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# **The Hermits**

Charles Kingsley

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## INTRODUCTION

St. Paphnutius used to tell a story which may serve as a fit introduction to this book. It contains a miniature sketch, not only of the social state of Egypt, but of the whole Roman Empire, and of the causes which led to the famous monastic movement in the beginning of the fifth century after Christ.

Now Paphnutius was a wise and holy hermit, the Father, Abba, or Abbot of many monks; and after he had trained himself in the desert with all severity for many years, he besought God to show him which of His saints he was like.

And it was said to him, "Thou art like a certain flute-player in the city."

Then Paphnutius took his staff, and went into the city, and found that flute-player. But he confessed that he was a drunkard and a profligate, and had till lately got his living by robbery, and recollected not having ever done one good deed. Nevertheless, when Paphnutius questioned him more closely, he said that he recollected once having found a holy maiden beset by robbers, and having delivered her, and brought her safe to town. And when Paphnutius questioned him more closely still, he said he recollected having done another deed. When he was a robber, he met once in the desert a beautiful woman; and she prayed him to do her no harm, but to take her away with him as a slave, whither he would; for, said she, "I am fleeing from the apparitors and the Governor's curials for the last two years. My husband has been imprisoned for 300 pieces of gold, which he owes as arrears of taxes; and has been often hung up, and often scourged; and my three dear boys have been taken from me; and I am wandering from place to place, and have been often caught myself and continually scourged; and now I have been in the desert three days without food."

And when the robber heard that, he took pity on her, and took her to his cave, and gave her 300 pieces of gold, and went with her to the city, and set her husband and her boys free.

Then Paphnutius said, "I never did a deed like that: and yet I have not passed my life in ease and idleness. But now, my son, since God hath had such care of thee, have a care for thine own self."

And when the musician heard that, he threw away the flutes which he held in his hand, and went with Paphnutius into the desert, and passed his life in hymns and prayer, changing his earthly music into heavenly; and after three years he went to heaven, and was at rest among the choirs of angels, and the ranks of the just.

This story, as I said, is a miniature sketch of the state of the whole Roman Empire, and of the causes why men fled from it into the desert. Christianity had reformed the morals of individuals; it had not reformed the Empire itself. That had sunk into a state only to be compared with the worst despotisms of the East. The Emperors, whether or not they called themselves Christian, like Constantine, knew no law save the basest maxims of the heathen world. Several of them were barbarians who had risen from the lowest rank merely by military prowess; and who, half maddened by their sudden elevation, added to their native ignorance and brutality the pride, cunning, and cruelty of an Eastern Sultan. Rival Emperors, or Generals who aspired to be Emperors, devastated the world from Egypt to Britain by sanguinary civil wars. The government of the provinces had become altogether military. Torture was employed, not merely, as of old, against slaves, but against all ranks, without distinction. The people were exhausted by compulsory taxes, to be spent in wars which did not concern them, or in Court luxury in which they had no share. In the municipal towns, liberty and justice were dead. The curials, who answered somewhat to our aldermen, and who were responsible for the payment of the public moneys, tried their best to escape the unpopular office, and, when compelled to serve, wrung the money in self-defence out of the poorer inhabitants by every kind of tyranny. The land was tilled either by oppressed and miserable peasants, or by gangs of slaves, in comparison with whose lot that even of the American negro was light. The great were served in their own households by crowds of slaves, better fed,

doubtless, but even more miserable and degraded, than those who tilled the estates. Private profligacy among all ranks was such as cannot be described in these or in any modern pages. The regular clergy of the cities, though not of profligate lives, and for the most part, in accordance with public opinion, unmarried, were able to make no stand against the general corruption of the age, because—at least if we are to trust such writers as Jerome and Chrysostom—they were giving themselves up to ambition and avarice, vanity and luxury, intrigue and party spirit, and had become the flatterers of fine ladies, “silly women laden with sins, ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth.” Such a state of things not only drove poor creatures into the desert, like that fair woman whom the robber met, but it raised up bands of robbers over the whole of Europe, Africa, and the East,—men who, like Robin Hood and the outlaws of the Middle Age, getting no justice from man, broke loose from society, and while they plundered their oppressors, kept up some sort of rude justice and humanity among themselves. Many, too, fled, and became robbers, to escape the merciless conscription which carried off from every province the flower of the young men, to shed their blood on foreign battle-fields. In time, too, many of these conscripts became monks, and the great monasteries of Scetis and Nitria were hunted over again and again by officers and soldiers from the neighbouring city of Alexandria in search of young men who had entered the “spiritual warfare” to escape the earthly one. And as a background to all this seething heap of decay, misrule, and misery, hung the black cloud of the barbarians, the Teutonic tribes from whom we derive the best part of our blood, ever coming nearer and nearer, waxing stronger and stronger, learning discipline and civilization by serving in the Roman armies, alternately the allies and the enemies of the Emperors, rising, some of them, to the highest offices of State, and destined, so the wisest Romans saw all the more clearly as the years rolled on, to be soon the conquerors of the Cfsars, and the masters of the Western world.

No wonder if that, in such a state of things, there arose such violent contrasts to the general weakness, such eccentric protests against the general wickedness, as may be seen in the figure of Abbot Paphnutius, when compared either with the poor man tortured in prison for his arrears of taxes, or with the Governor and the offi-

cialists who tortured him. No wonder if, in such a state of things, the minds of men were stirred by a passion akin to despair, which ended in a new and grand form of suicide. It would have ended often, but for Christianity, in such an actual despair as that which had led in past ages more than one noble Roman to slay himself, when he lost all hope for the Republic. Christianity taught those who despaired of society, of the world—in one word, of the Roman Empire, and all that it had done for men—to hope at least for a kingdom of God after death. It taught those who, had they been heathens and brave enough, would have slain themselves to escape out of a world which was no place for honest men, that the body must be kept alive, if for no other reason, at least for the sake of the immortal soul, doomed, according to its works, to endless bliss or endless torment.

But that the world—such, at least, as they saw it then—was doomed, Scripture and their own reason taught them. They did not merely believe, but see, in the misery and confusion, the desolation and degradation around them, that all that was in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, was not of the Father, but of the world; that the world was passing away, and the lust thereof, and that only he who did the will of God could abide for ever. They did not merely believe, but saw, that the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men; and that the world in general—above all, its kings and rulers, the rich and luxurious—were treasuring up for themselves wrath, tribulation, and anguish, against a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who would render to every man according to his works.

That they were correct in their judgment of the world about them, contemporary history proves abundantly. That they were correct, likewise, in believing that some fearful judgment was about to fall on man, is proved by the fact that it did fall; that the first half of the fifth century saw, not only the sack of Rome, but the conquest and desolation of the greater part of the civilized world, amid bloodshed, misery, and misrule, which seemed to turn Europe into a chaos,—which would have turned it into a chaos, had there not been a few men left who still felt it possible and necessary to believe in God and to work righteousness.

Under these terrible forebodings, men began to flee from a doomed world, and try to be alone with God, if by any means they might save each man his own soul in that dread day.

Others, not Christians, had done the same before them. Among all the Eastern nations men had appeared, from time to time, to whom the things seen were but a passing phantom, the things unseen the only true and eternal realities; who, tormented alike by the awfulness of the infinite unknown, and by the petty cares and low passions of the finite mortal life which they knew but too well, had determined to renounce the latter, that they might give themselves up to solving the riddle of the former; and be at peace; and free, at least, from the tyranny of their own selves. Eight hundred years before St. Antony fled into the desert, that young Hindoo rajah, whom men call Buddha now, had fled into the forest, leaving wives and kingdom, to find rest for his soul. He denounced caste; he preached poverty, asceticism, self-annihilation. He founded a religion, like that of the old hermits, democratic and ascetic, with its convents, saint-worships, pilgrimages, miraculous relics, rosaries, and much more, which strangely anticipates the monastic religion; and his followers, to this day, are more numerous than those of any other creed.

Brahmins, too, had given themselves up to penance and mortification till they believed themselves able, like Kehama, to have gained by self-torture the right to command, not nature merely, but the gods themselves. Among the Jews the Essenes by the Dead Sea, and the Therapeutif in Egypt, had formed ascetic communities, the former more "practical," the latter more "contemplative;" but both alike agreed in the purpose of escaping from the world into a life of poverty and simplicity, piety and virtue; and among the countless philosophic sects of Asia, known to ecclesiastical writers as "heretics," more than one had professed, and doubtless often practised, the same abstraction from the world, the same contempt of the flesh. The very Neo-Platonists of Alexandria, while they derided the Christian asceticism, found themselves forced to affect, like the hapless Hypatia, a sentimental and pharisaic asceticism of their own. This phase of sight and feeling, so strange to us now, was common, nay, primfval, among the Easterns. The day was come when it should pass from the East into the West. And Egypt, "the

mother of wonders;" the parent of so much civilization and philosophy both Greek and Roman; the half-way resting-place through which not merely the merchandise, but the wisdom of the East had for centuries passed into the Roman Empire; a land more ill-governed, too, and more miserable, in spite of its fertility, because more defenceless and effeminate, than most other Roman possessions — was the country in which naturally, and as it were of hereditary right, such a movement would first appear.

Accordingly it was discovered, about the end of the fourth century, that the mountains and deserts of Egypt were full of Christian men who had fled out of the dying world, in the hope of attaining everlasting life. Wonderful things were told of their courage, their abstinence, their miracles: and of their virtues also; of their purity, their humility, their helpfulness, and charity to each other and to all. They called each other, it was said, brothers; and they lived up to that sacred name, forgotten, if ever known, by the rest of the Roman Empire. Like the Apostolic Christians in the first fervour of their conversion, they had all things in common; they lived at peace with each other, under a mild and charitable rule; and kept literally those commands of Christ which all the rest of the world explained away to nothing.

The news spread. It chimed in with all that was best, as well as with much that was questionable, in the public mind. That men could be brothers; that they could live without the tawdry luxury, the tasteless and often brutal amusements, the low sensuality, the base intrigue, the bloody warfare, which was the accepted lot of the many; that they could find time to look stedfastly at heaven and hell as awful realities, which must be faced some day, which had best be faced at once; this, just as much as curiosity about their alleged miracles, and the selfish longing to rival them in superhuman powers, led many of the most virtuous and the most learned men of the time to visit them, and ascertain the truth. Jerome, Ruffinus, Evagrius, Sulpicius Severus, went to see them, undergoing on the way the severest toils and dangers, and brought back reports of mingled truth and falsehood, specimens of which will be seen in these pages. Travelling in those days was a labour, if not of necessity, then surely of love. Palladius, for instance, found it impossible to visit the Upper Thebaid, and Syene, and that "infinite multitude of monks,

whose fashions of life no one would believe, for they surpass human life; who to this day raise the dead, and walk upon the waters, like Peter; and whatsoever the Saviour did by the holy Apostles, He does now by them. But because it would be very dangerous if we went beyond Lyco" (Lycopolis?), on account of the inroad of robbers, he "could not see those saints."

The holy men and women of whom he wrote, he says, he did not see without extreme toil; and seven times he and his companions were nearly lost. Once they walked through the desert five days and nights, and were almost worn out by hunger and thirst. Again, they fell on rough marshes, where the sedge pierced their feet, and caused intolerable pain, while they were almost killed with the cold. Another time, they stuck in the mud up to their waists, and cried with David, "I am come into deep mire, where no ground is." Another time, they waded for four days through the flood of the Nile by paths almost swept away. Another time they met robbers on the seashore, coming to Diolcos, and were chased by them for ten miles. Another time they were all but upset and drowned in crossing the Nile. Another time, in the marshes of Mareotis, "where paper grows," they were cast on a little desert island, and remained three days and nights in the open air, amid great cold and showers, for it was the season of Epiphany. The eighth peril, he says, is hardly worth mentioning—but once, when they went to Nitria, they came on a great hollow, in which many crocodiles had remained, when the waters retired from the fields. Three of them lay along the bank; and the monks went up to them, thinking them dead, whereon the crocodiles rushed at them. But when they called loudly on the Lord, "the monsters, as if turned away by an angel," shot themselves into the water; while they ran on to Nitria, meditating on the words of Job, "Seven times shall He deliver thee from trouble; and in the eighth there shall no evil touch thee."

The great St. Athanasius, fleeing from persecution, had taken refuge among these monks. He carried the report of their virtues to Trjves in Gaul, and wrote a life of St. Antony, the perusal of which was a main agent in the conversion of St. Augustine. Hilarion (a remarkable personage, whose history will be told hereafter) carried their report and their example likewise into Palestine; and from that time Judfa, desolate and seemingly accursed by the sin of the Jewish

people, became once more the Holy Land; the place of pilgrimage; whose ruins, whose very soil, were kept sacred by hermits, the guardians of the footsteps of Christ.

In Rome itself the news produced an effect which, to the thoughtful mind, is altogether tragical in its nobleness. The Roman aristocracy was deprived of all political power; it had been decimated, too, with horrible cruelty only one generation before, {12} by Valentinian and his satellites, on the charges of profligacy, treason, and magic. Mere rich men, they still lingered on, in idleness and luxury, without art, science, true civilization of any kind; followed by long trains of slaves; punishing a servant with three hundred stripes if he were too long in bringing hot water; weighing the fish, or birds, or dormice put on their tables, while secretaries stood by, with tablets to record all; hating learning as they hated poison; indulging at the baths in conduct which had best be left undescribed; and "complaining that they were not born among the Cimmerians, if amid their golden fans a fly should perch upon the silken fringes, or a slender ray of the sun should pierce through the awning;" while, if they "go any distance to see their estates in the country, or to hunt at a meeting collected for their amusement by others, they think that they have equalled the marches of Alexander or of Cfsar."

On the wives, widows, and daughters of men of this stamp—and not half their effeminacy and baseness, as the honest rough old soldier Ammianus Marcellinus describes it, has been told here—the news brought from Egypt worked with wondrous potency.

Women of the highest rank awoke suddenly to the discovery that life was given them for nobler purposes than that of frivolous enjoyment and tawdry vanity. Despising themselves; despising the husbands to whom they had been wedded in loveless marriages *de convenance*, whose infidelities they had too often to endure: they, too, fled from a world which had sated and sickened them. They freed their slaves; they gave away their wealth to found hospitals and to feed the poor; and in voluntary poverty and mean garments they followed such men as Jerome and Ruffinus across the seas, to visit the new found saints of the Egyptian desert, and to end their days, in some cases, in doleful monasteries in Palestine. The lives of such women as those of the Anician house; the lives of Marcella and

Furia, of Paula, of the Melanias, and the rest, it is not my task to write. They must be told by a woman, not by a man. We may blame those ladies, if we will, for neglecting their duties. We may sneer, if we will, at the weaknesses—the aristocratic pride, the spiritual vanity—which we fancy that we discover. We may lament—and in that we shall not be wrong—the influence which such men as Jerome obtained over them—the example and precursor of so much which has since then been ruinous to family and social life: but we must confess that the fault lay not with the themselves, but with their fathers, husbands, and brothers; we must confess that in these women the spirit of the old Roman matrons, which seemed to have been so long dead, flashed up for one splendid moment, ere it sunk into the darkness of the Middle Age; that in them woman asserted (however strangely and fantastically) her moral equality with man; and that at the very moment when monasticism was consigning her to contempt, almost to abhorrence, as “the noxious animal,” the “fragile vessel,” the cause of man’s fall at first, and of his sin and misery ever since, woman showed the monk (to his naively-confessed surprise), that she could dare, and suffer, and adore as well as he.

But the movement, having once seized the Roman Empire, grew and spread irresistibly. It was accepted, supported, preached, practised, by every great man of the time. Athanasius, Basil, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzen in the East, Jerome, Augustine, Ruffinus, Evagrius, Fulgentius, Sulpicius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian, Martin of Tours, Salvian, Celsarius of Arles, were all monks, or as much of monks as their duties would allow them to be. Ambrose of Milan, though no monk himself, was the fervent preacher of, the careful legislator for, monasticism male and female. Throughout the whole Roman Empire, in the course of a century, had spread hermits (or dwellers in the desert), anchorites (retired from the world), or monks (dwellers alone). The three names grew afterwards to designate three different orders of ascetics. The hermits remained through the Middle Ages those who dwelt in deserts; the anchorites, or “ankers” of the English Middle Age, seem generally to have inhabited cells built in, or near, the church walls; the name of “monks” was transferred from those who dwelt alone to those who dwelt in regular communities, under a fixed govern-

ment. But the three names at first were interchangeable; the three modes of life alternated, often in the same man. The life of all three was the same,—celibacy, poverty, good deeds towards their fellow-men; self-restraint, and sometimes self-torture of every kind, to atone (as far as might be) for the sins committed after baptism: and the mental food of all three was the same likewise; continued meditation upon the vanity of the world, the sinfulness of the flesh, the glories of heaven, and the horrors of hell: but with these the old hermits combined—to do them justice—a personal faith in God, and a personal love for Christ, which those who sneer at them would do well to copy.

Over all Europe, even to Ireland, {15} the same pattern of Christian excellence repeated itself with strange regularity, till it became the only received pattern; and to “enter religion,” or “be converted,” meant simply to become a monk.

Of the authentic biographies of certain of these men, a few specimens are given in this volume. If they shall seem to any reader uncouth, or even absurd, he must remember that they are the only existing and the generally contemporaneous histories of men who exercised for 1,300 years an enormous influence over the whole of Christendom; who exercise a vast influence over the greater part of it to this day. They are the biographies of men who were regarded, during their lives and after their deaths, as divine and inspired prophets; and who were worshipped with boundless trust and admiration by millions of human beings. Their fame and power were not created by the priesthood. The priesthood rather leant on them, than they on it. They occupied a post analogous to that of the old Jewish prophets; always independent of, sometimes opposed to, the regular clergy; and dependent altogether on public opinion and the suffrage of the multitude. When Christianity, after three centuries of repression and persecution, emerged triumphant as the creed of the whole civilized world, it had become what their lives describe. The model of religious life for the fifth century, it remained a model for succeeding centuries; on the lives of St. Antony and his compeers were founded the whole literature of saintly biographies; the whole popular conception of the universe, and of man’s relation to it; the whole science of demonology, with its peculiar literature, its peculiar system of criminal jurisprudence. And their influence did not

cease at the Reformation among Protestant divines. The influence of these Lives of the Hermit Fathers is as much traceable, even to style and language, in "The Pilgrim's Progress" as in the last Papal Allocution. The great hermits of Egypt were not merely the founders of that vast monastic system which influenced the whole politics, and wars, and social life, as well as the whole religion, of the Middle Age; they were a school of philosophers (as they rightly called themselves) who altered the whole current of human thought.

Those who wish for a general notion of the men, and of their time, will find all that they require (set forth from different points of view, though with the same honesty and learning) in Gibbon; in M. de Montalembert's "Moines d'Occident," in Dean Milman's "History of Christianity" and "Latin Christianity," and in Ozanam's "Etudes Germaniques." {17a} But the truest notion of the men is to be got, after all, from the original documents; and especially from that curious collection of them by the Jesuit Rosweyde, commonly known as the "Lives of the Hermit Fathers." {17b}

After an acquaintance of now five-and-twenty years with this wonderful treasury of early Christian mythology, to which all fairy tales are dull and meagre, I am almost inclined to sympathise with M. de Montalembert's questions,—"Who is so ignorant, or so unfortunate, as not to have devoured these tales of the heroic age of monachism? Who has not contemplated, if not with the eyes of faith, at least with the admiration inspired by an incontrollable greatness of soul, the struggles of these athletes of penitence? . . . Everything is to be found there—variety, pathos, the sublime and simple epic of a race of men, *naofs* as children, and strong as giants." In whatever else one may differ from M. de Montalembert—and it is always painful to differ from one whose pen has been always the faithful servant of virtue and piety, purity and chivalry, loyalty and liberty, and whose generous appreciation of England and the English is the more honourable to him, by reason of an utter divergence in opinion, which in less wide and noble spirits produces only antipathy—one must at least agree with him in his estimate of the importance of these "Lives of the Fathers," not only to the ecclesiologist, but to the psychologist and the historian. Their influence, subtle, often transformed and modified again and again, but still potent from its very subtleness, is being felt around us in many a puzzle—educational,

social, political; and promises to be felt still more during the coming generation; and to have studied thoroughly one of them—say the life of St. Antony by St. Athanasius—is to have had in our hands (whether we knew it or not) the key to many a lock, which just now refuses either to be tampered with or burst open.

I have determined, therefore, to give a few of these lives, translated as literally as possible. Thus the reader will then have no reason to fear a garbled or partial account of personages so difficult to conceive or understand. He will be able to see the men as wholes; to judge (according to his light) of their merits and their defects. The very style of their biographers (which is copied as literally as is compatible with the English tongue) will teach him, if he be wise, somewhat of the temper and habits of thought of the age in which they lived; and one of these original documents, with its honesty, its vivid touches of contemporary manners, its intense earnestness, will give, perhaps, a more true picture of the whole hermit movement than (with all respect, be it said) the most brilliant general panorama.

It is impossible to give in this series all the lives of the early hermits—even of those contained in Rosweyde. This volume will contain, therefore, only the most important and most famous lives of the Egyptian, Syrian, and Persian hermits, followed, perhaps, by a few later biographies from Western Europe, as proofs that the hermit-type, as it spread toward the Atlantic, remained still the same as in the Egyptian desert.

Against one modern mistake the reader must be warned; the theory, namely, that these biographies were written as religious romances; edifying, but not historical; to be admired, but not believed. There is not the slightest evidence that such was the case. The lives of these, and most other saints (certainly those in this volume), were written by men who believed the stories themselves, after such inquiry into the facts as they deemed necessary; who knew that others would believe them; and who intended that they should do so; and the stones were believed accordingly, and taken as matter of fact for the most practical purposes by the whole of Christendom. The forging of miracles, like the forging of charters, for the honour of a particular shrine, or the advantage of a particular monastery,

belongs to a much later and much worse age; and, whatsoever we may think of the taste of the authors of these lives, or of their faculty for judging of evidence, we must at least give them credit for being earnest men, incapable of what would have been in their eyes, and ought to be in ours, not merely falsehood, but impiety. Let the reader be sure of this – that these documents would not have exercised their enormous influence on the human mind, had there not been in them, under whatever accidents of credulity, and even absurdity, an element of sincerity, virtue, and nobility.



## SAINT ANTONY

The life of Antony, by Athanasius, is perhaps the most important of all these biographies; because first, Antony was generally held to be the first great example and preacher of the hermit life; because next, Athanasius, his biographer, having by his controversial writings established the orthodox faith as it is now held alike by Romanists, Greeks, and Protestants, did, by his publication of the life of Antony, establish the hermit life as the ideal (in his opinion) of Christian excellence; and lastly, because that biography exercised a most potent influence on the conversion of St. Augustine, the greatest thinker (always excepting St. Paul) whom the world had seen since Plato, whom the world was to see again till Lord Bacon; the theologian and philosopher (for he was the latter, as well as the former, in the strictest sense) to whom the world owes, not only the formulizing of the whole scheme of the universe for a thousand years after his death, but Calvinism (wrongly so called) in all its forms, whether held by the Augustinian party in the Church of Rome, or the "Reformed" Churches of Geneva, France, and Scotland.

Whether we have the exact text of the document as Athanasius wrote it to the "Foreign Brethren" — probably the religious folk of Trjves — in the Greek version published by Heschelius in 1611, and in certain earlier Greek texts; whether the Latin translation attributed to Evagrius, which has been well known for centuries past in the Latin Church, be actually his; whether it be exactly that of which St. Jerome speaks, and whether it be exactly that which St. Augustine saw, are questions which it is now impossible to decide. But of the genuineness of the life in its entirety we have no right to doubt, contrary to the verdicts of the most distinguished scholars, whether Protestant or Catholic; and there is fair reason to suppose that the document (allowing for errors and variations of transcribers) which I have tried to translate, is that of which the great St. Augustine speaks in the eighth book of his Confessions.

He tells us that he was reclaimed at last from a profligate life (the thought of honourable marriage seems never to have entered his mind), by meeting, while practising as a rhetorician at Trjves, an old African acquaintance, named Potitanus, an officer of rank. What followed no words can express so well as those of the great genius himself.

“When I told him that I was giving much attention to those writings (the Epistles of Paul), we began to talk, and he to tell, of Antony, the monk of Egypt, whose name was then very famous among thy servants: {23} but was unknown to us till that moment. When he discovered that, he spent some time over the subject, detailing his virtues, and wondering at our ignorance. We were astounded at hearing such well-attested marvels of him, so recent and almost contemporaneous, wrought in the right faith of the Catholic Church. We all wondered: we, that they were so great; and he, that we had not heard of them. Thence his discourse ran on to those flocks of hermit-cells, and the morals of thy sweetness, and the fruitful deserts of the wilderness, of which we knew nought. There was a monastery, too, at Milan, full of good brethren, outside the city walls, under the tutelage of Ambrosius, and we knew nothing of it. He went on still speaking, and we listened intently; and it befell that he told us how, I know not when, he and three of his mess companions at Trjves, while the emperor was engaged in an afternoon spectacle in the circus, went out for a walk in the gardens round the walls; and as they walked there in pairs, one with him alone, and the two others by themselves, they parted. And those two, straying about, burst into a cottage, where dwelt certain servants of thine, poor in spirit, of such as is the kingdom of heaven; and there found a book, in which was written the life of Antony. One of them began to read it, and to wonder, and to be warned; and, as he read, to think of taking up such a life, and leaving the warfare of this world to serve thee. Now, he was one of those whom they call Managers of Affairs. {24} Then, suddenly filled with holy love and sober shame, angered at himself, he cast his eyes on his friend, and said, ‘Tell me, prithee, with all these labours of ours, whither are we trying to get? What are we seeking? For what are we soldiering? Can we have a higher hope in the palace, than to become friends of the emperor? And when there, what is not frail and full of dangers?