the same discipline. The monks who live there come from many different places, and differ greatly in stature and culture; it follows then that they need a Rule different from what they have been used to.

Divine grace and the integrity of his own life had together brought this voice to him, and Pachomius listened to it with sincerity of heart, in the sure knowledge that it came from God. He eagerly accepted the divine Rule. Returning to the venerable old man, Palaemon, he recounted what he had been charged to do by the divine voice, and begged him to come back with him to that place, where they might fulfil the commandments of the Lord together. Not willing to disappoint a beloved son in anything he might be asked to do, Palaemon yielded to his prayers, and they both went back to that hamlet where they built a cell, rejoicing in the Lord and waiting for the fulfilment of his promises.

After some time, Palaemon made a proposition to Pachomius:

"I am very much aware that the grace of God has been conferred upon you, and that you will always order your life accordingly; let us then make a pact between us that we should never leave each other, so that for as long as we still live in the light of day we should be able to encourage each other with tireless mutual support."

They were both pleased with this idea, and for as long as they lived the blessed old man and Pachomius together took care to abide by this agreement.

Chapter XIII

Soon after this the venerable Palaemon began to suffer from kidney trouble, brought on by his practices of abstinence, and his whole body began to suffer with a most debilitating illness. For sometimes he had been eating while abstaining from drinking anything, and at others he would drink without eating anything. There were some other brothers with them who had come on a visit, and they advised him to cease from the daily offices, in order to give his body some rest, and that he should take up a more suitable diet to build up his wasted limbs and prevent his body from being totally ruined. But he would not agree to this regime for very long. His illness became even worse, and feeling that this new diet was an extravagance, he reverted to his old ways without any relaxation.

"The Martyrs of Christ," he said, "were some of them torn to pieces, some decapitated, some burnt in the fire, but endured bravely to the end for the sake of their faith, and should I, then, impatiently scorn what rewards might come to me through suffering, and give in to these insignificant discomforts, by becoming attached to this present life and frightened

of a few momentary pains? I agreed to your persuasion and adopted a diet which I was not used to, and it made my illness even worse than it was before, rather than giving me any relief. So I go back to my former regime, and I will not give up my battle for continence, in which I am certain lies all peace and true joy, except for the peace and joy we will find in God. I have not taken up arms in this battle to please human beings; I have set myself to strive for the love of Christ"

So he carried on manfully, but within a month he became exceedingly weak. Pachomius attended him, caring for him as a father, kissing his feet and embracing him, in the knowledge that he was in the process of saying farewell. And the venerable old man, laden with every virtue, gently rested in peace. Holy Pachomius buried his body, and choirs of Angels lifted his soul and carried it up to heaven. Pachomius carried on with his own path of pilgrimage.

Chapter XIV

Not long after this his own brother, John, came to join him, having heard about everything he was doing. This gave Pachomius the greatest possible joy, for out of all those baptised Christians who had chosen the solitary life, he had up till then not found anyone from his own family. So John, Pachomius' true brother, followed in his footsteps

and stayed with him, following the same rule, united with him in the same love for God. They meditated on the law of God day and night (Psalms 1.2), their minds undistracted by any worldly cares. Whatever was left over from what they produced by their manual work they gave to the poor and gave no thought to the morrow, in obedience to the precepts of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 6.34). They kept to the use of only one lebiton [sleeveless tunic] until it got to be so dirty that it had to be washed. This lebiton was a linen garment, similar to the colobium [long tunic] and is still worn today by the monks of the Thebaid and Egypt. But the blessed Pachomius preferred to mortify his own body and generally wore only a cilicium. [Shirt of goat's hair.] He lived for fifteen years like this, in laborious toil and sweat, in vigils and abstinence. He did not lie down to sleep at night, but sat in the middle of his cell without even leaning against the wall for support. He did not find that an easy practice, but bore it quite cheerfully, in anticipation of the eternal rest being prepared for him in heaven. He studied the injunctions of many of the fathers, endeavouring always, with his brother, to rise to the very heights of virtue. They worked hard at it, and each of them lived to the utmost of their ability in the greatest humility and patience and in faith unfeigned (1 Timothy 1.5).

Chapter XV

During this time Pachomius was given more divine guidance about the Rule which was to be observed by those who because of him would put their trust in the Lord. He began to make additions to the building in which he and his brother lived, and he constructed other buildings as well in order to accommodate all those who would undoubtedly be renouncing the world and coming to serve Christ. He constructed enough accommodation for a great number of people.

But while the holy Pachomius had been widening the area over which the monastery extended, as we have said, and increasing the number of buildings, his brother had been thinking about solitude and the life of an anchorite. He loved the smallness of his dwelling place. He was the elder of the two, and had no hesitation in making his views known to Pachomius.

"You should give up this idea," he said. "Why are you doing all this unnecessary work? It's stupid to extend yourself like this."

Pachomius took this reproach hard; he wasn't used to being criticised, but nevertheless said nothing in reply, kept calm and continued with what he was doing. But next night he went into the smallest room of a house that he had built himself, prostrated himself in prayer and wept bitterly.

"Woe is me!" he cried. "For fleshly prudence has bought itself a foothold in me! I am still walking according to the flesh, as I have just discovered. For I have taken on all this activity, and it is not right that sometimes it makes me impatient, sometimes gloomy, sometimes furious, even though I might have cause to be angry. Have mercy on me, O Lord, lest I perish, lest I succumb to the deceits of the devil. For if your grace has deserted me, and the enemy has discovered in me some share in his own evil deeds, then I must have become a slave to his own demands, as it is written, 'You are designated a slave of whomsoever it is that overpowers you' (2 Peter 2.19). And again it is written, 'If someone who is bound to fulfil the whole law offends in only one particular he is guilty of the whole' (James 2.10).

"I believe, O Lord, that your mercies are without number. They support me and help me for no merit of mine. Enlightened by you I shall walk in the way of your saints, and 'looking towards what is before I shall forget what is behind' (Philippians 3.13). It is thus that the company of your servants who have pleased you from the beginning, protected by your help, have evaded the attacks of the devil and have shone resplendent far and wide for the salvation of the many. But how should I, O Lord, presume to train in the monastic life others whom you might send to me, when I have not yet conquered the passions of the flesh myself, nor kept your commandments with a spotless mind? And yet I put my trust in you, O Christ, that your power may come

to my aid in everything that happens, so that what I do may be pleasing in your sight. O most merciful God, forgive, forgive I pray, all my sins, and purify my heart by your visitation."

He persevered all night with tears and weeping in this prayer to the Lord. He poured out so many tears and so much sweat (for it was summer time) that the floor on which he was praying became so wet that you would think it had had water poured out all over it. When he stood in prayer he was accustomed to stretching out his hands for several hours without lowering them while keeping his body still as if fixed to the cross, and by keeping this up for long periods at a time he spurred on his soul to be vigilant in prayer. And although he was powerfully endowed with all kinds of virtue, he showed incredible humility and the greatest gentleness in the way he lived with his brother, whom he supported always without fail.

Not long after this his brother came to the end of his earthly life, and Pachomius celebrated his funerary rites with due honour. He spent a whole night keeping vigil by his body with psalms and hymns, commended his soul to the God in whom they had both put their trust, and reverently gave him burial.

Chapter XVI

Unwearyingly, he continued to discipline himself in his strait and narrow way of life, striving for integrity and purity in all things. When illicit thoughts assailed him he straightaway put them to flight with the help of God, and kept on going, rooted in the fear of the Lord. He was ever mindful of eternal punishment and never ending grief, where the worm does not die and the fire is unquenchable (Mark 9.44). While Pachomius was thus abstaining from forbidden practices and progressing onwards to better things, he was all the time taking great pains in extending his monastery in preparation for receiving many others. And the devil began to obstruct him fiercely, gnashing his teeth at him like a wild beast, stirring him up with all kinds of temptations in the hope of finding some opening for his deceits to enter. But protected by the shield of faith he vigilantly warded off the attacks of the enemy, and sang the holy Scriptures which he had committed to memory.

Chapter XVII

One day when Pachomius was beseeching the Lord and bending his knee in prayer, a great pit appeared in front of him by means of the devil's tricks. The enemy of the human race showed him a crowd of strange and meaningless shapes tumbling about in it, trying by stealth and deception to distract

the mind at prayer from its proper intention, so that it was no longer able to offer prayer to the Lord in purity. By the revelation of Christ Pachomius recognised the stratagems of the demons and held them in contempt, gaining a great increase in faith thereby. In this kind of conflict he was constantly giving thanks and blessing the Lord.

One of his customs was to go off to places some distance from the monastery to pray. On his way back the unclean spirits would often amuse themselves by forming into a troupe and disporting themselves in front of him, urging each other on as if they were clearing a path for some great official, by shouting out, "Make way for the man of God!" But Pachomius, armed with the hope of Christ our Redeemer, poured scorn on their ridiculous playacting, and held them to be as futile as barking dogs.

They soon found that the great constancy of this man prevented them from being able to break down his defences by any number of these games, so they formed themselves into a great phalanx and rushed in upon him to surround his house and shake the foundations to such an extent that the holy man thought the whole place was about to fall in. But he remained undaunted, and as usual plucked the strings of his spiritual harp, by declaiming in a loud voice, "God is our refuge and strength, our help in the troubles which come upon us. Therefore we shall not fear though the earth be shaken" (Psalms 46.1-2). His

psalmody brought immediate peace, and the attacks of the enemy vanished like smoke.

But they only retreated for a little while, just like dogs who will leave off what they are doing when they get tired of it, but come back more aggressively than ever later on. For when the holy man after his prayers sat down to his work as usual, the enemy appeared in the shape of an enormous cock in the midst of his hens, crowing repeatedly, and making other unusual noises, before jumping on him and tearing him grievously with its claws. He made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and blew at the cock, putting it to flight. He became familiar with all the shapes which the enemy could take, but forearmed with the fear of God he made sure their deceits were of no effect. Frequently attacked, he never wearied, but like an impregnable fortress endured every struggle with the greatest patience.

On some occasions the demonic army busied themselves by tempting the holy servant of God with what are called phantasms. Many of them would gather themselves together into a massed attack, seemingly as many as the leaves on a tree, and drag him into a mighty struggle, with their cohorts arrayed on the right hand and on the left. They would urge each other on, and strenuously oppress him so that he felt as if the weight of an enormous stone was moving against him. The wicked spirits carried on like this in the hope that they could so unnerve him that his mind would relax into some kind of mockery, through which they might find some way of giving

him a mortal wound. But Pachomius discerned their impudence, and had recourse to the Lord as usual in prayer. By the power of Christ their attack was brought to naught.

When he sat down to eat giving thanks to God, the demons would frequently appear in front of him looking like beautiful women of various shapes and sizes, decked out in scandalously shameless scanty clothing, seeming to sit down next to him and come close to him and touch him. Our strong and sturdy athlete was much troubled by this, but nevertheless closed his outward eyes and turned his inward eye upon the Lord, whereby he was able to trample their best endeavours underfoot. For the mercy of the Lord was with him, deigning always to come to the aid of those with an upright and contrite heart, according to his promise, 'Fear not, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28.20).

Chapter XVIII

On another occasion the devil began a most severe campaign against him, and attacked him so fiercely that from evening to morning his whole body was lacerated with many stripes. But although he was being crucified in immense pain, he never gave way to despair, but was mindful of the Lord who never deserts his servants in the time of trial. It was at this time that a monk called Apollo came to visit him. As

Pachomius was conversing with him on the subject of salvation and recounting the manifold ways in which the devil attacks, he began to tell Apollo about all the ways in which he himself had been attacked, and in particular how bitter had been the beating that he had suffered.

"Keep on fighting manfully," said Apollo, "and be strong in heart, venerable Father. For the devil knows that if you fall victim to his devices, he will also be easily able to overcome us as well. We rely for strength on living under the shadow of your contests, and we look to you as the greatest possible example of virtue. So don't cease from fighting vigorously. You are strong in the protection of the Lord; be strong in his power, lest you are called to account for us as well, which God forbid. For if you, who stand out among us all, grow slack in any way, you will become a cause and occasion of ruin for many."

To hear this gave Pachomius great encouragement in his battle with the demons. He glorified God for the company of this brother, and begged him not to desert him. Apollo kept that in mind and often thereafter came to visit the old man.

Shortly afterwards, however, when paying a visit to Pachomius for a few days, he was struck with an illness which put him beyond any human help, and to Pachomius' dismay completed the course of his life. He buried him with his own holy hands, singing the usual psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Chapter XIX

After this the blessed Pachomius grew so much in confidence before God, and flourished so magnificently in divine hope, that time beyond number he would tread upon serpents and scorpions without coming to the slightest harm (cf. Luke 10.19). Even crocodiles would most meekly submit to him, and transport him across the river when he had need, and take him to wherever he wanted on the other side. For all these things he constantly gave thanks to God who had protected him from all the wiles of the enemy.

"Blessed are you, Lord God of our fathers," he prayed, "for you have not despised my humble estate, nor allowed me to be deceived in my great weakness by the deceitful frauds of the devil. You have mercifully dispersed the darkness of my ignorance and taught me how to do your will. For whereas I was weak and puny, and hardly aware of what my life should be, you have enlarged me with a sense of awe in your sight, so that I am saved from outer darkness and eternal punishment, and have been brought to a knowledge that you are the true light and eternal joy."

Chapter XX

(This chapter also in III.35)

Seeing that he seemed to be pursued so assiduously by the demon, our bold athlete strove even more vigorously for a holy life by asking God that if it were possible he might be allowed to exceed the normal limits of human endurance and overcome the necessity of having to waste time in sleeping. So he kept vigil day and night until he had cast down the attacks of the devil, as it is written, 'I shall afflict them till they cannot stand. They shall fall under my feet, for you have girded me with power for the battle' (Psalms 18. 38-39)

This petition was granted, to the limit of what the human condition would allow, and he endured against the enemy as if he were actually visible, and persevered in driving himself in eloquent outpourings to heaven. His prayers were unceasing that the will of God should be done in all things.

Chapter XXI

And as Pachomius was thus watching in prayer, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him

"The will of the Lord, Pachomius," said the Angel, "is that you serve him with a pure mind, and gather together a great number of monks, who may strive to serve God by keeping all the rules in the book which has been shown to you".[See Chapter

XII.] For he had already recently been given tablets on which the following words were inscribed:

Chapter XXII

Let each one eat and drink according to their strength, and let them work according to what they eat. Don't forbid them either to fast or to eat in moderation, but give harder work to those who are strong and eat more, lighter work to the weak and those who fast.

Build a number of different cells, and put them three to a cell. Let all the food be prepared and eaten in the one place.

At night let them wear linen lebitons [see Chapter XIV), girded about the loins, and let them each have a melote, that is a goat skin dyed white, without which they should neither eat nor sleep.

When they come to the Communion of the Sacraments of Christ let them loosen their belts and take off their melotes, and wear only their cowls. It was also decreed that the monks should be divided up into twenty-four groups according to the letters of the Greek alphabet, that is from a through to w. So that when the archimandrite [This word was used in the Eastern Church from the 4th century for the head of a monastery, and is thus the equivalent of an "abbot". Later it was used to designate a ruler over several monasteries. It is still used in the Eastern Church today.] is asked about any particular person

he can be given an easy one word answer about what he is like by saying a, or z, and again lor r or s, so that whatever letter you give to a group signifies its grading. You could give the single-minded and innocent the letter i, or the difficult and complex ones the letter x, so that each letter would indicate each group according to its behaviour and serious intent. Only the spiritual leaders would know what each letter meant.

It was also written down in the tablets that if a pilgrim from another monastery should come wearing a different habit no one should eat with him, unless he were on a journey, in which case this rule should be waived.

Anyone coming to the monastery with the intention of staying permanently should be trained in his holy duties for three years and given the more straightforward tasks, before letting him enter into the field of battle.

At mealtimes let them conceal their faces in their cowls so that a brother cannot see any other brother eating. And let them stay silent and not let their eyes wander about.

The Angel who spoke with Pachomius also laid down that there should be twelve prayers for the daytime, twelve for the evening and twelve for the night.

When Pachomius remarked at how few that was, the Angel replied:

"It has been set at that number so that the weaker won't find the task too difficult. But the

perfect need not feel deprived by this rule, for in the privacy of their own cells they can go on praying if they are being nourished by divine contemplation in purity of mind."

After saying all this the heavenly messenger departed, and Pachomius gave thanks to God, for it was now by a threefold revelation that his vision was confirmed. He began to receive all who offered themselves to the mercy of God through penitence, and after a long trial of the life, they were enrolled into the family of monks. He urged them to flee from the immorality of the world, and to cleave always to the holy rules. He warned them that the overall rule according to the Gospel was that the monk renounces first the whole world, then his family, and lastly denies himself, so that he may take up his cross and follow in the footsteps of Christ (Luke 14.26-7).

Instructed in that sort of teaching by the blessed old man, they soon brought forth most worthy fruits of penitence. Although he was now of advanced age he pursued the purpose of the spiritual life with undiminished zeal. He not only committed himself to a stricter rule but took upon himself the control and care of the whole monastery, aiming to be a servant of all even if it were beyond his strength. He punctually prepared the common meal for the brothers and performed the usual offices. He gathered the vegetables from the garden which he had watered with his own hands. When anyone knocked at the monastery door he would be the one who went to open it and give a ready response. He

nursed the sick day and night. In all these things he gave a most excellent example to his disciples. Newcomers to the service of the Lord were thus more readily drawn into the duties of devotion. Not yet able to enjoy the gift of matching his standard of care, but free from all distraction, they were gently admonished by the old man:

"In so far as you are called 'brothers', take your cue from that. Say the psalms and other books, and especially commit the holy Gospel to memory. Thus, serving the Lord, and binding to yourselves each one of the commandments, you will become perfect, you will imbue all things with my own spirit, especially if you take care to observe all the heavenly precepts."

Chapter XXIII

The first three men to join up with Pachomius were Psenthessus, Suris and Obsis. Pachomius constantly reminded them of the word of God as he gave them instruction and encouraged them to grow in the work of the spirit. For their part, as they contemplated the old man's life as a specimen of virtue, they were filled with admiration.

"It is a big mistake," they said, "to think that human beings may live a life of blessedness because of some kind of privilege of birth, as if there were no such thing as free will. It is just as much a mistake to think that sinners cannot through penitence develop

in virtue. Just look at how the Lord has manifestly enlarged this venerable father Pachomius, whose parents were pagan outsiders, and who has stretched himself to such an extent in the worship of God that he carries out all the commandments of God.

"So then, we can be sure that any one of us who really wishes to, can by the help of God's grace follow the model of this holy man, and attain to the perfect life and holiness of the fathers. It is written in the Scriptures that Christ says, 'Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11.28). What does this mean except that we should cast off the heavy burdens which oppress the human race, and adhere to an unchanging good which does not perish? Let us persevere to the end with this old man, that we may be found worthy to be glorified with him in eternal bliss. For everything he teaches us is right, not only by his words but what is more effective still, by his own marvellous example."

They went then to Pachomius and said to him, "Why is it, venerable father, that you take the whole responsibility of the monastery upon yourself?"

"No one harnesses up beasts of burden," he replied, "and suddenly compels them to work with such a heavy load that they collapse under the strain, but he trains them little by little, getting them used to lighter loads until they are capable of taking on heavier. In the same way it is right that we should deal with you as Christ has dealt with us, and lead

you on so that we may rejoice in your constancy in all things. May the most merciful God, who never despises the prayers of the humble, confirm his teaching in your heart, that you may carry out every good work with patience and longsuffering, following in the footsteps of the holy fathers, so that others may see how the integrity of your life is pleasing to God, and will come to the service of Christ and all take an equal share with the father in seeing to the needs of the monastery."

Chapter XXIV

They accepted the regime he gave them, that is, that they should be sparing in what they ate, that their clothing should be of the cheapest, and that their sleep should be no more than adequate. And it came about that according to the will of the Lord, who wills the salvation of all human beings, and who blesses all their good works with increase, that many men came to join the old man and stay with him, among whom were Pecusius and Cornelius, Paul, and another Pachomius, and John, who freely embraced the spotless faith and saving teaching of the blessed father. He then decided that those with any competence should share in the duties of the monastery, and in a very short time the numbers of monks were multiplied.

When a feast day required that they should participate in the holy mysteries, they asked

presbyters from neighbouring villages to come and celebrate the feast of spiritual joy for them. For the old man would not allow any of their own number to perform the duties of the clergy. He maintained that it was much more fitting that monks should not seek for pre-eminent honour and glory, and that opportunities of that sort should be rooted out of coenobia, for they are often sources of futile strife and jealousy among the brothers. Just as a whole year's harvest can be destroyed if a spark falling into the fields is not quickly extinguished, so a deadly thought in the mind of a monk, ambitiously desiring leadership as a cleric, can destroy the modesty he has acquired so laboriously, if he does not forthrightly drive from his heart the incendiary nature of such a suggestion. So the communicants of Christ should respect the clerics in the church with all meekness and sincerity; it is not right that they should wish for any religious preferments themselves.

"But if anyone among the monks has been previously ordained by a bishop," said Pachomius, "let us welcome his ministry. We find in the old Testament that not everyone was allowed to take clerical office; only those born among the tribe of Levi were allowed to offer the sacrifices. So if a brother of undisputed priestly status comes in from elsewhere, let us not denigrate him as if he were trespassing into sacred areas and had no right to exercise his ministry. How could we possibly think that about him, when at the same time we earnestly request him to celebrate the heavenly Sacraments for

us? It is much more fitting that we respect him as a father following the footsteps of the Saviour, and who is doing what we have requested him to do, and that he should not cease from offering the sacrificial gifts to God, especially if his character is known and approved by all.

"If he is thought to have been guilty of some offence, which God forbid, it is not for us to judge him. For God the just judge has set bishops to be the judges over such people. As successors and imitators of the blessed Apostles they have the power to examine the particulars of each single case, and give just judgment upon them. Let us concur with their judgments from the bottom of our hearts, for the Lord warns us to be merciful, and that we ought always to pray that we be not led into temptation" (Matthew 6.13).

This renowned father spoke these words quite forcefully, but yet with a caring concern. And thus when any cleric came to him wanting to live under his Rule, he accorded him the honour which the church expects for one of that rank, but expected him to submit to the monastic rules with all humility.

Chapter XXV

The blessed Pachomius loved all the servants of Christ, watching over them always with a father's care. He performed the works of mercy with his own hands for the old and for the sick, and even for the

very young. Among other things he would always train their minds to be ready for spiritual warfare. Since many of them were making progress in their faith and in their work, and since their numbers were increasing, they were all becoming rather stretched in their pursuit of virtue. So he chose prefects (praepositi) from among them, who stood out as being able to assist in the development of the souls who daily came crowding in.

There were so many coming in and increasing in the work of the spirit, that a great diversity was seen in their various spiritual states. So in accordance with the Rule given him by God, the old man, with the grace of Christ guiding him in everything, issued guidelines and schedules of work for all of them according to the strength and ability of each one. Some he set to grow food by manual labour, others were occupied in various common tasks, not that anyone was tied to any task at all times, for each one retained a certain amount of control over his own discipline according to his zeal and the sort of work he did. The general oversight of both brothers and visitors he committed to those who followed him in seniority.

He urged all the monks, however, to be prompt in obedience, as a direct and easy path towards aspiring after the heights of perfection and diligently cultivating the fear of God in their hearts. For in humbly bringing forth the fruits of obedience they would be living their lives for God rather than self. This venerable father was mainly concerned

with spiritual direction, but he was always ready to undertake any particular task if it so happened that for any reason the person to whom he had committed responsibility was not available. He truly regarded himself as the servant of all. And he did this quite unobtrusively and without any of the bluster which sometimes spoils the virtues of spiritual men. His manner of great humility infused everything that he did and built up everyone in the Lord. He visited each of the cells (monasteria) in turn, until his paternal affection led his footsteps back to those of his sons he had started with. He loved to find them earnestly vigilant in the work of God, and rejoiced greatly at the progress they were making.

Chapter XXVI

It happened once that he became concerned that the neighbouring peasantry in caring for their flocks did not receive the communion of Christ's Sacraments nor hear the solemn reading of the divine books which solemnly took place everywhere on Saturdays and Sundays. So he consulted with the holy Aprius, bishop of Tentyri, with a view to building a church in what passed for their village centre to which they could all come and participate in the divine mysteries. This was done, but since there were no ordained clerics to celebrate the solemnities for the people, he would go there with some monks at the usual hour for churchgoing, and read some pages to the people with their messages of

saving grace. As he said, no readers had as yet been appointed, nor any other clerics to celebrate the sacred mysteries. So for as long as there was no presbyter there, or any of the other members of the clerical order, Pachomius would come and carry out the duties of reader with such unashamed eagerness and with his mind and body so focussed, that when the people attended to him they might have thought they were looking not at a man but an Angel. As a result of this programme many were converted from error and became Christians. His love of neighbour was so advanced, and his compassion so great, that when he saw anyone deceived by the devil, worshipping not the true God but vain idols, he would groan loudly because they were lost, and pour forth floods of tears that they might be saved.

Chapter XXVII

The holy Athanasius was bishop of Alexandria at that time, [He became bishop in 328.] a man outstanding in every virtue. He had been making a solemn visitation of all the churches in the upper Thebaid, building up the people's faith in Christ by his wholesome teachings, when his journeyings brought him to Tabennisi. As soon as Pachomius knew about it he went out to meet him with all his monks, leaping for joy in great happiness. They greeted this great pontiff of Christ with psalms and hymns, a vast multitude of brothers rejoicing in the Lord for his coming. But Pachomius did not

introduce himself to this famous leader, but deliberately drew back and hid himself among the throng of monks. His reason for that was that the aforesaid bishop of Tentyri had often spoken about him to the holy Athanasius, suggesting that he was a marvellous man and a true servant of God worthy of being promoted to the honour of the priesthood. It was the knowledge of this that led Pachomius to make himself inconspicuous and hide himself away among the ranks of the monks until the bishop had gone.

Pachomius respected Athanasius as being someone than whom there was no one more outstanding at that time. He had heard about his holy life and the persecutions he had suffered from the Arians because of his confession of Christ. He admired unreservedly the love which he showed to all but especially to monks, and respected him with his whole heart. But he accorded the greatest respect not only to Athanasius but to all men of true faith. He detested heretics completely, and had a particular horror of Origen as a blasphemous traitor and a precursor of Arius and Meletius. Arius had been expelled from the church by the venerable Heraclas, former bishop of Alexandria, because he had added many hateful and detestable things to the teachings of holy Scripture and thereby subverted quite a few souls. Just as poisoners disguise a bitter taste with honey, so did Origen bedaub the poison of his erroneous opinions with a most heavenly ability to write well, and so disseminated his pernicious

doctrines among those who did not know any better. So Heraclas was careful to warn all the brothers not merely to refrain from reading any of Origen's commentaries, but also to pay no heed to anyone who had read them. It is said that on one occasion he picked up a volume of Origen's and threw it into the sea.

"If it weren't for the fact that I know that it contains the holy Name of God," he said as he did so, "I would have consigned all those outpourings of blasphemy to the flames!"

Thus he loved the true faith and always sought for the truth. Just as he opposed the enemies of the church with unremitting detestation, so he acclaimed joyfully the increasing numbers of Catholics, and declared that he could discern Christ the redeemer of all speaking through the bishops (sacerdotes) in the royal power of the Church. If ever he heard of a brother slandering anyone on any matter, he not only stopped trusting him but avoided him as if he were a serpent, citing the Psalmist who said 'I will cut off him who secretly slanders his neighbour' (Psalms 101. 5).

"No good person," he said, "allows evil to come out of his mouth and insult the holy fathers with venomous tongue. There are many places in the Scriptures showing how God is angry at such offences. Think of the example of Miriam who poured out disparaging remarks about Moses and became infected with leprosy (Numbers 12.10). She had no chance of avoiding the judgment of God."

By this teaching he conferred great benefits upon his listeners.

Chapter XXVIII

[This story of Pachomius' meeting with his sister is ascribed to Theodore in Book III, chapter 34.]

His sister had heard of the old man's deservedly famous institution, and journeyed to the monastery in order to see him. When Pachomius knew she was there he sent her this message by the doorkeeper:

"Look, sister, you have heard that I am alive and well, so therefore depart in peace. Don't be sad that you have not been able to see me with your bodily eyes. But if you desire to follow the same sort of life as I am leading, so that you may find mercy from God, take diligent thought about it, and if you can assure me that this purpose has taken root in your heart I will bid my brothers to build you a house at some distance from here where you can live a disciplined and modest life. And I don't doubt that by your example God will call many to live with you and be counted worthy through you to gain the reward of everlasting salvation. For it is not possible for human beings to get any rest in this mortal flesh unless they please God by their dedication to a good life."

His sister wept bitterly on hearing this, her conscience pricked by godly compunction, but she took his wholesome exhortations to heart and

determined to set herself to follow Christ. When Pachomius realised his sister's intentions, he gave thanks to God who had so quickly strengthened her will, and gave orders to the more responsible of his brothers that they should build a cell for her at some distance. This was done, and she began to live the life in the fear of God. It was not long before many others gathered around her and she had become the mother of a great multitude. In her teaching she provided them with a means of openly renouncing all carnal desires in order to attain to heaven which perishes not, and she led the way on that journey as much by her living as by her teaching.

Chapter XXVIII

Pachomius appointed Peter, an outstanding monk of a venerable old age, to visit these sisters from time to time, so that he might support them with his holy instructions. He was a man who had mortified all his passions, and whose speech was well seasoned with salt, as the Apostle said (Colossians 4.6), and was most chaste in mind and body. Again and again he spoke to the virgins of Christ on the holy Scriptures, pointing out to them what was necessary for salvation. And Pachomius wrote Rules for them whereby they might together guide the direction of their lives. Except for the sheepskin cloak which women did not wear, the shape of their rules was exactly the same as for the monks.

If one of the monks wanted to visit a sister or some other close relation in the women's monastery, an older monk of proven integrity was appointed to go with him. This man would first of all approach the woman in charge, after which, in the presence of them and other older women, the monk could then see his sister or relation in all propriety and holiness. They were not allowed to give each other anything, for neither of them had anything of their own to give. It was sufficient for them that they were able to visit each other and bear in mind the hope of future everlasting bliss. If the women needed any building work done by the monks, the work was entrusted to men of proven character who would oversee the brothers' work as they laboured in the fear of God. They would not be given anything to eat or drink by the women, but would return to their monastery when it was time to eat.

There was only one Rule observed daily by both women and men, except for the sheepskin, as we have said. When any of the virgins died, the others carried out the necessary burial rites and carried the body down to the river which separated the two monasteries, singing the customary psalms. The monks then would cross the river bearing branches of palm and olive, and singing the psalms would carry her back to bury her with joy in their own cemetery.

Chapter XXIX

This way of life began to be noised abroad far and wide, and the name of Pachomius became well known everywhere, giving rise to universal thanksgiving towards God. Numbers of people were renouncing the affairs of the world and turning to this extraordinary monastic way of life and its spiritual search. Theodore was numbered among them, and this is the story of his conversion. He was a young man of nearly fourteen years of age, of Christian parents, highly respected in the world. On the eleventh day of the Egyptian month Tybi, that is, the eighth day before the Ides of January, [Jan 6, at that time the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, sometimes associated with the Nativity. Today, the Feast of the Epiphany.] a certain Egyptian festival was being celebrated as usual. He was giving thanks to God, aware that he had a large and splendid house and an abundance of possessions of all kinds, when he suddenly felt compunction in his heart.

"What will it profit you, O Theodore," he began to wonder, "if you gain the whole world (Mark 8.36) and enjoy all its worldly delights, at the price of being excluded from the good things of eternal and immortal life? No one who lives only for present pleasure can expect the reward of unending glory."

In a great turmoil over these thoughts he went into an inner chamber of his house and fell weeping on his face.

"Almighty God, who know the secrets of our hearts," he prayed, "you know that there is nothing in this world that is more important to me than your love. So I beg you in your mercy to guide me in your will and enlighten my miserable soul lest in the darkness of my sins I fall into eternal death. Grant that by the gift of your redemption I may praise and glorify you for ever. "

As he was praying thus his mother came in and saw his eyes were full of tears.

"Why are you so sad, my beloved son?" she asked. "And why are you hiding away from us? We have been worried and upset, looking for you everywhere so that you can share our festival banquet."

"Go and have your banquet, mother," he said. "For my part I could not eat a thing."

She continued to beg him, but in vain. He would not come and join them in the feast. Daily while going to school to learn his letters he began to fast at least until vespers, though he would often fast for two days at a time. He abstained from all rich and fancy foods for a period of two years, striving to attain to perfect continence, in so far as his young age would allow. He began to wonder whether he should seek out a monastery and bind himself to a holy Rule. He gave up all that he had and sought out some religious men living a godly life together, and went to live with them, progressing daily in the fear of God.

Chapter XXX

These monks had a holy custom of gathering together after the evening prayers to meditate on the divine wisdom, and it so happened one evening that Theodore heard one of them talking of what the tabernacle of the old Testament and the holy of holies signified for people of the present day.

"As regards those whose foreskins were circumcised," he said, "the outer court of the temple signified the early Jewish people, but the inner court, the holy of holies, prefigured the vocation of all the gentiles, that is, a vocation to be found worthy of entering into the more sacred place in order to participate in the greater mysteries. Instead of the animal sacrifices, the manna in the ark, the flowering rod of Aaron and the tables of the Law, the thurible, the table, and the propitiatory candelabra, God himself has mercifully made himself known to us in the person of his incarnate Word, and enlightened us with the light of his presence, and has become himself the propitiation for our sins. Instead of manna he has given us his own body for food.

"This teaching I learned from our holy father Pachomius," this same brother went on to say. "He has begun to gather monks together in his monastery of Tabennisi, and by God's help I made great progress while I was among them. And I bear in mind that through this great man all my sins were forgiven."

Theodore found his heart burning as he listened to this, and he prayed silently.

"O Lord God, if this is what a righteous man on earth should be like, grant that I may see him and follow in his footsteps in obedience to all his commands, that so I may be found worthy to enjoy all those good things which you have promised to those who love you."

And he wept freely, overcome by the wound of divine love.

A few days later the venerable Pecusius, a man of a distinguished old age, came to visit them, desirous of knowing how they did. Theodore earnestly begged him to take him as his companion and guide him to the holy Pachomius. Without any argument he freely agreed to do so, and when they arrived there Theodore worshipped the Lord.

"Blessed are you, O Lord," he said, "for answering so quickly the prayers of sinners. You have deigned to grant me what I asked."

And as soon as he entered the monastery and saw Pachomius he wept for joy.

"Don't weep, my son," the venerable father said, "for I am only a sinful human being, trying to do the work of God."

Having said that, he introduced him into the monastery. Theodore's mind lit up when he saw how many brothers there were, and he flung himself with great zeal into the round of daily worship. In the course of time he made great strides in virtue. God showered great gifts upon him; he became practised

both in good works and good words, with a wonderful humility and heartfelt contrition, meticulous in his fasting, wide awake in his vigils, earnest in prayer, losing no opportunity to seek after ever greater gifts of spiritual grace. He was able to give great comfort to those who were in some distress, and knew how to correct with humility and good will those who had strayed into some misdemeanour. Pachomius could see what a brilliant and shining example he was, and took him to his heart and loved him deeply.

Chapter XXXI

As soon as his mother heard that he was with Pachomius, she got the bishops to write a letter requesting that she should be reunited with her son, and armed with this she hurried to visit him. She lodged with the virgins in the monastery which, as we have said, was at some distance from the men, and sent the bishops' letter to the holy Pachomius, with an earnest request that he would allow her to see her son. Pachomius summoned Theodore to him.

"I have to tell you, my son," he said, "that your mother is here and wants to see you. She has even brought letters to us from the bishops. So make haste and satisfy your mother, especially seeing that she brings a letter which the holy bishops have written."

"Venerable father," he replied, "I have gained some knowledge of spiritual things. Before I do as you ask please first assure me that if I do see her I will not have to answer for it in the day of judgment. Like anyone else in the world I have given her due respect according to the commandments of Christ. But in the times before the manifestation of Christ's grace, the sons of Levi turned their backs upon their own parents in order to fulfil the righteousness of the law (Exodus 32.26-28, Leviticus 21.11, Deuteronomy 33. 8-9). Is it not even more incumbent upon me, who have been made partaker of such great gifts, to put the love of God before love of parents? The Lord says in the Gospel, 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10.37) ".

"If you have decided it would not be right to see her," Pachomius replied, "I will not bring any pressure to bear on you. Those who utterly renounce this world do need to deny themselves completely. Monks especially ought to flee from all idle and worldly meetings and meaningless conversations, and associate seriously only with those who are members of Christ. For if anyone governed by some worldly passion says, 'My parents are my flesh. Therefore I ought to love them', he should pay attention to what the blessed Peter the Apostle says, 'A man is in bondage to anyone who overcomes him' (2 Peter 2. 19)."

When Theodore's mother realised that he was not going to meet her, she decided to stay

permanently in the monastery with the virgins of Christ, saying to herself, "If the Lord wills, I may at least catch sight of him among the other monks, and I shall also bring benefits to my own soul for as long as I persevere in this way of life. It is certain that those who maintain a strict discipline for Christ's sake and not for the sake of vainglory will acquire virtue upon virtue, and in a short space of time will give offence to none."

Chapter XXXII

We have shown his zeal in encouraging those who had a desire to seek after better things; so now we think it is right to describe those who were negligent, by way of a warning to our readers. For there were some monks living after the flesh and making no attempt to put off the old man (Colossians 3.9), about whom Pachomius was very worried. He frequently spoke to them with words of salutary advice, but could never see any signs of improvement in them. Worried and sad, he besought the Lord ever more earnestly.

"O Lord, Ruler of all," he prayed, "You have commanded us that we love our neighbour as ourselves (Leviticus 19.18, Matthew 19.19). You know the secrets of our hearts. Turn not your face away from me as I cry out to you for their salvation. Have mercy on them, fill them with the fear of God, that knowing your power they may serve you truly,

strengthened in all they do by hoping in your promises; for my soul is greatly troubled because of them, and my whole being is in distress."

After a few days he could see that they had not improved a bit as a result of his prayers. Once more he stood in prayer, praying for them to the Lord, and he also gave them some private and personal rules of prayer and behaviour, in the hope that by applying themselves to obey rules like slaves they might little by little aspire to the gift of loving him as sons. They found that they were not going to be able to follow their own desires and went in mortal dread of Pachomius, inspired by fear of him rather than moved by his purity. They fell utterly into error and departed from the monastery, following Satan and rejecting the wonderful way of life followed by Pachomius.

But once they had gone, the whole flock was restored to a state of integrity, increasing more and more in virtues, just as the good grain is able to flourish in the field when the weeds have been rooted out. I have told you all this to show you that although there is nothing against worldly people embracing a monastic life, nevertheless their venerable profession will be of no use to the monks if they persist in being negligent, for neither paternal prayer nor understanding will be able to help the idle.

Chapter XXXIII

The sometime confessor Dionysus, presbyter and oeconomus (that is, steward) of the Church of Tentyri, was someone whom the holy Pachomius loved dearly. Learning from somebody that Pachomius would not allow people coming from another monastery to eat with his own brothers, but kept them separate in another place outside the monastery, he came to see Pachomius in some agitation.

"It is not right, abba," he said, more in anger than in gentle admonition, "that you don't treat everyone with the impartial charity that brothers deserve."

Pachomius took this reproof with great patience and resignation.

"The Lord knows what my purpose is in doing this," he replied, "and your fatherly nature must also accept that I don't want to upset anybody, much less despise them. Why should I do that, provoking my Lord into being angry with me, when he has clearly said in the Gospel that 'what you do unto the least of these my brothers you do unto me' (Matthew 25.40)? So listen to my explanation, venerable father. It is not that I wish to shun or despise anyone who comes to me that I do what you say I do. My own flock are gathered together in the coenobium. I am aware that many of them are so far unlearned in the monastic way of life that they have

not yet even received the monastic habit. Some of them are quite young, and so ignorant that they hardly know their right hand from their left. So I thought it better that brothers from another monastery should be received with all honour and respect in a different place. I hardly think that this constitutes any insult to fathers and brothers who change over to us. On the contrary they are received with more than due reverence, especially seeing that they come together with us at the regular hours to worship God, after which they each go to the place allotted to them, where they work in silence. I am careful before God to supply them with everything they need."

Having listened to all this, Dionysius the presbyter agreed that Pachomius was worthy of great praise, and said that he was sure that everything was being done according to the will of God. Much enlightened by the explanation that the holy Pachomius had given him, he went back to his own place.

Chapter XXXIV

There was a woman in the city of Tentyri who suffered from an issue of blood and had struggled with this disability for many years. She had heard that Pachomius worshipped God in a most marvellous and holy way, and was moreover aware that Dionysius the presbyter was a dearly beloved

friend of his. She begged him to have pity on her and ask Pachomius to come and visit him on some business or other. He was moved by the woman's prayers and acted without delay. When Pachomius came to the church and greeted Dionysius after the prayers, she was seated nearby. As they were talking to each other, she summoned up her faith, believing she could hear Christ saying, 'Be of good comfort, my daughter. Your faith has made you whole' (Matthew 9.22). She came up quietly behind him and touched the cowl with which he covered his head. Immediately she was cured. She fell face down and worshipped the Lord, glorifying his mercy that through his servants he bestowed such great benefits on those who believe in him. The holy Dionysius realised what had happened and gave a blessing to the woman, who forthwith went back to her home.

Chapter XXXV

It was decided once that the monastery should be protected by being enclosed with a palisade and ditch, and Pachomius himself cheerfully played a great part in the work which the brothers undertook.

A little later, a presbyter-monk who was the father of many brothers paid one of his frequent visits to the holy Pachomius, this time bringing with him a brother who was the cause of some dissension in their monastery. For this brother, since the time when

he had arrived, had greatly pestered him to be given the dignity of being ordained but the presbyter judged him to be unworthy of such a gift, and had been putting him off with various excuses. It got to the point where he could no longer abide his importunity, and came to the holy Pachomius to lay the whole matter before him, confident that he was the only one who could settle such disputes. Once Pachomius had fully grasped what it was all about, he gave the presbyter his opinion.

"Now you have come to me to discover what is the will of God, haven't you? My opinion is that you should give him what he asks and don't worry about it. It is quite probable that by exercising this office his soul will be freed from the power of the devil, for it often happens that when a bad man is given great blessings he amends his life. A desire for betterment is often the occasion for the growth of a genuine devotion and it becomes possible for at least some souls to cultivate the virtues which they have hitherto neglected through laziness. So I think it is right for the brother to do this, and it will be pleasing to God."

The presbyter accepted this opinion and acted upon it. And the brother who had had his wish granted came to the blessed Pachomius in a most tranquil and self-effacing frame of mind and fell on his face before him.

"O man of God," he said, "you stand most high in God's favour. For you have discerned what is necessary for salvation and turned evil into good. For

if you had not been kind and understanding towards me but treated me sternly I might have discarded my habit and been lost to God for ever. But now, blessed are you in the Lord, for you have saved my soul."

The old man lifted him up from the ground and earnestly entreated him to live worthy of the dignity which would be conferred upon him, lest being negligent he suffer the pains of future torment. He embraced him and went with him as far as the monastery gates before sending him on his way in peace

Chapter XXXVI

While Pachomius was still standing there, a man who had come from some distance away ran towards him and followed after him, begging him for the love of Christ to cure his daughter who was possessed of a demon. Pachomius left him outside and sent back a message to him through the gatekeeper.

"It is not our custom to speak with women," he said, "but if you have got any of her clothing with you, send it in to us and we will bless it in the name of the Lord and give it back to you straight away. We trust in Christ that by this means your daughter will be freed from the attacks of the enemy."

A tunic belonging to the girl was brought to the holy man, which he examined very gravely.

"This is not hers," he said.

"Yes it is," said the father. "Truly it is."

"Yes, I know it is really hers," said Pachomius. "But although she is a virgin dedicated to God, she has not maintained her holy purity. It was for this reason that having inspected her tunic, and sensing that she had been neglectful of her holy chastity, I declared that it was not hers. Let her promise to you in the sight of God that from now on she will be continent and Christ will have mercy on her and restore her to health."

Grieving and angry, the father interrogated his daughter, and she at last confessed to him that it was even as the holy Pachomius had said. She swore with an oath that she would not ever behave like that again, and the blessed man prayed for her to the Lord and sent her some blessed oil. Anointing with the oil immediately effected a cure, and she glorified God anew for delivering her not only from the demon but also from a repugnant practice. And for the rest of her life by Christ's help she was liberated to practise continence.

Chapter XXXVII

The reputation of this holy man was spreading everywhere so rapidly that it is not surprising that another man who had a son possessed by a demon should with great lamentation have begged Pachomius on bended knee to pray for his son to the almighty power of Christ. He was not able

to bring his son to the monastery, but Pachomius prayed for him and gave him some blessed bread, with exact instructions that his son should take a little bit of this medicine before a meal.

When it was time for his son to eat he gave him some of this bread, but the unclean spirit would not at all allow him to eat it, though he picked up other bread which was put in front of him and ate that. So the father broke the bread into smaller bits, took the stones out of some dates and put pieces of the bread inside them. He placed nothing else besides the dates in front of him, hoping that all unwittingly his son might receive a blessing. But he opened the dates up, pulled out the pieces of bread, cursed the dates and refused to eat anything at all. So the father kept him entirely without any food for several days, until at last, faint with hunger, he did eat some of the blessed bread. He immediately fell into a deep sleep, and was liberated from the evil spirit. And the father took the son with him to Pachomius, praising and glorifying God, who through his servants does such great and glorious things without number.

This most blessed man did many other healings in the power of the holy Spirit, but never got conceited or took any credit to himself, for he had this gift from God that he always treated everyone the same, and never let his mind stray away from the discipline of Christ. And if he ever asked anything from God and his petition was not granted he was never in the least cast down but bore it patiently, knowing that whatever the divine mercy prescribed

was right for him as well as for everybody else. Sometimes, with the best of intentions we ask for the wrong things, which are not granted because the goodness of God sees fit to overrule them. It is a great mercy of God not to grant our petitions when they are veiled in the night of our own ignorance.

Chapter XXXVIII

A certain young man named Silvanus gave up his life on the stage to live in the monastery with Pachomius. But after being received he continued living in the same disreputable worldly way, ignoring the disciplines of the Rule and neglectful of his own salvation. He spent his days in the ridiculous empty pastimes of his former life, and even achieved some following among the brothers persuading them to imitate him. Most of the brothers objected to this and urged the holy Pachomius to expel him from the monastery. But he would not agree to that, but bore it all with equanimity. He spoke to the brother, urging him to amend his ways and give up his former lifestyle. He prayed constantly to God for him, that out of the accustomed abundance of his mercy he might fill the young man's heart with compunction. But the youth persisted in his dissolute ways, an example of a lost soul if ever there was one, until at last everyone agreed that he should be cut off from the congregation as being completely unworthy.

But Pachomius still begged to differ. He plied him with the most wise and gentle warnings, and gave him instructions in the wisdom of heaven, with the result that he began to burn so fiercely with the fear of God, and was filled with such trepidation about his future fate, that from then on he was completely unable to refrain from tears. Completely reformed, he became like a book in which everyone else could read what conversion really was. He wept continually wherever he was and whatever he was doing. Even when the brothers were eating he could not cease from lamentation. This annoyed many of the monks.

"Stop your everlasting weeping," they said. "Please, just throw off these expressions of grief."

"However much I try," he replied, "I simply cannot stop crying, as you ask. For my breast burns as if it is on fire, and gives me no peace."

"Well weep privately, then, or if you must, during the prayers, but at least when we gather for a meal you ought to stop weeping and eat. For it is perfectly possible to maintain compunction in your soul without all these exterior manifestations of grief. Many of the brothers are quite put off their food when they see you weeping so freely. Tell us now, why is it that you can't moderate your tears?"

"Would you not have me weep, when I am aware of how much I am supported by you holy brothers? I worship the dust under your feet and don't consider myself at all worthy of being part of your company. Should I not weep, when a man of the

stage, guilty of many sins, receives such kindnesses? I go in constant fear lest like Dathan and Abiron I should be swallowed up in my wickedness by a hole in the earth (Numbers 16.32). Those men of unclean hands and deeds had attempted to take over power; and I who am so much aware of the gifts of God have likewise scorned my own salvation by reason of my disgraceful deeds. With this constantly in mind I am not ashamed to weep in front of you all. For I know what sins I am capable of, and I must needs expiate them by my constant fountains of tears. So if I pour out my soul in lamentations it is not really any great thing I am doing. Indeed, at this time I cannot think of any punishment adequate for my sins."

This brother progressed to better things day by day and outstripped all his brothers in humility. So much so that the holy Pachomius had this to say about him in the presence of all the brothers:

"I tell you my brothers and sons, before God and the holy Angels by whom this coenobium was founded, there is only one person that I know of who has followed my teachings on humility."

Some of the brothers thought he was talking of Theodore, others of Petronius, others yet again of Orsesius. Theodore begged him to tell whom he was talking about, the holy man demurred, and Theodore asked him again more urgently. The greater part of the brothers also strongly urged him to say who it was who merited such praise.

"Well, I wouldn't tell you," said Pachomius, "if I thought that the person of whom I have been

speaking would succumb to vainglory, but I have not the slightest doubt that by the grace of Christ he would increase in humility however much he might be praised, so I need have no fear in openly singing his blessed praises.

"Now you, Theodore, and others like you, have trapped the devil like a sparrow in a cage, and by the grace of God you have trampled him under your feet and crushed him to dust. But if, which God forbid, you are neglectful in anything he who is under your feet will rise up and rave against you with a terrible fury. But this young Silvanus, whom not long ago you wanted to drive out of the monastery, has put to death his own desires and laid the enemy so low that no one can compare with him. His humility is greater than anyone's. Indeed, whereas you, my brothers, derive satisfaction from the works of righteousness that you do, this young man judges himself to be lower than everyone, however hard he fights himself. With complete conviction he judges himself to be useless and lacking in every kind of virtue. That is why he cries so readily, because he lowers himself and humiliates himself, and does not reckon anything that he does to be important. There is nothing like the humility of a pure heart, together with amendment of life, to destroy the power of the devil."

Silvanus valiantly fought under the banner of Christ for another eight years before coming to the end of his life in peace. The blessed Pachomius testified of his going that a host of holy Angels

carried off his soul with great rejoicing, offering him up as a chosen vessel in the sight of Christ.

Chapter XXXIX

At this time, the way in which Pachomius was presiding over such a remarkable way of life came to the attention of Varus, the bishop of the city of Panos. He was a man highly respected in all his doings, devoted to God, standing out as one who fervently loved the true faith. He sent letters to Pachomius, telling him at great length of his desire that Pachomius should come and build monastic cells (monasteria) near his city. For a number of reasons he agreed to the bishop's request, and as he set out on his journey he decided it would be right to visit on the way the monasteries under the bishop's pastoral care. As he approached one of these monasteries he met the funeral procession of one of the brothers who had recklessly taken his own life. The brothers of the monastery were conducting the funeral with all ceremony, singing the usual psalms, with the friends and relations of the dead person all present. When they saw Pachomius they set down the bier and asked him to pray for the dead man as well as for themselves. Having finished the required prayer he turned to the brothers.

"Stop singing psalms," he said. "Take off those splendid vestments you have clothed him with,

burn the lot of them, and take the corpse to be buried without any further psalm-singing."

The parents of the dead man, the brothers, and everyone else that was there were thus suddenly confronted in utter astonishment with this unheard of situation. They begged the old man that at least they should be permitted to sing the usual psalms over him, but he wouldn't agree.

"What is the idea of this new procedure?" the parents asked accusingly. "Who would not pay their respects to the dead, even if they are in disgrace? The tragedy of his death in itself is quite enough to bear. What you are doing is worse than behaving like a wild beast and does not say much for your reputation of holiness. Besides, our own reputation will become completely dishonoured, and we shall be suspected of all sorts of other hidden wickednesses. If only we had never come to this place; if only he had never become a monk! Don't inflict on us a grief which will never go away. We beg that you will restore the singing of the usual psalms for the dead."

"Truly, my brothers and children," said Pachomius in reply, "I grieve for you in the presence of this dead person inasmuch as you are thinking only of what is visible and temporal. My concern is for his present state which we cannot see, which is why I have made these decisions. And you would be bringing even more grief upon him by these so-called honours. I want him to expiate his evil deed, in the hope that he might gain some small measure of eternal rest. I am not thinking of his bodily life. What

I have decided is for the benefit of his immortal soul, which will be given back his flesh incorrupt and whole in the day of resurrection. If I were to agree to what you want I would be thought of as one who bowed to human judgment, but I scorn to be seen as one who seeks only to satisfy your wishes for this present moment, rather than seek the best interests of this man in the world to come.

"Our God is the fountain of all goodness, and he seeks opportunities to pour out upon us the overflowing gifts of his own beneficence and to forgive us our sins, not only in this world but in the world to come. It says in the Gospel, 'Whoever blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this world or in the world to come' (Matthew 12.32), which means that there are some sins which undoubtedly can be forgiven if penance is done for them. We have been considered worthy by the power of Christ to administer the medicine prescribed by his godhead, and if we do not pronounce judgments appropriate for each particular case we shall fall into disrepute as despisers, as Scripture says, 'Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish' (Habakkuk 1.5 & Acts 13.41). So, therefore, I beg you to allow this dead person to be humiliated because of his sins, if only so that he may be found worthy of obtaining some measure of rest in the day of judgement. Bury him without the psalms, as I have said. Our kind and clement and most merciful God is well able to grant him eternal rest in response to our unadorned prayers."

When he had finished, they all went on their way and did as the venerable father had said, burying him on the mountainside where his tomb had been prepared.

Chapter XL

The holy man stayed with the monks for several days, and taught them first of all how each one should live in the fear of God, and then how they should fight against the devil, and by the grace of Christ turn away from his attacks.

Messengers then came to tell him that a brother of the monastery of Chinobosci was seriously ill, and begged the blessing of a final prayer from Pachomius. The man of God immediately set off in all haste with the messengers, and as they were hurrying along about two or three miles from the monastery they were going to, he heard the most beautiful voice sounding in the air, and looking up saw that brother's soul being swiftly carried up to the blessed realms of everlasting life by Angels praising the Lord. Pachomius' companions neither heard nor felt anything at all, but only saw him gazing steadily towards the East.

"Why are you just standing there, father?" they asked him. "We need to hurry if we are to get there in time."

"There is no point in hurrying," he said. "What I have been gazing at for so long is the brother being taken up into the joys of eternity."

They asked him to explain how he had seen the soul, and he told them what he had seen in as far as they could understand it. When they arrived at the monastery they asked what time the brother had fallen asleep, and found that everything they had learned from the holy man was true.

I have told you about this for two reasons. Firstly, to show that this blessed old man had supersensitive sight and possessed the gift of prophecy, being able to see things at a distance by intellectual vision, and secondly, that we who follow in the footsteps of such men should carefully avoid the company of the wicked. And I think that I have now said enough about such things.

Chapter XLI

When the holy Pachomius and the monks came at last to the bishop of Chinobosci, he was welcomed with the greatest of respect, and a great celebration was held because of his arrival. He was told the places where it was hoped that monastic cells would be built, as was stated in the letters some time before, and the venerable man set about building them immediately. In the process of building surrounding walls to prevent break-ins, some detestable people, blinded with envy by the devil,

came by night and destroyed what had been built so far. The punishment for their wrongdoing was not long delayed. For while the old man was urging his disciples to put up with all this patiently, those wicked people came intending to finish the destruction which they had begun. But the Angel of the Lord immediately consumed them by fire, and they were reduced to nothing, like wax cast into the flames.

The brothers then quickly finished the whole building, where Pachomius installed religious men as monks, and put Samuel in charge of them. He was a very pleasant man, endowed with a great gift of self-denial. Once the monastic cells had been built, the holy man decided to stay there for some time, until those whom he had brought together should become established in the gifts of Christ.

Chapter XLII

During this time a philosopher of that same city came to visit them, having heard of their reputation as servants of God, wanting to know what they were like and what they thought they were doing. Seeing some of the monks he asked them to call the father, as he had several things he would like to discuss with him. When Pachomius knew it was a philosopher, he sent Cornelius and Theodore to him, telling them to answer his questions as prudently as they could.

"We have heard many accounts," said the philosopher when they met, "of how you give yourselves to the study of wisdom, and that you are known to be able to give wise answers to anyone who enquires about your religion, for which you have a great love. I would like to ask you about what you have gathered in to your store of wisdom."

"Ask what you like," said Theodore.

"Would you settle the question for me about anything I might ask you?"

"Tell me what you have in mind."

"Who died without being born? Who was born but never died? Who died but did not suffer corruption?"

"There is nothing very difficult about your questions, O philosopher. They can easily be answered. He who died without being born was Adam, the first man. He who was born but never died was Enoch, who pleased God and was translated (Genesis 5.24). The one who died but did not suffer corruption was Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt, and remains there to this day as an example to all who do not believe (Genesis 19.26). And my advice to you, O philosopher, is that you give up your inept propositions and empty questions and turn without delay to the true God whom we worship, and receive remission of your sins to your eternal salvation."

Quite confounded, the philosopher went away without asking any more questions, overcome

with admiration at the sharpness of the reply which he got so quickly.

Chapter XLIII

Pachomius spent several more days in these newly constructed cells before going on to another monastery under his control. As all the brothers hurried out to meet him with a great welcome, a little child from the congregation, running about among them, shouted out to Pachomius.

"Truly, father, since the last time you were here there have not been any vegetables or pulses cooked for us."

"Don't worry, my son," Pachomius replied kindly, "I will cook you some."

He went into the monastery and after the prayers went to the kitchen where he found the brother in charge making psiathoi (that is, rush mats), known in the vernacular as mattae.

"Tell me, brother," asked Pachomius, "how long is it since you cooked any vegetables or pulses for the brothers?"

"Almost two months."

"Why have you been acting like this against the Rule and depriving the brothers of this benefit?"

"I had been trying daily, venerable father," he replied, making his humble excuses, "to carry out my duty, but whatever it was that I cooked did not get eaten because they were all fasting. The boys were

the only ones who ate anything cooked. So in order not to waste this food prepared with so much labour and expense I just stopped cooking it. And to keep myself from idleness I have chosen to weave psiathoi with the brothers. Only one of my assistants is needed for preparing what little food the brothers want for their meals, that is olives and herbs."

"And how many psiathoi do you reckon you have you made?"

"Fifty."

"Bring them out for me to see."

And when they had been laid out in front of him, he immediately ordered them to be thrown into the fire!

"Since you have despised the Rule given you of looking after the brothers, then I condemn your labours to be consumed by fire. For you must know how pernicious it is to break the rules set out by the fathers that provide for the salvation of souls. And are you not aware of what a glorious thing it always is to fast in this present life? The Lord greatly rewards anyone who, as far as he is able, fasts out of consideration for the love of God. But when he has no choice in the matter but is compelled to it by necessity, his forced abstinence is useless, and he can expect a reward in vain. But when there is a variety of dishes placed in front of them, by partaking sparingly of them they demonstrate that their whole hope is in God. If they don't see the food, if they are never given any chance of seeing it, how can they expect a reward from God for their abstinence? For

the sake of a petty concern for cost the brothers ought not to be deprived of this opportunity."

Chapter XLIV

As soon as he had finished speaking and correcting their errors the gatekeeper came to him in some haste, saying that certain highly respected anchorites had arrived wanting to see him. He said they were to be brought in, and after greeting them with due reverence and saying a prayer he showed them round the brothers' cells and all the other parts of the monastery. They then asked the old man if they could discuss certain matters with him, so he took them to his own cell and sat down with them. As they began a heated discussion about certain abstruse and arcane subjects Pachomius began to notice a terrible smell. It was so bad that he couldn't think, much less contribute to the discussion. When the time for the evening meal at the ninth hour drew near they stood up and said they must go. The holy man strongly invited them to stay for a meal, but they would not, saying that they had to return to their own place before sunset. They bade farewell and set out without delay.

The holy Pachomius, wanting to know the cause of the smell, then prostrated himself in prayer, begging the Lord to reveal to him what kind of people these were. It was made known to him then that it was the impiety of the opinions which they

held that had sent out such a stench from their hearts. Without delay he followed them and caught them up.

"I would just like to ask you something," he said.

"Ask, by all means."

"You have been reading the Commentaries of Origen, haven't you."

Of course, they denied it.

"Before God I say to you that anyone who reads Origen and agrees with his depraved opinions will be sent to the lowest parts of Hell, where his inheritance will be worms and outer darkness, where the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment. See now, I have taken care to pronounce to you what has been revealed to me by God, so I am in the clear. You will know if you have spurned what is right. If you would agree with me and please God in all things, drown all the books of Origen in the river lest you be also drowned with them."

Upon which he left them and went back to resume his accustomed life of virtue, where he found the brothers standing in prayer, and joined with them in singing the hymns and spiritual canticles.

Chapter XLV

As the monks went to their meal Pachomius betook himself to his own cell where he was accustomed to pray to the Lord. Shutting the door he fell to earnest prayer as he thought of the vision

which he had just seen. He begged the Lord to reveal to him what would be the future state of his monks and what would happen to his congregation after he was dead. He prayed from the ninth hour up to the time when the brother in charge of the night prayers called him to the usual offices, thus extending the time of his own supplications.

As he persevered in prayer, suddenly about midnight he saw a vision in answer to his prayer, which enlightened him a great deal about the state of those who were to come after him. As his monastery grew in size he saw there would be many living devoutly and chastely, but also a great number living negligently who would completely lose their chance of salvation. He saw, so he told me, a crowd of monks in a deep and dark valley, with some of them trying to climb out of it but not being able to. They could not make each other out and so were running about bumping into each other, completely unable to find the way out of that deep and dark place. Some tried in vain because they became overcome with weariness and sank down to lower places still. Others were lying about, weeping with tearful voices. But there were others climbing up with an infinite labour, and as they climbed they were suddenly bathed in light, and gave thanks to God that they were able to escape.

Chapter XLV

So Pachomius was given to understand what was to happen in the last days. He grieved for the

blinded minds of some who were to come after him, and their erroneous beliefs and falling away from goodness. He grieved especially that the leaders among them (praepositi) would become negligent and idle, wearing the monastic habit but bringing forth no good works. For once the worst kind of people hold the leadership, ignorant of what holy living should be like, strifes and envyings must needs arise, and evil men will be preferred above good men; leaders will be chosen not because of their integrity of life but merely for their seniority, whence good men will have no confidence in speaking up for the good of the community but will be forced to keep silent, lest for their outspoken honesty they suffer great persecution. But what need to go into details of what might happen when everything covered by the holy rules is subverted by human wickedness? Pachomius tearfully cried out to the Lord:

"Almighty God, if this is what is going to happen, why did you allow this coenobium to be founded? For if the leaders will be corrupt in those last times, what will they be like who are under their rule? 'If the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the ditch' (Matthew 15.14). Woe is me! I have laboured uselessly and in vain! Lord, be mindful of the zeal with which your gifts have enabled me to work. Be mindful of your servants who have served you with their whole heart. Be mindful of your promise that your testament will be observed till the end of the world by those who worship you (Matthew 15.20). You know, O Lord, that since the time when

I took the monastic habit I have humbled myself exceedingly in your sight, nor have I ever indulged to excess in partaking of bread or water or any creature that you have made."

And even as he spoke a voice came to him from heaven:

"Don't boast, Pachomius. You are only a human being in need of mercy. Everything that I have created continues to exist only through my mercy."

Pachomius immediately threw himself on the ground, seeking forgiveness:

"Almighty God, let your mercy come upon me that I may live (Psalm 119.77). Take not your mercy from me, for your mercy and truth have sustained me. For I know, O Lord, that all things fall into nothingness without the protection of your help."

Angels of light stood about him as he spoke, and a young man was in the midst of them who shone with an indescribable beauty and brilliance, sending forth rays of splendour like the sun, and wearing a crown of thorns upon his head

"Pray tell me, O Lord," cried Pachomius, "was it I who crucified you?"

"It wasn't you who crucified me," the Lord gently said, "but your parents. But be of good cheer and comfort your heart, for your posterity shall stand for ever, and shall not fail until the end of the world. Those who come after you shall be freed from deep darkness insofar as they have lived in abstinence and

taken care for their own salvation. Only those who hold with you at this present time, following the example of your virtues, shine with a great light of grace. But those who after you become embroiled in the darkness of this world will climb out of that great darkness, serving justice and loving eternal life with all their heart, insofar as they shall prudently understand what is to be sought after and what is to be avoided, and are not willingly swayed by merely human considerations. Amen I say to you, they shall be granted the same salvation and eternal rest as those who are with you now in continence and radiant sanctity."

Having spoken thus, the Lord ascended into heaven, as the sky was illuminated with such a splendour of light as no human tongue could possibly describe.

Chapter XLVI

Pachomius, lost in wonder at what he had been shown, then went to the night office with all the brothers. And when the holy office was complete, the brothers according to their custom gathered round the old man to hear the word of God. And he opened his mouth and taught them:

"My little children, with all the power of which you are capable strive bravely after your own salvation, and fight valiantly against the armed might of the enemy, before the time comes when we

ourselves shall cry out in misery and lamentation as we grow weak and incapable. Let us not fritter away the days which the Lord has bestowed upon us, but let us develop our virtues with all zeal. For I say to you, if you knew the good things prepared for the saints in heaven, and the torments remaining for those who fall from virtue having known the truth and not embraced it, you would with all your strength flee from that eternal punishment and hasten to obtain that blessed inheritance which has been promised to the servants of God. It is only the evil and abandoned who shun and spurn such blessings, for they know not what they might be losing. It behoves them even now to cast off their worldly desires, weep constantly for their past offences, and seek for the mercy of God that they may turn to better things, and so direct their pathways that they may depart happy from this life and come rejoicing to the heavenly kingdom.

"Having cast off its earthly tabernacle, the soul expands in the knowledge of its own inner existence (*ad cognitionem suae substantiae properat*), and accompanied by the celestial powers hastens to the presence of the Father of lights. Why do human beings exalt themselves in vainglory? Why should a creature of dust be raised up? What have earth and ashes to be proud about? Let us weep while we have time, so that when our long-delayed end comes upon each one of us, we may not then be found begging for a time of repentance when we no longer deserve to be given it. It is in this life that we

are given to weep for our sins; as we learn from the holy prophet David: 'Who shall be able to cry to the Lord in hell' (Psalms 6.5)? Unhappy the soul, to be mourned with floods of tears, that having once renounced the world returns to the deeds of the world, that having but now been freed from worldly care returns once more to the service of slavery. So then, my beloved brothers, as the time is short before we are to pass from this fleeting world, let us not allow the perpetual life of blessedness to be taken away from us.

"Our earthly parents, immersed as they are in the affairs of the world, and occupied with the business of this present life, are under the impression that we who have fled from the evils of the world already enjoy everlasting life. I tremble in great fear lest they condemn us under those very terms, saying to us, 'Why have you grown weary in your ways, beset with such misery as you are (Wisdom 5.7)? Your sad state is a great grief to us, your destructiveness only adds to our burdens. Our offspring have become quite useless, they do not produce the fruits of which their early flowering gave promise.' I greatly fear lest this prophecy becomes true for us, 'Our loved ones have fallen into disgrace, they have become abominable, the crown has been torn from their brows (Jeremiah 13.18). The cities of the south are closed to us, and there is no one who may open them up. Let the wicked perish and not see the glory of God' (Isaiah 26, according to Septuagint). Let us think on these things, my

brothers, and strive with all our strength lest we be overcome by the enemy. For as he is ever on the alert to destroy us, so we must keep careful vigil that we be not destroyed by his deceits, which God forbid.

"Above all, let us keep the last day before our eyes, and stand in dread each moment before the punishments of eternal pain. This will encourage the soul to grow in self-knowledge, and keep under the body by vigils and fasts. Persevere in grief and mourning, until you are set alight by the fire of the holy Spirit and are found worthy of the gift of heavenly contemplation, when freed from the contagion of earth you may be filled to overflowing with the words of God. He who at all times meditates upon these things obtains purity of mind and a humble heart; he rejects vainglory and turns his back on the wisdom of the world.

"Let our spiritual souls, my brothers, reason daily against the crass matter of the flesh. Deal with it so thoroughly that it may cooperate in aspiring to better things. And when at night you seek your pillow, say to your bodily members, 'As long as we are together, obey me when I tell you what is best for you, and come along with me to serve the Lord with eagerness'. Say to your hands, 'The time will come when your expansive gestures will cease, when your angry pugilistic skills will no longer be, when your palms can no longer be thrust out to steal'. Say to your feet, 'The time will come when you will no longer have the strength to rush headlong into iniquity, when you will not be able to travel in the

paths of depravity'. Speak also to all your members at once, and say to them, 'Before we are parted from each other by death, undergoing the punishment which fell upon us by the sin of the first human being, let us do battle bravely, stand unflinchingly, struggle boldly, serve the Lord without fear or hesitation, until he comes again to put an end to our earthly labour and lead us to the kingdom of immortality. Eyes, pour forth tears; flesh, show your nobility by being obedient, and work with me in prayer to my God, lest by preferring rest and sleep you procure for us eternal torment. Be watchful always in everything you do, for it is as you act in sobriety that you will receive an abundant reward of good things.'

"But if you are neglectful, swarms of pitiable torments will come upon you, and then you will hear the moans of the soul complaining to the body, 'Woe is me that I am bound to you, undergoing the punishment of eternal condemnation because of you'.

"Now, if we reason within ourselves like this, we shall become temples of the Lord, and the holy Spirit will dwell within us, nor shall any craft of Satan be able to encompass us round about. By means of meditations of this sort, the fear of the Lord can teach us more than the doctrines of ten thousand pedagogues and scholars, and the holy Spirit himself will breathe into us whatever we are unable to grasp by human perception. For we know not how to pray as we ought, as the blessed Apostle says, but the Spirit himself prays for us with groans which cannot be uttered (Romans 8.26).

"There are many more things I might say to you, but lest I overburden you I will bring an end to my sermon here. Brothers, may the God of peace and grace give you strength and establish you in his fear. Amen"

He finished speaking and straightway rose, commended us to God and departed.

Chapter XLVII

As he was going back to the monastery of Tabennisi with Theodore and Cornelius and a number of the other brothers, he suddenly stood completely still for a little while in the course of the journey, as if he was having a secret conversation with somebody. He was being made spiritually aware that one of the rules he had made for the monastery was being neglected. For he had decreed that the brothers working in the bakehouse should not indulge in empty chatter when preparing the oblations [i.e. bread for the Eucharist.] but should limit the conversation to edifying topics. He summoned Theodore who was in charge of the monastery.

"Make a few judicious and unobtrusive enquiries about any rude conversations the brothers might be indulging in when preparing the oblations," he said, "and make sure you tell me whatever it is that you find."

He went away and made diligent enquires, reporting back to the holy Pachomius what he had discovered.

"Now wouldn't you think," said Pachomius, "that the rules I gave them to keep were eminently sensible? Don't they realise that neglect of even the least important of rules lays them open to great danger? Didn't the Israelites gladly keep silence for seven days before the city of Jericho, until at the appointed time they all gave a great shout and the city was taken (Joshua 6.10)? Did any of them deceitfully disobey what was really a commandment from God, even though conveyed to them only by a human voice? The monks from now on must observe our rules, if their previous sins of negligence are to be forgiven. After all, we ourselves strictly observe the rules which we prescribe for others." He rejoined the monastery, and after the prayers he visited the brothers who were making psiathoi. [See Chapter XLIII, above.] He sat down with them and began to do some weaving himself. Now, there was a young lad watching him who had been appointed as his assistant for the week.

"You are not doing it right, father," he said. "Abba Theodore told us a quite different method."

"Show me how I ought to do it, then," said Pachomius.

He submitted to the lad's teaching, and sat down again to his work with a perfectly cheerful mind, having banished the spirit of pride by what he had done. For if he had been wise according to the

flesh to only the smallest degree, he would not have paid any attention to the instructions of a small boy, but rebuked him for presuming to speak out of turn.

Chapter XLVIII

On one occasion when he shut himself away from everyone in solitude, the devil appeared and contended with him in a false guise.

"Greetings, Pachomius," he said. "I am Christ paying you a visit, my faithful friend."

But guided by the holy Spirit, he thought for a while, then spurned this vision of the enemy.

"The coming of Christ always being peace, and to see him is to be free from all fear and full of joy. Human reason is banished afar and gives way to a longing for heaven. But at this moment I am in a turmoil, gripped by a tumult of confusing thoughts." He rose up and signed himself with the cross, and stretching out his hands as if to seize him, he breathed upon him.

"Devil, depart from me," he cried. "Cursed are you and your visions and your insidious arts. You have no place among the servants of God."

He was turned to dust, filling the cell with a most foul smell, and Pachomius heard a loud voice shattering the silence:

"I would have rewarded you greatly if I had persuaded you into my power. But the power of Christ is supreme, and I am always beaten by you.

But make no mistake, I shall always continue to attack you. I am bound to carry out my task without ceasing."

So Pachomius was strengthened by the holy Spirit, and put his trust in the Lord, giving thanks for the great gifts and blessings showered upon him.

Chapter XLIX

While walking through the monastery one night with Theodore, he was suddenly aware of a great phantasm in the distance, of an immensely seductive appearance. It was dressed as a woman so much more beautiful than any human being could possibly be that it is impossible to portray what it looked like or describe the impression it made. As Theodore looked at it he became exceedingly agitated and the look on his face showed it. The venerable old man could see that Theodore was desperately anxious.

"Put your trust in the Lord, Theodore," he said, "and don't be afraid."

And he stood in prayer, beseeching the Lord that the presence of his divine majesty might put to flight this stupendous phantasm. As soon as he began to pray, this vision began to dissolve into what it had been before, that is, a multitude of demons. As Pachomius finished his prayers they came towards him and spoke.

"Why do you labour in vain when you cannot do anything to harm me? For the Lord has given me power to put to the test anyone I like."

"What are you after?" asked Pachomius. "Where do you come from, and who is it you are seeking to put to the test?"

"I am the power of the devil," it replied, "and a horde of demons are mine to command. I am the one to cast a holy light upon the earth, disguising the darkness of a death-dealing voluptuousness. I was the one who deceived Judas, and deprived him of the dignity of being an Apostle. Therefore, O Pachomius, I have sought from the Lord that I might wage war against you without ceasing, for I cannot bear the reproaches of the demons any longer that you have show yourself more powerful than all my stratagems and attacks. There is no one like you for making me powerless. For young men and old and even young boys subvert me by your teaching. They almost tread me underfoot. They are so much part of a monastic army gathered against me, surrounded by the indestructible wall of the fear of God, that my servants have no power to seduce by their multiple deceits anyone of your people at all. This is what is happening to us because the word of God was made man, who gave power to you to drive our power far off."

"What then?" said Pachomius. "Am I the only one you have come to tempt, or are there others?"

"You and everyone like you."

"Theodore too?"

"I have sought after Theodore also, and power has been given me to put you both to the test, but the trouble is that I can't get anywhere near you!"

"Oh, why not?"

"In fighting against you both it would seem that I am doing you a favour, but especially you, Pachomius, because you have attained to such heavenly heights that you have been held worthy to see the glory of the Lord with your bodily eyes. But you won't always be with your monks, will you, protecting them with your prayers, and stiffening their resolve by your exhortations. The time will come after your death when I shall rave wildly among them as much as I like, and do with them whatever I please. For it is all your doing that at present I am trodden underfoot by your great congregation of monks."

"You miserable idiot, don't you realise that it could well be that better people will come after me, serving Christ with a steadfast will, who will imbue with spiritual knowledge those who take refuge in the discipline of the Lord, and build them up by their godly examples."

"My certainty is that you are simply lying, speaking against the mind of God."

"No, it is you who are the father of lies, for there is no way that you are able to tell the future. Only God knows the future; it is for his power and majesty to have foreknowledge of all things."

"As far as foreknowledge goes, I admit I don't know much but by means of divination I know a great deal."

"What do you mean? Divination?"

"I deduce the future from what has gone before."

"How can you do that! Tell me!"

"Every project in the beginning tends as time goes on to prosper, until eventually its impetus weakens. And so I discern that this divine vocation of yours has been strengthened in its beginnings by counsel from heaven, by signs and prodigies, full to overflowing with all kinds of powers. But when it gets a bit older, it will grow less quickly, it will get weary as time stretches out, it will begin to fail through laziness and negligence, and in this situation I shall begin to make some headway. But for the present my task is to overcome whomsoever I can, and I shall not cease to put you great men to the test."

"If, as you say, you will not cease from putting great men to the test, and if you claim that your main task is the perdition of souls, and that your malice is greater than all the demons put together, tell me, why is it that at this time you cannot prevail against the servants of God?"

"I have already told you. Because of the marvellous incarnation of Christ on earth, we are having to carry on with greatly curtailed powers. Because of those who believe in his name we have become as insignificant as sparrows. Nevertheless, although we are weakened, we have not yet been so

completely put out of action that we are prevented from deceiving where we can. For we never rest from sniping at your people. We insinuate evil thoughts into the minds of those who set themselves up against us, and when we sense that they are giving some measure of assent to our titillations we slip in a few thoughts even more disgusting still, and stir up the fires of various kinds of voluptuous excitement, By our subtle undermining tactics we can penetrate their defences and bring them more fully under our power.

"On the other hand, if they reject what we suggest to them and pay no attention to us, and if they seriously and vigilantly build up their defences by means of their faith in Christ, we are scattered like a smoke, driven from their hearts and put to flight. We are not allowed to lay siege to all and sundry, because there are some that would not be able to resist our attacks. If we were allowed to deploy all our forces indiscriminately against everyone, we would be able to deceive many who are now protected by your endeavours. But what's the point? They are protected by your virtue and the power of the Crucified."

"O how wicked," cried the holy Pachomius with a great groan, "are the unsleeping attacks which you will never cease levelling against the human race, until the power of God shall come again in the person of his Son and consume and destroy you for ever!"

And he cursed the horde of demons in the name of Christ, whereupon they were scattered and brought to naught.

Next morning Pachomius called together all the brothers who had seniority either by reason of the sanctity of their lives or by the length of their service. He told them all that he had seen and heard from the evil spirits. And he sent warnings by letter to those elsewhere, to strengthen them in the discipline and fear of the Lord, telling them to be on the alert and give no ground at all to demonic phantasms, but to have no fear of the demons' multiform displays. They all heard and understood what had been miraculously revealed to him by the grace of God and continued to endure with all eagerness the burden of labouring after purity of heart.

Chapter L

Meanwhile one of the brothers, who zealously imitated the patience shown by the old man, was bitten in the foot by a scorpion while he was standing at prayer. The poison injected into him almost travelled as far as his heart, so that he was almost on his last breath, but although he was in extreme pain he did not move from the spot until he had finished his prayer, whereupon Pachomius immediately poured out prayers to Christ and restored him to his former health.

Chapter LI

Theodore also suffered terribly once from severe headaches, and he asked Pachomius to pray that he might gain some relief.

"Do you think, my son," said Pachomius, "that any griefs or pains or anything else like that can happen to anyone unless God allows it? Therefore, put up with your aches humbly and patiently, and God will give you relief when he wills. And if you seem to be tested in this way for an over long time, be grateful. Job was perfectly patient, and blessed the Lord after suffering many trials and excruciating torments. Do as he did, and you also will receive an even greater reward from Christ. Abstinence and persevering prayer are good things, but the rewards are even greater when infirmity is endured with patience and longsuffering. Now this teaching has come down to us from men of great heart, and I too judge it necessary that for the benefit of many one man should show tolerance beyond human praise."

Chapter LII

There was a monk call Zachaeus who suffered from jaundice as a result of his abstinence over a long period, for he had been content with bread and salt, and lived alone in a cell quite separate from the brothers. He was always weaving rush mats,

and for the sake of the Lord his hands suffered such injury through winding thin strands of rope together that they were covered in drops of blood. But in spite of these bodily ills he was never absent when the brothers met together, but roamed about watchfully during the offices to make sure that none of the brothers went to sleep. Every night before going to sleep it was his custom to meditate on something from the holy Scriptures, sign himself with the cross, give praise to the Lord, and only then snatch a little rest. He would get up again in the middle of the night and keep vigil till the time of the morning prayers.

A brother was one day looking at those hands covered in blood, damaged so severely by the vigorous way he worked, and spoke to him about them.

"Why do you torture yourself so much by the way you work father," he asked, "and let yourself get so wounded? Is it perhaps because you are afraid that God will be angry with you and accuse you of idleness if you don't work as hard as that? God knows you are suffering, and no work is worth the great trouble you are causing for yourself, especially when it is all quite unnecessary. For if we give bountifully, first to God, then to pilgrims and poor people, how much more should we not care for you, when we all serve with the greatest devotion such a great and good father."

"Impossible for me not to work!" he replied.

"Please, at least put some oil into your hands, lest the streams of blood coming from them stain your work."

He took that advice and did what he was urged to do, but it only made his wounded hands so much worse that he could hardly bear the pain of it. The blessed Pachomius passed by and saw what was happening and why.

"Did you really think, brother," he said, "that oil would be able to cure you? Was anybody compelling you to keep at your work so vigorously that you felt it necessary to use that as an excuse to put your trust in oil rather than putting your hope in God? Do you think it is impossible for God to heal you, or that he is ignorant of each person's illnesses? Do you imagine that he needs us to advise him? He is merciful by nature; how can he possibly despise us? He takes into consideration the welfare of the souls of us all, and allows us to suffer some temporary pains in order to pour out upon us the eternal rewards due to tolerance. Let us then be sure that we cast all our care upon him, and let him in his mercy bring an end to our griefs when he wills and as he wills."

"Forgive me, venerable father," said Zachaeus, "and pray for me to the Lord that in his goodness he may see fit to put my fault behind me." Many people related of this old man that for the space of a whole year his eyes were full of tears, and that he took food only once every two days. The holy Pachomius held him up as an example of good works

and a stronghold of virtues. He would send anyone weighed down with worry to him, for he said there was no one like him for being able to give a word of comfort. He fought bravely to the end of a holy old age, till he passed over to the heavenly kingdom to receive eternal consolation for all his pains.

Chapter LIII

Pachomius certainly never hid the talents entrusted to him (Matthew 25.18), but used them for the benefit of all, and sent Zachaeus and many others like him, who had become perfect in their lives, to the presence of Christ before him. One feast day he celebrated by giving thanks to God for all those many great blessings granted to him that this long drawn out account of ours has described. For on the most blessed feast of Easter, after many of his brothers had gone to the Lord before him, he at last fell ill himself and was nursed by Theodore, whom we have often mentioned. His whole body was weak and debilitated, but his face was shining and cheerful, proof to those who saw him of his godly mind and pure conscience. Two days before he died a holy death he called all the brothers to him.

"Beloved brothers," he said, "I am about to enter into the path the fathers have trodden before me, for I hear the Lord calling me hence. But you, remember all the teachings you have heard from me again and again. Be watchful in prayer and sober in

all you do. Have nothing to do with the sects of Meletius, Arius, Origen, or any others who set themselves up against the precepts of Christ. Keep to the company of those who fear the Lord and are able to assist you in pursuit of a holy life and provide your souls with spiritual comfort. I am now ready to be delivered, and the time of my departure is at hand (2 Timothy 4.6). Therefore, while I am still here, choose one among you who under God will be senior to all and will undertake the cure of your souls. As far as my own judgement is worth anything I would choose Petronius as being suitable for this task, but it is up to you to choose whom you will."

In this they accepted their father's advice as obedient sons. Petronius was a man of great faith, humble in bearing, prudent in his thinking, of good habits and discernment. The holy Pachomius poured out prayer to the Lord for him, for he was known to be suffering from illness in the monastery of Chinobosci. But Pachomius commended the whole brotherhood to his care, even though he was absent, and had a message sent to him that he should come immediately. He signed himself with the cross, and gazing with a joyful countenance on the Angel of Light sent to him, he gave up his holy spirit in the tenth day of the month Pachon, according to the Egyptians, which is the seventh day before the Ides of May according to the Romans. [May 9]

His disciples revered his dear and venerable body in a fitting manner according to the customs, and kept vigil over it the whole night

through with the singing of psalms and hymns. And the next day they buried him in the mountain where he had begun. The brothers who had been sent to fetch the holy Petronius brought him back still suffering from his illness. He only ruled over the brothers for a few days before coming to a peaceful end himself, leaving behind him Orsesius, a just man acceptable to God.

Chapter LIV

We have described only a few of their many merits, and set out only a small number of their great deeds, not that their honour will be any the less for that. Indeed they have no need of lavish commendation, for it is enough for them to enjoy the eternal praise and unending glory which they have been granted in the presence of Christ and all his holy Angels. They shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of God (Matthew 13.43), who has borne witness that he glorifies those who glorify him. We try to follow in their footsteps with all our strength. Aware of the brilliance of their lives we try to imitate them with the help of Christ, aided always by the prayers of the blessed fathers, Patriarchs and Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs and all the Saints, who ever give glory and praise to our almighty and merciful God, the blessed and co-eternal and consubstantial and indivisible Trinity, Father, Son and holy Spirit, to whom be given all praise and glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

