

On the Confusion of Tongues

Philo of Alexandria



Chapter I

As to the preceding topics, what has been already said will be sufficient. We might next proceed to consider, and that in no slight or cursory manner, the philosophical account which Moses gives us of the confusion of languages; for he speaks in the following manner: “And all the earth had one pronounciation, and there was one language among all men. And it came to pass, as they were moving from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwelt there. And one man said to his neighbour, Come, let us make bricks, and let us burn them with fire; and they had bricks for stone, and asphalt for mortar. And they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose head shall reach to heaven; and let us make for ourselves a name, before we are scattered over the face of all the earth. And the Lord came down to see the city, and the tower, which the sons of men had builded. And the Lord said, Behold, all mankind is one race, and there is but one language among them all; and they have begun to do this thing, and now there will not fail unto them anything of all the things which they desire to do. Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that each may not understand the voice of his neighbour. And the Lord scattered them from thence over the face of all the earth, and they desisted from building the city, and the tower. On this account, the name of it was called Confusion, because there the Lord confused the languages of all the earth, and from thence the Lord scattered them over the face of all the Earth.”

Chapter II

Those who are discontented at the constitution under which their fathers have lived, being always eager to blame and to accuse the laws, being impious men, use these and similar instances as foundations for their impiety, saying, “Are ye even now speaking boastfully concerning your precepts, as if they contained the rules of truth itself? For, behold, the books which you call the sacred scriptures do also contain fables, at which you are accustomed to laugh, when you hear others relating to them.”

And what is the use of devoting our leisure to collecting the fables interspersed in so many places throughout the history of the giving of the law, as if we had especial leisure for the consideration of calumnies, and as if it were

not better to attend merely to what is under our hands and before us?

Certainly, this one fable resembles that which is composed about the Aloadae, who the greatest and most glorious of all poets, Homer, says, had in contemplation to heap the three loftiest mountains on one another, and to build them into one mass, hoping that by this means there would be a road for them, as they were desirous to mount up to heaven, and that by these mountains it would be easy for them to be raised to the height of the sky. And the verses of Homer on this subject are these: —

But instead of these mountains the lawgiver represents a tower as having been built by these men, who, out of ignorance and wicked ambition, were desirous to reach the heaven. Every alienation of mind, then, is grievous; for even if every portion of the whole earth could be built over, a slight foundation is being first laid, and then if a superstructure could be raised in the fashion of a single pillar, it would still be an enormous distance removed from the heavenly sphere, and above all would it be so according to the tenets of those curious philosophers who have affirmed that the earth is the centre of the universe.

Chapter III

And there is also another story akin to this, related by the deviser of fables, concerning the sameness of language existing among animals: for they say that formerly, all the animals in the world, whether land animals, or aquatic ones, or winged ones, had but one language, and that, just as among men Greeks speak the same language as Greeks, and the present race of barbarians speaks the same language as barbarians, exactly in the same manner every animal was able to converse with every other animal with which it might meet, and with which it did anything, or from which it suffered anything, so that they sympathised with one another at their mutual misfortunes, and rejoiced whenever any of them met with any good fortune;

for they could impart their pleasures and their annoyances to one another by their sameness of language, so that they felt pleasure together and pain together; and this similarity of manners and union of feelings lasted, until being sated with the great abundance of good things which they enjoyed, as often happens, they were at last drawn on to a desire of what was unattainable,

and even sent an embassy to treat for immortality, requesting to be released from old age, and to be always endowed with the vigour of youth, saying, that already one animal of their body, and that a reptile, the serpent, had received this gift; for he, having put off old age, was allowed again to grow young; and that it was absurd for the more important animals to be left behind by an inferior one, or for their whole body to be distanced by one.

However, they suffered the punishment suitable to their audacity, for they immediately were separated in their language, so that, from that time forth, they have not been able to understand one another, by reason of the difference in the dialects into which the one common language of them all had been divided.

Chapter IV

But he who brings his account nearer the truth, has distinguished between the rational and irrational animals, so that he testifies that identity of language belong to men alone: and this also, as they say, is a fabulous story. And indeed they affirm, that the separation of language into an infinite variety of dialects, which Moses calls the confusion of tongues, was effected as a remedy for sins, in order that men might not be able to cooperate in common for deeds of wickedness through understanding one another; and that they might not, when they were in a manner deprived of all means of communication with one another, be able with united energies to apply themselves to the same actions.

But this precaution does not appear to have turned out of any use; for since that time, though men have been separated into different nations, and have no longer used one language, nevertheless, land and sea have been repeatedly filled with unspeakable evils. For it was not the languages which were the causes of men's uniting for evil objects, but the emulation and rivalry of their souls in wrong-doing.

For even those who have had their tongues cut out can intimate what they wish by nods and looks, and other positions and motions of the body, not less than by a distinct utterance of words. And besides this consideration, there is the fact that, very often, one nation by itself, having not merely one language, but one code of laws, and one system of manners, has arrived at such a pitch of

iniquity that, as to a superfluity of wickedness, it may counterbalance the sins of all the men in the world put together.

And again, through ignorance of foreign languages, many persons, having no foreknowledge of the future, have been anticipated and overwhelmed by those who were plotting against them; as, on the other hand, by knowledge of foreign languages, men have been able to repel fears and dangers with which they have been threatened; so that a community of language is an advantageous thing rather than an injurious one: since, even at the present day, nothing contributes so greatly to the safety and protection of the people of each country, and particularly of the natives, as their being of one language.

For if a man has learnt many dialects, he immediately is looked upon with consideration and respect by those who are also acquainted with them, as being already a friendly person, and contributing no small introduction and means of friendship by reason of his familiarity with words which they too understand; which familiarity very commonly imparts a feeling of security, that one is not likely to suffer any great evil at the hands of such a man. Why, then, did God remove sameness of language from among men as a cause of evils, when it seems it should rather have been established as a most useful thing?

Chapter V

Those, then, who put these things together, and cavil at them, and raise malicious objections, will be easily refuted separately by those who can produce ready solutions of all such questions as arise from the plain words of the law, arguing in a spirit far from contentious, and not encountering them by sophisms drawn from any other source, but following the connection of natural consequences, which does not permit them to stumble, but which easily puts aside any impediments that arise, so that the course of their arguments proceeds without any interruption or mishap.

We say then that by the expression, that “all the earth had but one pronunciation and one language,” is intimated a symphony of great and unspeakable evils, which cities have inflicted upon cities, nations upon nations, and countries upon countries, and through which men not only wrong one another, but also behave with impiety towards God, and yet these

things are the iniquities if many; but let us consider the ineffable multitude of evils which proceed from each individual man, and especially when he is under the influence of that ill-timed, and inharmonious, and unmusical agreement.

Chapter VI

Now who is there who does not know the great influence of fortune, when men, in addition to the diseases or mutilations of the body, are attacked also by poverty and want of reputation? And again, when these things are further united to diseases of the soul, in consequence of moody melancholy, driving men beside themselves, or of extreme old age, or of any other severe calamity which presses upon them?

For even one of these evils here mentioned by itself, when it opposes a man with violence, is sufficient to overthrow and to crush even one who is very proud and haughty; but when all these evils, to wit, the evils of the body, and the evils of the soul, and external misfortunes, all come together as one if in one regular battalion, moving by previous arrangement at the same time, so as to attack him in the body, what resolution is there which they will not overpower? For when the guards are slain, it follows of necessity that he who relies on his guards must fall.

Now the guards of his body are wealth, glory, and honours, which set it up and raise it on high, and make it proud, just as the contrary things, dishonour, want of reputation, and poverty, throw it down like so many enemies.

Again, the body-guards of the soul are hearing, and seeing, and smelling, and taste, and the whole band of the outward senses, and also health, and strength, and vigour, and energy. For the mind, when walking among the living and in the company of these things, as between wellfortified boundaries firmly standing and solidly established, triumphs and rejoices, meeting with no hindrance on any side to prevent it from exerting its own impulses, but having its road in every direction easy, and level, and open, and easy to be travelled.

But the things which are set in opposition and hostility to these guards are mutilation of the organs of the outward senses, and disease, as I have said before, by which the mind is often precipitated into disaster; and these things are all the results of fortune, very grievous and intrinsically miserable, but still,

if compared with those which are brought on ourselves by our own deliberate will, they are far lighter.

Chapter VII

Let us now again in its turn consider what is the united body of evils voluntarily incurred. Our souls being capable of being divided into three divisions, one division is said to have fallen to the lot of the mind and of reason, the second to passion, and the third to appetite; and each separate one of these has its own peculiar evils, and also they have all common and mutual diseases. Since the mind reaps the harvest which folly, and cowardice, and intemperance, and injustice sow; and passion brings forth frantic and insane strife and conflict, and all the other numerous evils with which it is pregnant; and appetite disseminates in every direction the impetuous and fickle loves of youth which descend upon every object, animate or inanimate, which it chances to meet with.

For then, as if in any vessel, the sailors, and the passengers, and the pilots, had all, under the influence of insanity, agreed to destroy it, those who have joined in the plot against it are none the less involved in the same destruction. For the heaviest of all evils, and almost the only one that is incurable, is the unanimous energy of all the parts of the soul agreeing to commit sin, not one of the parts being able to act with soundness (just as is the case in an evil affecting the whole people), so as to heal those that are sick; but even the physicians being diseased as well as their patients, whom the pestilential disease has overwhelmed and weighs down under a confessed calamity.

Of this great evil, that great deluge described by the lawgiver is an image; for the torrents from heaven continually pouring down cataracts of wickedness itself with impetuous violence, and springs from the ground (by which I mean the body) continually bursting up and pouring forth streams of every passion in great numbers and vast size, which, uniting an being mingled in the same stream with the other waters, are thrown into confusion, and overthrow the whole region of the soul which has received them with incessant eddies and whirlpools.

“For,” says Moses, “the Lord God, seeing that the wickedness of men were multiplied upon the earth, and that every one did think continually in his

heart nothing but evil all his days, determined to punish man” (and here by man I understand the mind, together with all the reptiles and the winged creatures, and all the rest of the multitude of wild animals which surround him), by reason of his incurable wickedness; and then punishment which God decided upon was the deluge.

For there was unbounded freedom in sinning, and unlimited licence in doing wrong, no one hindering it, but all restraints being shamelessly broken down in such a way that there was no fear left behind to restrain those who were thoroughly ready to snatch at abundant supplies for enjoyment of every kind. And may we not say that this was natural? For it was not only one portion of the soul which was corrupted in such a way that it could still be preserved by the sound condition of the other parts; but there was no part whatever of it which was left free from disease or from corruption. For the incorruptible Judge, says Moses, seeing that every thought of man’s heart (not one single idea by itself) was evil continually, inflicted upon him a deserved punishment.

Chapter VIII

These are they who “made a treaty with one another in the valley of Salt.” For the region of the vices and of the passions is a hollow valley, rough, and full of ravines; truly salt, and producing bitter pains; and their treaty, as one that was not worthy of being confirmed by any oath or by any libation, the wise Abraham, who knew the character of it, annulled. For it is said in the scripture that, “All these men made a treaty at the valley of Salt, that is the sea of Salt.”

Do you not perceive that they who are barren of wisdom and blinded as to the intellect which it would be natural to expect should be sharp-sighted, having the name of Sodomites from their real character,” did, with all their people united together, from young to old, surround the house in a Circle” (that is to say, the house of the soul), in order to pollute and contaminate those strangers from a foreign land, who had been received in hospitality, namely, sacred and holy reasons, the guards and defenders of the soul; no one whatever attempting either to resist those wrong doers, or to avoid doing wrong himself?

For Moses does not speak of some as having consented and of others having stood aloof; but, as he says, "The whole people surrounded the house all together, both old and young," having entered into a conspiracy against all those holy actions and words which it is customary to call angels.

Chapter IX

But Moses, the prophet of God, will meet them and check them, though they come on with exceeding boldness; even though, placing in the front him who is the boldest and the most forward and able speaker among them as their king, namely speech, they rush on with one impulse, hoping to increase their strength as they go on, and overflowing like a river; "For behold," says Moses, "the king of Egypt is coming to the water; but do thou go to meet him, and stand on the bank of the River."

Therefore the wicked man goes forth to the stream of iniquities and passions, and all collected evils, which are here likened to water; but the wise man first obtains from God, who always stands firm, an honour akin to his undeviating, and in all respects and under all circumstances, unchangeable power; for we read in the scripture,

"But do thou stand here with me, that having laid aside doubt and vacillation, the dispositions of an infirm soul, he may put on that most steadfast and trustworthy disposition, faith. In the next place, even while standing still, he (which seems a most extraordinary thing) goes forward to meet him; for it is said to him, "Thou shalt stand meeting him," and yet to go to meet is a part of motion, while to stand still is regarded as characteristic of tranquillity.

But the prophet does not here say things which are inconsistent, but rather such as are exceedingly in accordance with nature; for the man whose mind is naturally disposed to be tranquil, and is established undeviatingly, must necessarily be at variance with all those who delight in disorder and confusion, and who by artificial storms seek to disturb him who is capable of enjoying tranquillity.

Chapter X

It is very appropriately said that the meeting took place on the bank of the river; but the banks are also called the lips, and the lips are the boundaries of the mouth, and are a sort of fence to the tongue, through which the stream of discourse is borne, when it begins to be uttered;

but those who hate virtue and who love learning, use speech as their ally for the exposition of doctrines which are disapproved; and again, on the other hand, virtuous men employ it for the refutation of such doctrines, and for establishing the irresistible strength of the better and true wisdom.

When then, after having had recourse to every expedient of contentious doctrines, men are destroyed, being overwhelmed by the opposing violence of contrary arguments, then the wise man will very justly and suitably establish a most sacred chorus, and melodiously sing a triumphal song;

“For,” says Moses, “Israel saw the Egyptians,” not dead in any other place, but “on the bank (cheilos) of the River;” meaning here by death, not the separation of the soul from the body, but the impetuous onset of unholy doctrines and assertions, which men utter by the mouth, and tongue, and the other organs of speech.

But the death of speech is silence, not that silence which well-bred people cultivate, making it a symbol of modesty — for this silence is itself a faculty and a sister of that one which is developed in speech, arranging what is to be said with reference to time — but that silence which the sick and the weary against their will endure, on account of the strength of their antagonists, because they cannot find any handle to answer them;

for whatever they touch slips away from them, and whatever thing they seek to take their stand on does not remain, so that they of necessity fall before they stand, like that hydrostatic machine called the helix; for in the middle of that engine there are some steps, which the husbandman when he desires to water his fields mounts up upon, but is rolled round of necessity; and in order to avoid falling he is continually catching at the nearest firm thing that he can lay his hands on, which he takes hold of and so supports his whole body; for instead of his hands he uses his feet, and instead of his feet he uses his hands; for he stands on his hands, by means of which, actions are usually done, and he acts with his feet on which it is natural to stand.

Chapter XI

But many, who are not able vigorously to refute the plausible inventions of the sophists, because they have not very much practised discussion by reason of their continued application to action, having taken refuge in the alliance of the only wise Being, and have besought him to become their defender. As one of the friends of Moses, when praying, says in his hymns, "Let the treacherous lips become Mute;" and how can they become mute if they are not curbed by the only being who has speech itself as his subject?

We must therefore flee, without ever turning back, from all associations entered into for the purposes of sin; but the alliance made with the companions of wisdom and knowledge must be confirmed.

In reference to which I admire those who say, "We are all one man's sons, we are men of Peace," because of their well-adapted agreement; since how, I should say, could you, O excellent men, avoid being grieved at war, and delighted in peace, being the sons of one and the same father, and he not mortal but immortal, the man of God, who being the reason of the everlasting God, is of necessity himself also immortal?

For they who make out many beginnings of the origin of the soul, being devoted to the evil which is called polytheism, and turning each individual of them, to the honour of different beings, having caused great confusion and dissension both at home and abroad, from the beginning of their birth to the end of their life, filling life with irreconcilable quarrels;

but they who rejoice in one kind alone, and who honour one as their father, namely right reason, admiring the wellarranged and all-musical harmony of the virtues, live a tranquil and peaceful life, not an inactive and ignoble one, as some persons think, but one of great manliness, and sharpened, and vigorous against those who endeavour to break the confederacy which they have formed, and who are always studying to bring about a violation of the oaths which have been taken; for it has come to pass that the men of peace have become men of war, sitting down to attack and to oppose them who seek to overturn the firmness of the soul.

Chapter XII

And there is testimony in support of this assertion of mine; first of all, in the disposition of every lover of virtue which acknowledges these inclinations; and secondly, in that comrade of the band of the prophets, who being inspired with a sacred frenzy, spoke thus, "O my mother, how hast thou brought me forth, a man of war, and a man of disquietude to all the earth! I have not benefited them, and they have not benefited me; nor is my strength free from their Curses."

But is not every wise man of necessity an irreconcilable enemy to all wicked men, not indeed using the apparatus of triremes or warlike engines, or arms, or soldiers, for his defence, but reasons?

For when he sees war stirred up in the midst of tranquil peace, so as to be continued and incessant among all men, both public and private, not existing only among nations and countries, and cities and villages, but also in every house, and between each particular individual; who is there who does not reproach and admonish and seek to correct the foolish men whom he sees, and not by day only, but also by night, his soul being unable to remain tranquil by reason of the hatred of wickedness implanted in his nature?

For they do in peace every thing that is done in war; they plunder, they ravage, they drag into slavery, they carry off booty, they lay waste, they behave insolently, they assault, they destroy, they pollute, they murder treacherously, they murder openly if they are the more powerful;

for every one of them, proposing to himself riches or glory as his object, aims all the actions of his life as so many arrows at it, and neglects equality, and pursues inequality, and repudiates associations, and labours to acquire to himself all the possessions together properly belonging to every one; he is a misanthrope and a hater of all his fellows, making a hypocritical pretence of benevolence, being a companion of a bastard kind of flattery, an enemy of genuine friendship, a foe to truth, a champion of falsehood, slow to do good, swift to do injury, very ready to calumniate, very slow to defend, clever at deceiving, most perjured, most faithless, a slave of anger, yielding to pleasure, a guardian of all that is evil, a destroyer of all that is good.

Chapter XIII

These and other similar gifts are the most desirable treasures of peace, that blessing so celebrated and so admired, which the mind of each individual among the foolish men sets up for itself as an image, and admires and worships; at whom, very naturally, every wise man is grieved, and is accustomed to say to his mother and nurse, wisdom, “O mother, what a person hast thou brought me forth!” not in strength of body but in energy and courage, a determined hater of wickedness, a man of disquietude and battle, by nature peaceful, and, on this very account, an enemy to those who pollute the desirable beauty of peace.

“I have done no good to them, nor have they done any good to me;” nor have they even derived any advantage from my good things, nor have I from their evil things; but according to the word of Moses, “I have received no desirable thing from any of Them,” inasmuch as I look upon as exceedingly pernicious every object of their desire, which they treasure up in their hearts as the greatest possible advantage;

“Nor has my strength failed by reason of the curses which they laid upon Me;”(psalm 79:7.) but embracing the divine doctrines with my most earnest power, I was not wearied so as to give up, but rather I vigorously reproached those who cursed me from their hearts.

For God made us to be a contradiction to our neighbours, as is said in my hymns, meaning all of us who aim at right reason: but are not all those people naturally found of contradiction who have a zeal for knowledge and virtue, being always at variance with the neighbours of their soul, reproving the pleasures which live in union with them, and reproving the appetites which have the same abode, and looking morosely at acts of cowardice and fear, and the whole body of passions and vices? Reproving then every outward sense, the eyes for what they saw, and the ears for what they heard, and the sense of smell for the smells that presented themselves to it, the taste for the flavours which were subjected to it, and moreover the touch for its various powers developed in the body, with reference to the peculiarities which come under its notice; and even uttered speech for the matters which it may have chosen to discuss;

for what the outward sense has perceived, or how it has done so, or why, or what speech has uttered, or how or why, or in what manner, and how and why

passion has disposed men, it is worth while to investigate in no superficial manner, and to examine each of the errors into which they fall;

but he who contradicts none of these things, but who assents to every one of them in succession, without being aware of it, is deceiving himself, and building up troublesome neighbours for his soul, which he had better have as subjects than as rulers; for as rulers they will do him manifold and great injury, since folly reigns among them; but as

Thus, indeed, while some are learning to be subjects, and others are obtaining authority, not by knowledge only but also by power, all the body-guards and champions of the soul, that is to say, its reasonings will keep them in order, and coming to that which is most important among them will say, "Thy children have taken the sum of the men that are warriors among us, and there is not one of them who has Disagreed;" but like musical instruments, skilfully tuned in all their tones, so we sound in harmony in all our explanations, neither uttering any word nor doing any action which shall be unmelodious or discordant, that we may by the contrast show, that the other company of unlettered men is, in all respects, voiceless and dead, and an object of deserved ridicule, namely, that nourishment of the corporeal parts, Midian, and that his offspring too, that mass of skins, whose name is Belphegor, is asleep;

"for we are of the race of picked men of Israel, that sees God, of whom not one has Disagreed;" that the instrument of the universe, the whole world, may be melodiously sounded in musical harmony.

On this account Moses says that the "reward of Peace" was given to the very warlike reason, which is called Phinehas; because, having received a zeal for virtue, and having taken up war against vice, he cut up the whole of generation; and in the second place, to all those who are willing, after a careful examination and investigation, using their eyes in preference to their ears as a trustworthy witness, to believe that the human race is full of infidelity, depending solely on opinion.

Therefore, the afore-mentioned agreement is admirable; and most admirable of all is that common one which exceeds all the harmonies of all the others, according to which the whole people is represented as saying with one accord, "All the things which God has spoken, we will obey and

Do.”(deuteronomy 5:27.)

For these men no longer obey reason as their ruler, but God, the governor of the universe, by whom they are assisted so as to display their energies in actions rather than in words. For when they hear of others doing such and such things, these men, which is a thing most contrary to what one would expect, say that, from some inspiration of God, they will act first and obey afterwards; in order that they may seem to have advanced to good actions, not in consequence of instruction and admonition, but by their own spontaneous and self-taught mind. And then, when they have accomplished these actions, they say that they will obey in order that they may form an opinion of what they have done, as to whether their actions are consistent with the divine injunctions and the sacred admonitions of scripture.

Chapter XIV

But those who conspired to commit injustice, he says, “having come from the east, found a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwelt There;” speaking most strictly in accordance with nature. For there is a twofold kind of dawning in the soul, the one of a better sort, the other of a worse. That is the better sort, when the light of the virtues shines forth like the beams of the sun; and that is the worse kind, when they are overshadowed, and the vices show forth.

Now, the following is an example of the former kind: “And God planted a paradise in Eden, toward the East,” not of terrestrial but of celestial plants, which the planter caused to spring up from the incorporeal light which exists around him, in such a way as to be for ever inextinguishable.

I have also heard of one of the companions of Moses having uttered such a speech as this: “Behold, a man whose name is the East!” A very novel appellation indeed, if you consider it as spoken of a man who is compounded of body and soul; but if you look upon it as applied to that incorporeal being who in no respect differs from the divine image, you will then agree that the name of the east has been given to him with great felicity.

For the Father of the universe has caused him to spring up as the eldest son, whom, in another passage, he calls the firstborn; and he who is thus born, imitating the ways of his father, has formed such and such species, looking to his archetypal patterns.

Chapter XV

But an example of the worse kind of dawning is afforded by the words used by the man who was willing “to curse the people who were blessed by God.” For he also is represented as dwelling in the east. And this dawning, having the same name as the former one, has nevertheless an opposite nature to it, and is continually at war with it.

For Balaam says, “Balak sent for me out of Mesopotamia, from the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me the people whom God doth not curse.” But the name of Balak, being interpreted means, “void of sense;” a very felicitous name. For how can it be otherwise than shocking to hope to deceive the living God, and to turn aside his most enduring and firmly established counsels by the sophistical devices of men?

On this account he is represented as living in Mesopotamia, for his mind is overwhelmed as in the middle of the depth of the river, and is not able to emerge and to swim away. And this condition is the dawning of folly and the setting of sound reason.

They, then, who are tuned in an inharmonious symphony are said to be moved from the east. Is this, then, the east according to wickedness? But the dawning in accordance with virtue is described as a complete separation, and the motion from the dawning according to vice is a united one, as when the hands are moved, not separately and disjunctively, but in a certain harmony and connection with the whole body.

For folly is to the wicked man the beginning of his energy in the works which are contrary to nature, that is, of his approach to the region of wickedness. But all those who have quitted the region of virtue, and have set forth to go over to folly, have found a most appropriate place in which they dwell, which is called in the Hebrew language Shinar. And Shinar in Greek, is called “shaking;”

for the whole life of the wicked is shaken, and agitated, and torn to pieces, being always kept in a state of commotion and confusion, and having no trace of any genuine good laid up in itself. For as everything which is not held together by close union, falls out of what is violently shaken, in the very same manner, it seems to me, that the soul is shaken of every man who associates

with others for the purpose of doing wrong; for he casts away every appearance of good, so that no shadow or image of it ever appears.

Chapter XVI

Accordingly, the body-loving race of the Egyptians is represented as fleeing, not from the water, but “under the water,” that is to say, beneath the impetuous speed of the passions. And when it has once placed itself under the power of the passions, it is shaken and agitated; it casts away the stable and peaceable qualities of virtue, and takes up in their stead the turbulent and confused character of wickedness; for it is said that “God shook the Egyptians in the middle of the sea, fleeing under the Water.”

These are they who neither knew Joseph — the diversified pride of life — but who, having their sins revealed, have not received any trace, or shade, or image of goodness and excellence.

For, says Moses, “Another king arose over the Egyptians who knew not Joseph,” the latest and most modern good perceptible by the outward senses, who utterly destroyed not only the perfections but even all improvements, and all the energy which can be exerted by the sight, and all the teaching which can be implanted by means of the hearing, saying, “Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy Israel for Me;”(numbers 23:7.) an expression which is equivalent to, Destroy both these things, the sight and the hearing of the soul, that it may neither see nor hear any true and genuine good thing; for Israel is the emblem of seeing and Jacob of hearing.

Accordingly the mind of such persons rejects the nature of good, being in some degree shaken; and, on the other hand, the mind of good persons, setting up a claim to the unmingled and unalloyed ideas of good things, shakes off and discards all that is evil.

Consider, therefore, what the practiser of virtue says: “Take up the foreign gods that are among you from out of the midst of you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments, and rise up and let us go to Bethel;” in order that, even if Laban should demand a power of examining, the images might not be found in his whole house, but only such things as have a real subsistence and essence, being fixed like pillars in the mind of the wise man, which the self-taught offspring Isaac has received as his inheritance; for he alone receives

his father's substance as his Inheritance."

Chapter XVII

And take notice that Moses does not say that they came unto a plain in which they remain, but that they "found" one, having searched around in every direction, and having considered what might be the most suitable region for folly; for in reality every foolish man does not take from another for himself, but he seeks for and finds evils, not being content only with those which wicked nature proceeds towards of its own accord, but also adding thereto such perfect skill in evil as arises from constant practice in contriving wrong.

And I wish indeed that after he had remained there a brief time he had changed his abode; but even now he thinks fit to remain, for it is said that having found the plain they dwelt there; having settled there as if in their own country and not as if in a foreign land; for it would have been less trouble for men who had fallen in with wicked actions to look upon them as strange and foreign to them, and not to consider that they had any kindred or connection with them. For if they had looked upon themselves as sojourners among them, they would have changed their abode at a subsequent time, but now having settled fixedly among them they were likely to dwell there for ever.

For this reason all the wise men mentioned in the books of Moses are represented as sojourners, for their souls are sent down from heaven upon earth as to a colony; and on account of their fondness for contemplation, and their love of learning, they are accustomed to migrate to the terrestrial nature.

Since therefore having taken up their abode among bodies, they behold all the mortal objects of the outward senses by their means, they then subsequently return back from thence to the place from which they set out at first, looking upon the heavenly country in which they have the rights of citizens as their native land, and as the earthly abode in which they dwell for a while as in a foreign land. For to those who are sent to be the inhabitants of a colony, the country which has received them is in place of their original mother country; but still the land which has sent them forth remains to them as the house to which they desire to return.

Therefore, very naturally, Abraham says to the guardians of the dead and to the arrangers of mortal affairs, after he has forsaken that life which is only dead and the tomb, "I am a stranger and a sojourner among You," but ye are natives of the country, honouring the dust and earth more than the soul, thinking the name Ephron worthy of precedence, for Ephron,

being interpreted, means "a mound" and naturally, Jacob, the practiser of virtue, bewails his being a sojourner in the body, saying, "The days of the years of my life which I spend here as a sojourner have been few and evil; they have not come up to the days of my fathers which they spent as Sojourners."

But to him who was self-taught the following injunction of scripture was given, "Do not go down," says the scripture, "to Egypt," that is to say to passion; "but dwell in this land, land which I will tell thee Of," namely, in the incorporeal wisdom which cannot be pointed out to the eye; and be a sojourner in this land, the substance which can be pointed out and appreciated by the external sense. And this is said with a view to show, that the wise man is a sojourner in a foreign land, that is to say in the body perceptible by the outward senses, who dwells among the virtues appreciable by the intellect as in his native land, which virtues God utters as in no way differing from the divine word.

But Moses says, "I am a sojourner in a foreign land;" speaking with peculiar fitness, looking upon his abode in the body not only as foreign land, as sojourners do, but also as a land from which one ought to feel alienated, and never look upon it as one's home.

Chapter XVIII

But the wicked man, desiring to exhibit the fact that identity of language, and the sameness of dialect does not consist more in names and common words than in his participation in iniquitous actions, begins to build a city and a tower as a citadel for sovereign wickedness; and he invites all his fellow revellers to partake in his enterprise, preparing beforehand abundance of suitable materials.

For, "Come," says he, "let us make bricks, and let us bake them in the fire," an expression equivalent to, Now we have all the parts of the soul mingled together and in a state of confusion, so that there is no species whatever the

form of which is evident to be seen.

Therefore it will be consistent with these beginnings that, as we have assumed a certain essence destitute of all particular species; and of all distinctive qualities, and have also taken up with passion and vice, we should also divide it into suitable qualities, and keep on reducing the proximate to the ultimate species; and with a view to the more distinct comprehension of them, and also to this employment and enjoyment of them combined with experience, which appears to produce many pleasures and delights.

Come, therefore, all ye reasonings of counsellors, in some way or the other to the assembly of the soul; come, all ye who meditate the destruction of justice and of all virtue, and let us consider carefully how we may attain to the end which we desire.

Now of success in this matter these will be the most established foundations: to give to things without form shape and character, and to distinguish each thing separately with distinct outlines, lest, if they become shaken and lame (though fixed on firm foundations,) and if they have assumed a connection with the nature of a quadrangular shape, (for this is a nature always unshaken), they may then, being established steadily like a building of bricks, support even those things which are built upon them. XIX.

Of such a structure as this every mind adverse to God, which we call the king of Egypt (that is to say of the body), is found to be the maker. For Moses represents the mind as rejoicing in the buildings made of brick;

for after some being or other made the two substances of water and earth to be the one dry and the other solid, and mingling the two together, for they were easily dissoluble and corruptible, made a third substance to be on the confines of the two, which is called clay, he has never ceased from dissecting this into small portions, giving its own appropriate figure to each of the fragments, in order that they might be very well compacted together, and very suitable to the objects for which they were intended. For in this way what was being made was sure to be very easily perfected.

Imitating this work, those men who are wicked in their natures, when they mingle the irrational and extravagant impulses of the passions with the most grievous vices, are, in reality, dissecting that which has been combined into various species, and unhappy that they are fashioning them again and

reducing them into shape, by means

Chapter XX

And before now some persons, even more excessively extravagant in wickedness than these, have not only prepared their own souls for such actions, but have also put a force upon those of a superior class and of the genus which is endowed with acuteness of vision, and have “compelled them to make bricks and to build strong Cities” for the mind, which has appeared to occupy the place of king, wishing to point out this fact, that what is good is the slave of what is evil, and that subjection to the passions is more powerful than tranquillity of soul, and prudence, and all virtue is, but, as it were, a subject of folly and all wickedness, so as of necessity to minister in all the matters which the master power enjoins;

for behold, says Moses, the most pure, and brilliant, and far-sighted eye of the soul, to which alone is permitted to behold God, by name Israel, being formerly bound in the corporeal nets of Egypt, endures severe commands, so as to be compelled to make bricks and all sorts of things of clay with the most grievous and intolerable labours, at which it is very naturally pained, and at which it groans, having laid up this, as it were, to be its only treasure amid its evils, the power of bewailing its present distresses.

For it is said, very correctly, that “the children of Israel groaned by reason of their Tasks.”(exodus 2:23.) And what man in his senses is there who, if he saw the tasks of the generality of men, and the exceeding earnestness with which they labour at the pursuits to which they are accustomed to devote themselves, whether it be the acquisition of money, or glory, or the enjoyment of pleasure, would not be greatly concerned and cry out to God, the only Saviour, that he would lighten their labours, and pay a ransom and price for the salvation of the soul, so as to emancipate and deliver it?

What, then, is the surest freedom? The service of the only wise God, as the scriptures testify, in which it is said, “Send forth the people, that they may serve Me.”

But it is a peculiar property of those who serve the living God neither to regard the work of cup-bearers, or bakers, or cooks, or any other earthly employments, nor to trouble themselves about arranging or adorning their

bodies like bricks, but to mount up with their reason to the height of heaven, having elected Moses, the type of the race which loves God, to be the guide of their path;

for then “they will see the place which is Visible,” on which the unchangeable and unalterable God stands; and the footstool beneath his feet, which is, as it were, a work of sapphire stone, and, as it were, a resemblance to the firmament of heaven, namely, the world perceptible by the outward senses, which he describes allegorically by these figures.

For it is very suitable for those who have made an association for the purpose of learning to desire to see him; and, if they are unable to do that, at least to see his image, the most sacred word, and, next to that, the most perfect work of all the things perceptible by the outward senses, namely, the world? For to philosophise is nothing else but to desire to see things accurately.

Chapter XXI

But he says that the world perceptible to the outward senses is, as it were, the footstool of God on this account: first of all, that he may show that there is no efficient cause in the creatures; secondly, for the purpose of displaying that even the whole world has not a free and unrestrained spontaneous motion of its own, but God, the ruler of the universe, takes his stand upon it, regulating it and directing everything in a saving manner by the helm of his wisdom, using, in truth, neither hands nor feet, nor any other part whatever such as belongs to created objects; for God is not as man, but the reason why we at times represent him as such, for the sake of instruction, is because we are unable to advance out of ourselves, but derive our apprehension of the uncreate God from the circumstances with which we ourselves are surrounded.

And it is very beautifully said by Moses, in the form of a parable, when he speaks of the world as if it resembled a brick; for the world appears to stand and to be firmly fixed like a brick in a house, as far as the vision of the sight of the outward senses can inform us, but it has a very swift motion, and one which is able to outstrip all particular motions.

For the eyes of our body look upon the appearance of the sun by day and of the moon by night as standing still, and yet who is there who does not know

that the rapidity of movements of these two bodies is incomparable, since they go round the whole heaven in one day? Thus, indeed, the universal heaven itself also, while appearing to stand still, revolves in a circle; its movements being detected and comprehended by the invisible and more divine eye which is placed in our mind.

Chapter XXII

And they are represented as baking the bricks in the fire, for the purpose of intimating by this symbolical expression that they are strengthened and hardened as to their vices and their passions by warm and most energetic reason, so that they can never be overthrown by the body-guards of wisdom, by whom engines for their defeat are being continually put in operation.

On which account we have this further statement also made, “Their brick was to them for stone;” for the weak and lax character of that impetuosity which is not in company with reason, when it is closely pressed and condensed so as to assume a nature capable of solidity and resistance, owes this change to powerful reasons and most convincing demonstrations; the comprehension of such speculations being, in a manner, endowed with manliness and vigour, which comprehensions, while in a tender age, melt away by reason of the mixture of the soul, which is not as yet able to consolidate and preserve the character impressed upon it.

“And they had slime for mortar;” not, on the contrary, mortar for slime. For the wicked appear to strengthen and fortify what is weak against what is most powerful, and from their own resources to consolidate and preserve what melts and flows away from such things, in order that they may aim and shoot at virtue from a safe place. But the merciful God and father of the good will not permit their buildings to be established in indissoluble safety, their work of melting zeal not being able to withstand, but becoming like soft mud.

For, if their clay had become mortar, then perchance that earthy thing perceptible by the outward senses, which is for ever and ever in a continued state of flux, would have been able to arrive at a safe and unalterable power; but since, on the contrary, their mortar became mere slime, we must not despair, for there is in this, certain hope that the strong fortifications of vice may be overthrown by the might of God.

Therefore the just man, even in the great and incessant deluge of life, while he is not as yet able to see things really as they are by the energy of his soul alone without the assistance of the outward sense, will anoint “the ark,” by which I understand the body, “both within and without the Pitch,” strengthening his imaginations and energies by his own resources; but when the danger has ceased and the violence of the flood abated, then he will come forth, availing himself of his incorporeal mind for the comprehension of truth.

For the good disposition being from the very birth of the man planted in virtue, and being spoken as of such, its name being Moses, dwelling in the whole world as his native city and country, becoming, as it were, a cosmopolite, being bound up in the body, smeared over as with “bitumen and Pitch,” and appearing to be able to receive and to contain in security all the imaginations of all things which might be subjected to the outward senses, Weeps at being so bound up, being overwhelmed with a desire for an incorporeal nature. And he weeps over the miserable mind of men in general as being wandering and puffed up with pride, inasmuch as, being elated with false opinion, it thinks that it has in itself something firm and safe, and, as a general fact, that there something immutable in some creature or other, though the example of perpetual stability, which is at all times the same, is set up in God alone.

Chapter XXIII

And the expression, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, the top of which shall reach to heaven,” has such a meaning as this concealed beneath it; the lawgiver does not conceive that those only are cities which are built upon the earth, the materials of which are wood and stone, but he thinks that there are other cities also which men bear about with them, being built in their souls;

and these are, as is natural, the archetypes and models of the others, inasmuch as they have received a more divine building, and the others are but imitations of them, as consisting of perishable substances. But there are two species of cities, the one better, the other worse. That is the better which enjoys a democratic government, a constitution which honours equality, the

rulers of which are law and justice; and such a constitution as this is a hymn to God. But that is the worse kind which adulterates this constitution, just as base and clipped money is adulterated in the coinage, being, in fact, ochlocracy, which admires inequality, in which injustice and lawlessness bear sway.

Now good men are enrolled as citizens in the constitution of the first-mentioned kind of city; but the multitude of the wicked clings to the other and worst sort, loving disorder more than orderliness, and confusion rather than well-established steadiness.

And the wicked man seeks for coadjutors in his practice of wickedness, not looking upon himself as sufficient by himself. And he exhorts the sight, and he exhorts the hearing, and he exhorts every outward sense in succession, to range itself on his side without delay, and every one of them to bring to him all things necessary for his service. And he raises up and sharpens all the rest of the company of the passions, which are by their own nature unmanageable, in order that by the addition of practice and care they may become irresistible.

The mind, therefore, having called in these allies, says, "Let us build ourselves a city;" an expression equivalent to, Let us fortify our own things; let us fence them around to the best of our power, so that we may not be easily taken by those who attack us; let us divide and distribute, as into tribes and boroughs, each of the powers existing in the soul, allotting some to the rational part, and some to the irrational part;

let us choose competent rulers, wealth, glory, honour, pleasure, by means of which we may be able to become masters of everything; banishing to a distance justice, the invariable cause of poverty and ingloriousness; and let us enact laws, which shall confirm the chief power and advantage to those who are always able to get the better of others.

And let a tower be built in this city as a citadel, to be a strong palace for the tyrant vice, whose feet shall walk upon the earth, and its head shall, through pride, be raised to such a height as to reach even to heaven;

for, in good truth, it rests not only upon human sins, but it also hastens forward as far as heaven, pushing up its words of impiety and ungodliness, since it either speaks of God so as to assert that he has no existence, or that, though he exists, he has no providence, or to affirm that the world had no

beginning of creation, or that, admitting that it has been created, it is borne on by unsteady causes, just as chance may direct, at one time wrongly, at another time in an irreproachable manner, just as often happens in the case of chariots or ships.

For sometimes the voyage of a ship, or the course of a chariot, goes on properly even without charioteers or pilots; but success is not only now and then owing to providences, but very often to human prudence and invariably to divine, since error is admitted to be altogether incompatible with divine power. Now what object can the foolish man have who, speaking figuratively, build up the reasonings of wickedness like a tower, except the desire of leaving behind them a name which shall be far from a good name?

Chapter XXIV

For they say, "Let us make for ourselves a name." O, the excessive and profligate impudence of such a saying! What say ye? When ye ought to seek to bury your iniquities under night and profound darkness, and to assume as a veil for them, shame, if not genuine, at all events pretending shame, whether for the sake of gaining favour in the eyes of the moderate and virtuous, or for that of avoiding punishment for admitted wickedness; do ye, nevertheless, proceed to such a pitch of audacity, as all but to come forth and display yourselves in the light and in the most brilliant beams of the sun, and to fear neither the threats of better men, nor the implacable justice of God, which impends over such ungodly and desperate men? But ye think fit even to send around in every direction reports, to carry intelligence of your domestic iniquities, in order that no one may be uninformed of or unacquainted with your deeds of daring wickedness, wretched and infamous men that ye are.

What name, therefore, do ye wish to assume? Is it the one which is most suitable to your actions? But is there not one name only which is suited to them? It may, perhaps, be one in genus; but there are ten thousand such names in species, which you will hear from others, even if ye keep silence yourselves. The names adapted to your conduct are, rashness united with shamelessness, insolence combined with violence, violence in union with homicide, corruption in combination with adultery, undefined appetite accompanied by unmeasured indulgence in pleasures, folly joined with

impudence, injustice united to crafty wickedness, theft combined with rapine, perjury united with lying, impiety combined with utter lawlessness. Such, and similar to these, are the names of such actions.

And it is well for them to boast over and pride themselves, upon seeking for reputation from actions which it would be more seemly to hide and to be ashamed of. And, indeed, some persons do pride themselves on these things, thinking that in consequence of them they do derive a certain irresistible degree of power among men from this idea being entertained respecting them; but they will not escape the divine vengeance for their enormous audacity, and very soon they will have occasion not only to anticipate at a distance, but even to see immediately impending their own death. For they say, "Before we are dispersed, let us have a care for our name and our glory."

Should I not then say to them, Ye know that ye will be dispersed? Why, then, do ye commit iniquity? But perhaps he is here placing before us the manner of foolish men who, even when the very greatest punishments are not obscurely impending over them, but are often visibly threatening them, nevertheless do not hesitate to commit iniquity. And the punishments, however they may seem to be concealed, are in reality most notorious, which are inflicted by God.

For all the most wicked of men adopt ideas that they can never escape the knowledge of the deity when doing wrong, and that they shall never be able to ward off altogether the day of retribution.

Since otherwise, how do they know that they will be dispersed? And yet they say, "Before we are dispersed." But their conscience, which is within, convicts them, and pricks them vehemently, when devoting themselves to ungodliness, so as to draw them against their will to a confession that all the circumstances affecting men are overlooked by a superior nature, and that justice is watching above, as an incorruptible chastiser, hating the unjust actions of the impious, and the reasonings and speeches which undertake their defence.

Chapter XXV

But all these men are the offspring of that wickedness which is always dying but which never dies, the name of which is Cain. Is not Cain

represented as having begotten a son whom he called Enoch, and as building a city to which he gave the same name, and as after a fashion building up created and mortal things to the destruction of those things which have received a more divine formation?

For the name Enoch, being interpreted, means “thy grace.” But every impious man supposes that what he thinks and understands is owing to the bounty of his intellect towards him; that what he sees is the gift of his eyes to him, what he hears of his ears, what he smells of his nostrils, and so that each of his outward senses bestows on him those perceptions which are in accordance with them. Again, that it is the organs of the voice which endow him with the capacity of speaking, and that there is actually no such thing as a God at all, or at all events that he is not the primary cause of things.

Because of these views he assigns to himself the first fruits of the fruits which he extracts from the earth by his husbandry, being contented afterwards to offer to God some of the fruit, and that too though he has a sound example at hand; for his brother offers a sacrifice of the offspring of the flock, offering the firstborn, and not those which are of secondary value; confessing that the eldest causes of all existing things are suited to the eldest and first cause.

But the impious man thinks exactly the contrary, namely, that the mind is endowed with absolute power to do whatever it desires, and that the outward senses have absolute power as to all that they feel, for that both the mind and the outward senses decide in an irreproachable and unerring manner, the one on bodies, and the other on everything.

Now what can be more open to blame, or more capable of conviction by truth, than such ideas as these? Has not the mind been repeatedly convicted of innumerable acts of folly? And have not all the outward senses been convicted of bearing false witness, and that too not by irrational judges who, it is natural to suppose, may be deceived, but before the tribunal of nature herself, which it is impossible to corrupt or to pervert?

And indeed as the criteria both of our mind and of our outward senses are liable to error respecting even ourselves, it follows of necessity that we must make the corresponding confession that God sheds upon the mind the power of intellect, and on the outward senses the faculty of apprehension, and that these benefits are conferred upon us not by our own members but by him to

whom also we owe our existence.

Chapter XXVI

The children who have received from their father the inheritance of self-love are eager to go on increasing up to heaven, until justice, which loves virtue and hates iniquity, coming destroys their cities which they have built up by the side of their miserable souls, and the tower the name which is displayed in the book which is entitled the Book of Judgment.

And the name is, as the Hebrews say, Phanuel, which translated into our language means, “turning away from God.” For any strong building which is erected by means of plausible arguments is not built for the sake of any other object except that of averting and alienating the mind from the honour due to God, than which object what can be more iniquitous?

But for the destruction of this strong fortification a ravager and an enemy of iniquity is prepared who is always full of hostility towards it; whom the Hebrews call Gideon: which name being interpreted means, “a retreat for robbers.” “For,” says Moses, “Gideon swore to the men of Phanuel, saying, On the day when I return victorious in peace, I will overthrow this Tower.”

A very beautiful and most becoming boast for the soul which hates wickedness and is sharpened against the impious, namely, that it is resolved to overthrow every reasoning which by its persuasions seeks to turn the mind away from holiness, and this indeed is the natural result. For when the mind turns round, then that which turns away from it, and rejects it is again dissolved,

and this is the opportunity for destroying it which (a most wonderful thing) he calls not war but peace. For, owing to the stability and firmness of the mind which piety is accustomed to produce, every reasoning which impiety has formed is overturned.

Many also have erected the outward senses after the fashion of a tower, raising them to such a height as to be able to reach the very borders of heaven. But the term heaven is here used symbolically to signify our mind, according to which the best and most divine natures revolve. But they who dare such deeds prefer the outward senses to the intellect, and desire by means of the

outward senses forcibly to destroy all the objects of intellect, compelling those things which are, at present masters to descend into the rank of servants, and raising those things which are by nature slaves to the rank of masters.

Chapter XXVII

And the statement, “The Lord went down to see that city and that tower” must be listened to altogether as if spoken in a figurative sense. For to think that the divinity can go towards, or go from, or go down, or go to meet, or, in short, that it has the same positions and motions as particular animals, and that it is susceptible of real motion at all, is, to use a common proverb, an impiety deserving of being banished beyond the sea and beyond the world.

But these things are spoken, as if of man, by the lawgiver, of God who is not invested with human form, for the sake of advantage to us who are to be instructed, as I have often said before with reference to other passages. Since who is there who does not know that it is indispensable for a person who goes down, to leave one place and to occupy another?

But all places are filled at once by God, who surrounds them all and is not surrounded by any of them, to whom alone it is possible to be everywhere and also nowhere. Nowhere, because he himself created place and space at the same time that he created bodies, and it is impious to say that the Creator is contained in anything that he has created. Again, he is everywhere, because, having extended his powers so as to make them pervade earth, and water, and air, and heaven, he has left no portion of the world desolate, but, having collected everything together, he has bound them with chains which cannot be burst, (the text has *aoratois*, “invisible,” but I have followed Mangey’s translation, who reads *arrheuktois*. The remainder of the sentence is exceedingly corrupt.) so that they are never emancipated, on which account he is especially to be praised with hymns.

For that which is higher than all powers is understood to exceed them, not merely in the fact of its existence. But the power of this being which made and arranged everything is with perfect truth called God, and it contains everything in its bosom, and pervades every portion of the universe.

But the divine being, both invisible and incomprehensible, is indeed everywhere, but still, in truth, he is nowhere visible or comprehensible. But

when he says, “I am he who 37The text has *aoratois*, “invisible,” but I have followed Mangey’s translation, who reads *arrheuktois*. The remainder of the sentence is exceedingly corrupt. stands before Thee” he appears indeed to be displayed and to be comprehended, though before any exhibition or conception he was superior to all created things.

Therefore, no one of the word which implies a motion from place to place is appropriate to that god who exists only in essence; such expressions, I mean, as going upwards or downwards, to the right or to the left, forwards or backwards. For he is not conceived of in any one of the above mentioned ideas, inasmuch as he never turns around or changes his place.

But, nevertheless, he is said to have come down and to have seen, he who by his foreknowledge comprehends everything, not only that has happened, but even before it happens; and this expression is used for the same of exhortation and instruction, in order that no man, indulging in uncertain conjectures about matters which he is not present to behold may, while standing afar off, be too prompt to believe idle fancies, but that every one may come close to the facts, and examining each one separately, may carefully and thoroughly consider them. For certain sight is more deserving to be looked upon as a trustworthy witness than fallacious hearing.

On which account a law has been enacted among these nations which have the most excellent constitution, that one must not give evidence on hearsay, because by its own nature the tribunal of the sense of hearing is liable to be corrupted. And Moses indeed says in the prohibitory part of his law, “Thou shalt not receive vain Hearing.” Meaning not only this, that one ought not to receive false or silly reports by hearsay, but that, as far as the clear comprehension of the truth is concerned, the hearing is a long way behind the sight, being full of vanity.

Chapter XXVIII

We say that this is the reason why it is said that God went down to see the city and the tower; and the addition, “Which the sons of men had built,” is not a mere superfluity. For perhaps some profanely disposed person may mock and say, “The lawgiver is here teaching us a very novel kind of lesson, when he says that no one else but the sons of men build cities and towers; for who, even

of the most crazy people is ignorant of what is so evident and notorious as that?”

But we must not suppose that such a plain and unquestionable fact as that, is what is intended to be conveyed by the mention of it in the holy scriptures, but rather there is some hidden meaning concealed under these apparently plain words which we must trace out.

What then is this hidden meaning? Those who, as it were, attribute many fathers to existing things, and who represent the company of the gods as numerous, displaying great ignorance of the nature of things and causing great confusion, and making pleasure the proper object of the soul, are those who are, if we must tell the plain truth, spoken of as the builders of the aforesaid city, and of the citadel in it; having increased the efficient causes of the desired end, building them up like houses, being, as I imagine, in no respect different from the children of the harlot whom the law expels from the assembly of God, where it says, “The offspring of a harlot shall not come into the assembly of the Lord.” Because, like archers shooting at random at many objects, and not aiming skilfully or successfully at any one mark, so these men, putting forward ten thousand principles and causes for the creation of the universe, every one of which is false, display a perfect ignorance of the one Creator and Father of all things;

but they who have real knowledge, are properly addressed as the sons of the one God, as Moses also entitles them, where he says, “Ye are the sons of the Lord God.” And again, “God who begot Thee;” and in another place, “Is not he thy father?” Accordingly, it is natural for those who have this disposition of soul to look upon nothing as beautiful except what is good, which is the citadel erected by those who are experienced in this kind of warfare as a defence against the end of pleasure, and as a means of defeating and destroying it.

And even if there be not as yet any one who is worthy to be called a son of God, nevertheless let him labour earnestly to be adorned according to his first-born word, the eldest of his angels, as the great archangel of many names; for he is called, the authority, and the name of God, and the Word, and man according to God’s image, and he who sees Israel.

For which reason I was induced a little while ago to praise the principles of those who said, "We are all one man's Sons." For even if we are not yet suitable to be called the sons of God, still we may deserve to be called the children of his eternal image, of his most sacred word; for the image of God is his most ancient word.

And, indeed, in many passages of the law, the children of Israel are called hearers of him that seeth, since hearing is honoured with the second rank next after the sense of sight, and since that which is in need of instruction is at all times second to that which can receive clear impressions of the subjects submitted to it without any such information.

And I also admire the things which are spoken under divine inspiration in the books of Kings, according to which those who flourished many generations afterwards and lived in a blameless manner, are spoken of as the sons of David who wrote hymns to God; (2 Ezr. 8:2.) though, during his lifetime, even their great grandfathers had not yet been born. The truth is, that the birth here spoken of is that of souls made immortal by their virtues, not of perishable bodies, and this birth is naturally referred to the leaders of virtue, as its parents and progenitors.

Chapter XXIX

But against those who praise themselves on justice, the Lord said, "Behold, there is one race and one language among them all," an expression equivalent to, Behold, there is one family and one bond of relationship, and also, one harmony and agreement among them all together, no one being in his mind at all alienated from or disconnected with his neighbour, as is the case with illiterate men. For at times, the organ of speech among them is, in all its tones, out of tune and inharmonious in no slight degree, being in fact carefully arranged so as to produce inharmoniousness, and having only such a concert as will cause a want of melody.

And in the case of fevers, (I have translated Mangey's Latin translation. He pronounces the whole passage in the original text corrupt and unintelligible. The word translated "fever" is *politidos*, a word manifestly corrupt.) one may see very similar effects; for they are periodical changes, in some recurring every day, in others every third or every fourth day, as the sons of the physicians say;

and they have also stated hours, both by day and night, at which important crises may be expected, and they at all times keep nearly the same order.

And the expression, “And they began to do this,” is said with no moderate indignation, because it has not been sufficient for wicked men to confuse all the principles of justice which affect those of the same country as themselves, but they have ventured to transgress even the laws of Heaven, sowing injustice and reaping impiety. But these wretched men derive no advantage,

for though those who seek to inflict mutual injuries on one another, succeed in many of the objects which they have at heart, bringing to their accomplishment in action what they have decided on in their unwise minds, yet the case is not the same with the impious. For all things belonging to the Deity are incapable of receiving either damage or injury, and the unclean can only find out the beginnings of sinning in respect of them, but can never arrive at the end which they propose to themselves;

on which account this expression also occurs, “They began to do.” Men full of an insatiable desire of doing wrong, not being content with the crimes which they can perpetuate on earth, by sea, and in the air, inasmuch as they are of a perishable nature, have determined to array themselves against the divine natures existing in heaven; which, as they are not reckoned among existing creatures are also out of all reach of Injury.(this passage again in the text is unintelligible, and pronounced by Mangey to be in a state of hopeless corruption.) Even calumny itself can inflict no injury on those things if it ventures to speak ill of them, inasmuch as they are never moved from their everlasting and eternal natures, but it inflicts incurable calamity on those who accuse it.

Are they not to be blamed, since indeed they have only begun, being unable to arrive at the end of the impiety they propose to themselves, are they not, I say, to be blamed just as much as if they had accomplished all the objects that they had in view? On this account also, Moses speaks of them as having finished the tower, though in fact they had not yet completed it, where he says, “The Lord went down to see the city and the tower,” not which the sons of men were going to build, but which they had built.

Chapter XXX

What, then, is the proof that they had not entirely completed this building? First of all, the manifest notoriety of the fact. For it is impossible for even so slight a portion of the earth to touch the heaven, by reason of the cause beforementioned, that no centre can ever touch the circumference; in the second place, because the aether *aithēr* is sacred fire and an unquenchable flame, as its very name shows, being derived from *aithō*, to burn, which is a synonymous word with *kaio*.

And we have a witness in our favour in one portion of the heavenly system of fire, that is in the sun, who, though he is at such a distance from the earth, sends his beams down into his inmost recesses, and sometimes warms and at times even scorches the earth itself, and the air which reaches from earth up to the heavenly sphere, though it is by nature cold; for, all those things which are removed to a distance from his rapid course, or which are in an oblique direction, one side of it only warms; but those which are near to him, or in a direct line from him, is violently burnt up. If, then, these things are so, was it not necessary that those men who were endeavouring to mount up to heaven must have been stricken with thunderbolts and burnt up, their high-minded and proud designs being unaccomplished by them?

This is the meaning which Moses appears to intend to convey, figuratively, by the expressions which follow: "For they ceased," says, he, "to build the city and the Tower." (genesis 11:8.) Not, indeed, because they had finished their work, but because they were prevented from accomplishing it by the confusion which supervened. Nevertheless, they have not escaped blame for their actions, inasmuch as they had decided on them and attempted to carry them out.

Chapter XXXI

At all events, the law says that that soothsayer and diviner who was led into folly in respect of his unstable conjectures (for the name, Balaam, being interpreted, means unstable), "cursed the people that Saw;" and that, too, though as far as his words go he uttered only words of good omen and prayers. The law here looking not at the words he uttered, which, through the providence of God, did change their character, becoming good money instead of base coinage, but having regard to the intention in which injurious things

were resolved in preference to beneficial ones. But these things are, by nature inimical to one another, conjectures being at variance with truth, and vain opinion with knowledge, and prophecy, which is not dictated by divine inspiration, being directly opposed to sober wisdom.

And even if any one, rising up as it were from his ambush, were to try, but to be unable, to slay a man, still he is none the less liable to the punishment due to homicides, as the law which is enacted about such persons shows. "For if," says the law, "any one attacks his neighbour, wishing to slay him by treachery, and escapes, thou shalt apprehend him, even at the altar, to put him to Death." And yet the thing condemned is the attacking with intent to kill, not the actual killing, but the law looks upon the intention to slay as equal in guilt to the actual slaying; on which account it does not grant pardon to such a man even if he supplicates for it, but bids one drag the man who has cherished so unholy a design even from the temple itself.

And such a man is unholy, not merely because he has plotted slaughter against a soul which might have lived for ever through its acquisition and use of virtue, making an attack on it through the agency of wickedness, but also because he blames God as the cause of his ungodly audacity; for the word, "escapes," has such a meaning as this concealed under it. Because many men wish to escape from accusations which are brought against themselves, and think it fitting that they should be delivered from the punishments due to the offences which they have committed, and so they attribute their own iniquity to him who is the cause of no evil, but of all kinds of good, namely, to God; for which reason it was accounted as no violation of divine law to drag such men even from the altars themselves.

And it was an excessive punishment which was then denounced against the reasons which were thus built up and put together for purposes of impiety; which, however, perhaps some foolish persons will look upon not as injury, but as a benefit. "For," says Moses, "there shalt not fail to them any one of the things which they have endeavoured to Do." Alas for their unlimited and interminable misery! All the objects which the most insane intention fixes its desires upon shall be successfully carried out, and shall obey its will, so that nothing whatever shall fail, either small or great, but everything shall, as it were, make haste to meet and to anticipate their requirements.

Chapter XXXII

These things are an exhibition of a soul destitute of prudence, and which meets with no impediment to its indulging in sin; for whoever is not utterly incurable would rather pray that all the purposes of his mind might fail, so that if he had formed a resolution to steal, or to commit adultery, or to murder a man, he might succeed or to commit sacrilege, or to perpetrate any similar crime, he might not succeed, but might find innumerable obstacles. For such hindrance would get rid of the greatest of all diseases, injustice; but any one who is free from all fear is sure to admit this malady.

Why, then, my friends, do you any longer praise or admire the fortune of tyrants, owing to which they succeed with ease in everything which they undertake, and which a frenzied and unrestrained mind prompts them to do? And yet one ought rather to lament over them, since inability and powerlessness to succeed in their objects is advantageous to the wicked, just as abundant opportunity and power is the most beneficial thing for the good.

But one of the crowd of foolish men, perceiving to what an abundant superfluity of misery indulgence in sinning leads, said, speaking with perfect freedom, "My wickedness is too great for me to be Forgiven." It is, therefore, very melancholy indeed for the soul, which is by its own nature unmanageable, to be left without any restraint; while it is scarcely possible for any one to hold it in with reins, and by that means, in conjunction with the infliction of stripes, to reduce it to reason.

On which account an oracle of the all-merciful God has been given, full of gentleness, which shadows forth good hopes to those who love instruction, in these terms: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake Thee." For when the chains of the soul, by which it has been used to be held in bondage, are loosened, then the greatest of all calamities follows, namely, the being deserted by God, who has fastened chains which can never be broken round the universe, namely, his own powers, with which he binds everything, willing that it shall never more be released.

Accordingly, he says, in another passage, that "all things which are bound with a chain are Pure;" since unbinding is the cause of the destruction of that which is impure. Beware, then, lest when you see a man accomplishing without difficulty all the objects which he endeavors to effect, you admire him

as a prosperous man; take care rather to pity him as a very unfortunate one, because he passes his whole life in a perfect destitution of virtue and a great abundance of vice.

Chapter XXXIII

And it is worth while to consider in no superficial manner what the meaning of that expression which is put by Moses into the mouth of God: “Come, let us go down and confuse their language There.” For here God is represented as if he were speaking to some beings who were his coadjutors. And the very same idea may be excited by what is said in the account of the creation of the world,

for there, too, Moses records that “the Lord God said, Come, let us now make man in our image; man in our Similitude. The expression, “Let us make,” implying a number of creators. And, in another place, we are told that God said, “Behold, the man, Adam, has become as one of us, in respect of his knowing good and Evil;” for the expression, “as one of us,” is not applicable to one person, but to many.

In the first place, then, we must say this, that there is no existing being equal in honor to God, but there is one only ruler and governor and king, to whom alone it is granted to govern and to arrange the universe. For the verse —

Chapter XXXIV

This point then being thus granted, it is necessary to convert with it also what follows, so as to adapt it properly. Let us then consider what this is: God, being one, has about him an unspeakable number of powers, all of which are defenders and preservers of every thing that is created; and among these powers those also which are conversant with punishment are involved. But even punishment is not a disadvantageous thing, inasmuch as it is both a hindrance to and a correction of doing wrong.

Again, it is by means of these powers that the incorporeal world, perceptible by the intellect, has been put together, which is the archetypal model of this invisible world, being compounded by invisible species, just as

this world is of invisible bodies.

Some persons therefore, admiring exceedingly the nature of both these worlds, have not only deified them in their wholes, but have also deified the most beautiful parts of them, such as the sun and the moon, and the entire heaven, which, having no reverence for anything, they have called gods. But Moses, perceiving their design, says, “O Lord, Lord, King of the Gods,” in order to show the difference between the ruler and those subject to him,

“And there is also in the air a most sacred company of incorporeal souls as an attendant upon the heavenly souls; for the word of prophecy is accustomed to call these souls angels. It happens therefore that the whole army of each of these worlds, being marshalled in their suitable ranks, are servants and ministers of the ruler who has marshalled them, whom they follow as their leader, in obedience to the principles of law and justice; for it is impossible to suppose that the divine army can even be detected in desertion.

But it is suitable to the character of the king to associate with his own powers, and to avail himself of them, with a view to their ministrations in such matters as it is not fitting should be settled by God alone, for the Father of the universe has no need of anything, so as to require assistance from any other quarter if he wishes to make any thing. But seeing at once what is becoming, both for himself and for his works of creation, there are some things which he has entrusted to his subordinate powers to fashion; and yet he has not at once given even to them completely independent knowledge to enable it to accomplish their objects, in order that no one of those things which come to be created may be found to be erroneously made.

Chapter XXXV

These things, then, it was necessary to give an idea of beforehand; but for what reason this was necessary we must now say. The nature of animals was originally divided into the portion endowed with and into that devoid of reason, the two being at variance with one another. Again the rational division was subdivided into the perishable and imperishable species, the perishable species being the race of mankind, and the imperishable species being the company of incorporeal souls which revolve about the air and heaven.

But these have no participation in wickedness, having received from the very beginning an inheritance without stain and full of happiness; and not being bound up in the region of interminable calamities, that is to say, in the body. The divisions also of the irrational part are free from any participation in wickedness, inasmuch as, having no endowment of intellect, they are never convicted of those deliberate acts of wickedness which proceed upon consideration.

But man is almost the only one of all living things which, having a thorough knowledge of good and evil, often chooses that which is worst, and rejects those things which are worthy of earnest pursuit, so that he is often most justly condemned as being guilty of deliberate and studied crime.

Very appropriately therefore has God attributed the creation of this being, man, to his lieutenants, saying, "Let us make man," in order that the successes of the intellect may be attributed to him alone, but the errors of the being thus created, to his subordinate power: for it did not appear to be suitable to the dignity of God, the ruler of the universe, to make the road to wickedness in a rational soul by his own agency; for which reason he has committed to those about him the creation of this portion of the universe; for it was necessary that the voluntary principle, as the counterpoise to the involuntary principle, should be established and made known, with a view to the completion and perfection of the universe.

Chapter XXXVI

And this may be enough to say in this manner; and it is right that this point also should be considered, namely that God is the cause only of what is good but is absolutely the cause of no evil whatever, since he himself is the most ancient of all existing things, and the most perfect of all goods; and it is most natural and becoming that he should do what is most akin to his own nature, that is to say, that the best of all beings should be the cause of all the best things, but that the punishments appointed for the wicked are inflicted by the means of his subordinate ministers.

And there is an evidence in favour of this assertion of mine in this expression, which was uttered by the man who was made perfect by practice; "The God who nourished me from my youth up, the angel who defended me

from all Evils;" for by this words he already confesses that those genuine good things which nourish the souls which love virtue, are referred to God as their sole cause; but the fate of the wicked is, on the other hand, referred to the angels, and even they have not independent and absolute power of inflicting punishment, that this salutary nature may not afford an opportunity to any one of the things which tend to destruction.

For this reason God says, "Come, let us go down and confuse;" for the wicked, deserving to meet with such punishment as this, that the merciful, and beneficent, and bounteous, powers of God should become known to them chiefly by its inflictions. Knowing therefore that these powers are beneficial to the race of man, he has appointed the punishments to be inflicted by other beings; for it was expedient that he himself should be looked upon as the cause of well-doing, but in such a way that the fountains of his everlasting graces should be kept unmingled with any evils, not merely with those that are really evils, but even with those which are accounted such.

Chapter XXXVII

We must now examine what this confusion is. How then shall we enter on this examination? In this manner, in my opinion. We have very often known those whom we had knowledge of before, from certain similarities and a comparison of circumstances which have some connection with them. Therefore we also become acquainted with things in the same manner, which it is not easy to form a conception of from their own nature, from some similarity of other things connected with them.

What things then resemble confusion? Mixture, as the ancient report has it, and combination; but mixture takes place in dry things, and combination is looked upon as belonging to wet substances.

Mixture then is a placing side by side of different bodies in no regular order, as if any one were to make a heap, bringing barley, and wheat, and pease, and all sorts of other seeds, all into one mass; but combination is not a placing side by side, but rather a mutual penetration of dissimilar parts entering into one another at all points, so that the distinctive qualities are still able to be distinguished by some artificial skill, as they say is the case with respect to wine and water;

for these substances coming together form a combination, but that which is combined is not the less capable of being resolved again into the distinctive qualities from which it was originally formed. For with a sponge saturated with oil it is possible for the water to be taken up and for the wine to be left behind, which may perhaps be because the origin of sponge is derived from water, and therefore it is natural that water being a kindred substance is calculated by nature to be taken up by the sponge out of the combination, but that that substance which is of a different nature, namely the wine, is naturally left behind.

But confusion is the destruction of all the original distinctive qualities, owing to their component parts penetrating one another at every point, so as to generate one thing wholly different, as is the case in that composition of the physicians which they call the tetrapharmacon. For that, I imagine, is made up of wax, and fat, and pitch, and resin, all compounded together, but when the medicine has once been compounded, then it is impossible for it again to be resolved into the powers of which it was originally composed, but every one of them is destroyed separately, and the destruction of them all has produced one other power of exceeding excellence.

But when God threatens impious reasonings with confusion, he is in fact not only commanding the whole species and power of each separate wickedness to be destroyed, but also that thing which has been made up of all their joint contributions; so that neither the parts by themselves, nor the union and harmony of the whole, can contribute any strength hereafter towards the destruction of the better part;

on which account, he says, “Let us then confuse their language, so that each of them may not understand the voice of his neighbour;” which is equivalent to, let us make each separate one of the parts of wickedness deaf and dumb, so that it shall neither utter a voice of its own, nor be able to sound in unison with any other part, so as to be a cause of mischief.

Chapter XXXVIII

This, now, is our opinion upon and interpretation of this passage. But they who follow only what is plain and easy, think that what is here intended to be recorded, is the origin of the languages of the Greeks and barbarians, whom,

without blaming them (for, perhaps, they also put a correct interpretation on the transaction), I would exhort not to be content with stopping at this point, but to proceed onward to look at the passage in a figurative way, considering that the mere words of the scriptures are, as it were, but shadows of bodies, and that the meanings which are apparent to investigation beneath them, are the real things to be pondered upon.

Accordingly, this lawgiver usually gives a handle for this doctrine to those who are not utterly blind in their intellect; as in fact he does in his account of this very event, which we are now discussing: for he has called what took place, confusion; and yet, if he had only intended to speak of the origin of languages, he would have given a more felicitous name, and one of better omen, calling it division instead of confusion; for things that are divided, are not confused, but, on the contrary, are distinguished from one another, and not only is the one name contrary to the other, but the one fact is contrary to the other fact.

For confusion, as I have already said, is the destruction of simple powers for the production of one concrete power; but division is the dissection of one thing into many parts, as is the case when one distinguishes a genus into its subordinate species so that, if the wise God had ordered his ministers to divide language, which was previously only one, into the divisions of several dialects, he would have used more appropriate expressions, which should have given a more accurate idea of the case: calling what he did, dissection, or distribution, or division, or something of that kind, but not confusion, a name which is at variance with all of them.

But his especial object here is to dissolve the company of wickedness, to put an end to their confederacy, to destroy their community of action, to put out of sight and extirpate all their powers, to overthrow the might of their dominion, which they had strengthened by fearful lawlessness.

Do you not see that he also who made the parts of the soul did not unite any one part to another in such a way as to enable one to discharge the duties of the other? But the eyes would never be able to hear, nor the ears to see, nor the lips of the mouth to smell, nor the nostrils to taste; nor, again, could reason ever be exposed to those influences which operate upon upon the outward senses, nor again, would the outward senses be able to develop reason.

For the Creator knew that it was desirable that each of these parts should not hear the voice of its neighbour, but that the parts of the soul should each exert its own peculiar faculties without confusion, for the advantage of living animals, and should, with the same object, be deprived of any power of exerting themselves in common, and that all the powers of vice should be brought to confusion and utter destruction, so that they might neither in confederacy, nor separately, be injurious to the better parts.

On which account Moses tells us, “The Lord scattered them from thence;” which is equivalent to, he dispersed them, he put them to flight, he banished them, he destroyed them; for to scatter is sometimes done with a view to production, and growth, and increase of other things; but there is another kind which has for its object overthrow and destruction: but God, the planter of the world, wishes to sow in every one excellence, but to scatter and drive from the world accursed impiety; that the disposition which hates virtue may at last desist from building up a city of wickedness, and a tower of impiety;

for when these are put to the rout, then those who have long ago been banished by the tyranny of folly, now, at one proclamation, find themselves able to return to their own country. God having drawn up and confirmed the proclamation, as the scriptures show, in which it is expressly stated that, “Even though thy dispersion be from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven, he will bring thee together from Thence.”

So that it is proper that the harmony of the virtues should be arranged and cherished by God, and that he should dissolve and destroy wickedness; and confusion is a name most appropriate to wickedness, of which every foolish man is a visible proof, having all his words, and intentions, and actions, incapable of standing an examination and destitute of steadiness.