

FLEUR DE LYS SERIES

THE DIVINE LOVE

The two treatises *De Laude Caritatis* and
De Amore Sponsi ad Sponsam

By Hugh of St Victor

Translated by
A Religious of C.S.M.V.



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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

“Descend on us, therefore, O sweet and lovely charity, enlarge our heart and widen our desire, extend the vessel of our mind, increase the space within the dwelling of our heart, so that it may be big enough to hold God as its Guest and its Inhabitant.” So concludes Hugh of St Victor’s meditation, *De Laude Caritatis*. In Hugh’s ascetical system as a whole we find a “complete, integrated Christian life,” wrote Martin Thornton—one that maintains the affective-speculative synthesis so necessary to the English School of Catholic spirituality, yet usually emphasizes the latter aspect. “According to his teaching, the universe is *symbolic* of the mind of God,” Thornton wrote in *The Purple Headed Mountain*. To meditate, for Hugh, is to *read*—whether words in a book, or flowers in a garden—and then allow their inner meaning to be absorbed by the mind. All of creation is the Book of Nature.

Called a “second Saint Augustine,” Hugh had “a unique ability to put theological, especially Trinitarian, speculation to practical, even pastoral use” (Boyd Taylor Coolman, *Trinity and Creation*, p. 27). While there is an intellectual element in his thinking, including the treatise herein, it is not in any strict sense discursive. Along with the Cistercian Fathers—although in many illuminating respects, quite distinct—Hugh and his fellow Canons Regular were patristic, monastic, rational, affective but not cloyingly sentimental, and non-scholastic. At all times, even when bathing in rich imagery, Hugh throws us to prayer.

“Our progress is from the many to the One,” he concludes in *De Amore Sponsi ad Sponsam*, an interpretation of three verses of *The Song of Songs*, inviting us anew to that potent, yet of late overlooked, book of Scripture. May Hugh guide us, in charity, toward Unity with God.

The Rev. Matthew C. Dallman
Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary, 2016

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Abbey life of St. Victor at Paris was a house of Augustinian Canons Regula, founded in 1110 by Master William of Champeaux, who, as a pupil of Anselm of Laon, was, so to speak, a spiritual grandson of that Anselm's master, the greater Saint Anselm of Bec. The community began with a handful of William's own pupils; it grew to include men from all the chief schools of the day, Englishmen and Scots, Italians, Germans, Norwegians, as well as Normans, Bretons and Frenchmen from all parts; it came also to have a daughter-house at Bristol, among other places.

Among its members from 1118 until his death in 1140 was a man called Hugh, the eldest son of Conrad, Count of Blankenburg in Saxony. Hugh came to Paris from the monastery of Hamerleve, near Halberstadt, where he had already worn the Augustinian habit for some years. After seven years at St Victor he began to teach; and between that date and his death at the age of forty-four he wrote enough treatises to fill, when they were printed centuries later, over two volumes of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. The Abbey of Saint Victor was an amazingly vital and wide-minded place. The range of literature its sons produced is vast; Adam was a lyricist, Andrew a biblical scholar, Richard a mystic. And Hugh, who came to be called a second Augustine, was something of everything, but a mystic above all; and it is as a mystic that we meet him in the two little treatises translated in this book. The text of the first, *De Laude Caritatis*, will be found in Migne, vol. clxxvi, col. 969–76, and that of the second, *De Amore Sponsi ad Sponsam*, in the same volume, columns 987–94. As far as I know, this is their first appearance in English. They seem gems to me, especially the first, and I have loved translating them. I only hope that enough of Hugh himself has come through my translation to lead its readers to the same opinion.

The Latin titles raise a point about translation. The Latin language has three words for love: *caritas*, sometime spelt

caritas in mediaeval Latin, *dilectio*, and *amor*, the last two only having corresponding verbs from the same root. Our word "charity," of course, is *caritas*, but carries a weaker meaning in ordinary usage. We have nothing directly from the other two, except the compound "predilection" and "amour" with the debased and narrow sense of "love-affair." Our word for love comes from the Saxon side of our inheritance, not from the French or Latin. In this translation I have rendered *caritas* by "charity," wherever it occurs, and reserved "love" for *amor* and *dilectio* and their verbs.

The first treatise poses another difficulty with regard to the word *via*. *Via* means a road, in the literal sense; but though we speak of roads as high-ways and by-ways, we also speak of a "way" of doing something, in the sense of "mode" or "manner." The senses are, of course, related; but in the latter case the Latin equivalent would be, not *via*, but *modus*. Hugh of Saint Victor treats charity as the road by which man goes to God, and God comes down to man. But in the Biblical texts which he cites in this context *via* in our English versions is always rendered "way." As "way" does not sufficiently bring out the metaphor of "road," I have used sometimes one, sometimes the other.

WANTAGE

September 1955

THE DIVINE LOVE

IN PRAISE OF CHARITY

I

ADDRESS

Hugh, to Peter, the servant of Christ: *O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!* (Ps 34:8)

When I was pondering, beloved brother, how I could rouse your love to thoughts of me, the first thing that occurred to me was this: that I, who ask from you nothing except the gift of love, should write to you about that selfsame love. This, therefore, I have done, as best I could; in such words as I could command I have commended charity, that you may know how ardently I both love it in you and long for it from you. Nor must your charity take it amiss if I, myself lukewarm, apply to it, when it already burns so strongly, the weak breath of my words, not with intent to fan it to a fiercer blaze so much as to make it acknowledge the endeavour of my own desire for it. Read, then, and love; and what you read for love, that read that you may love. It all proceeds from love; love sends it, love receives it; it is love that is offered, and love that is repaid.

II

CHARITY IN THE SAINTS

We recognize the praise of charity already in so many, that it may seem, perhaps, a thing presumptuous, rather than pious, on my part if I begin to say somewhat in praise thereof. For from the world's beginning, who was there of the saints who did not display the grace of charity, either by word or deed? Charity made a martyr of Abel (Gen 4:1–15), and charity led Abraham (Gen 12:1–9) out of his own country; for through charity the one suffered death when he had done no wrong, and the other of his own will forsook the native soil; and both of them through charity exchanged earth for heaven. It is charity alone which from the beginning has persuaded the servants of God to flee the attractions of this world, to trample on their passions, to curb the lust of the flesh, to subdue their desires, to despise honours, and at the last to spurn all pleasures of this present life and also, through their longing for the life that lasts, not to fear death itself.

This power of love Paul had experienced when he said:

*Who shall separate us from the love of God?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution,
or hunger, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?
For my hope is that neither death nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor might, nor heights, nor depth,
nor any creature,
shall be able to separate us from the charity of God,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35, 38f)*

For the same reason the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs exhorts the Bride about the virtue of love, saying:

*Set Me as a seal upon thine heart,
set Me as a seal upon thine arm,
for love is strong as death,
jealousy is hard as hell. (S. of S. 8:6)¹*

For death quenches the living, but hell has no mercy even for the dead. And *love is strong as death*, for it destroys the longing of fleshly desire, just as death destroys the flesh's power of feeling. *Jealousy is hard as hell*, for it compels those who are inwardly drawn by longing after things eternal not only to spurn pleasures, but also to endure all harsh and thwarting things in order to obtain the object of their love.

Let us consider through how many torments the martyrs made their passage to the heavenly kingdom. What a mighty fire of love it was the burned in them, as we believe, since we behold them for the sake of God not sparing their own selves! Let us consider what it was that they renounced, what they pursued, and whither they passed over. We see what renounced; what they pursued we see not, but believe; and whither they have gone, that we have heard. They renounced temporal good, they pursued those eternal, through torments they passed on.

Now let us look at our own heart, and see if it agrees to our forsaking all things pertaining to this world, to our not loving glory, nor honour, nor rejoicing in things fair. *Lord, Thine eyes have seen mine imperfection. (Ps 139:15)* How far removed do I behold myself to be, I will not say from that perfection, but from even its first beginning! And indeed for

1. The Latin *aemulatio* is used here in a good sense, which the English “jealousy” lacks, except where it is used with reference to God in the Old Testament.

the friends of God it was not enough that they should spurn these benefits for love of things eternal and tread them underfoot; having renounced them all, and hastening with eagerness to their self-offering, they could not be deterred by threats, nor yet by torments. Charity drew them; so neither did cupidity withdraw them, nor suffering frighten them off. They ran, therefore; they left the world behind, for they had God in front.

But tortures were applied to test them, alike as to the depth of their desire for God and as to the steadfastness with which they set the world at naught. Truth was put to the test, charity was proved, iniquity was put to shame. Fearless they came to the tortures, and their flesh outwardly despised its wounds according as their inward heart had felt the wound of love. They came, and they passed over; and dying, they confessed what the desire was wherewith they ran, while yet they lived.

O charity, how flavoursome you were to them, how sweet to those whom you compelled to bear such great things for your sake! With cords you drew them to you, and you could not lose them, although the world with its allurements would have drawn them back, and with the pains that it inflicted would have driven them away. They ran together, for you drew them; they passed over, because you helped them; they came through, because you received them. How unquenchably you burned in their hearts, for you could not be overcome by reproaches, nor yet by bribes, nor yet by sufferings! Like rivers in flood, those things swept down on them; but many rivers, many waters, could not quench charity. (Cf. S. of S. 8:7)

III

CHARITY THE TREASURE ABOVE PRICE

O Charity, what shall I say of you, in what way shall I praise you? If I could savour you, I could assess your value; and, if I knew your worth, I could weigh out your price. But perhaps you are beyond my slender means, and I have not the wherewithal to find your price. However, I will give what I have, and I will give all I have; I will give the whole substance of my house for you. All that is in the dwelling of my body, all that is in the dwelling of my heart, that will I give for you; and, when I have given it all, I shall account it nothing. I will willingly give up my fleshly pleasures and all my heart's delights to pay for you alone, and to be enabled to possess you only. You alone are dearer to me than all that I possess, you alone are sweeter and more pleasant, you alone content me more completely, save me more safely, and keep me happier.

I will tell of you to others also. Tell me, O human heart, which would you rather choose, to rejoice always with the world, or always to be with God? You choose what you love most. Listen, therefore, so that you may correct your love, or not put off your choice. If this world is beautiful, of what sort is the beauty, do you think, where the Creator of the world Himself is present? Love, then, that you may choose; love better, that your choice may be sounder. Love God, that you may choose to be with God, and therefore make your choice through love.

But the more you love, the quicker you will want to reach the object of your love, and you will hasten therefore to lay hold upon it. So run for love, and through love you attain.

Again, the more you love, the tighter your grip on what you love. So you enjoy through love.

You see, therefore, how love is everything to you; love is your choice, your journey, your arrival; love is your dwelling and your blessedness. Love God, therefore, choose God; run, seize, possess, enjoy.

IV

CHARITY MAN'S ROAD TO GOD

You say, "I have already chosen; by what road shall I run? that I may reach my soul?" We run to God along the road of God.

You say, "I cannot run along a road I do not know; give me companions, that I may not stray." With those who are already running on the road of God, you too must run His road; you cannot have better companions on the road than those who have been running on it for a long time already and, having long experience of running and being used to strenuous exercise, are not afraid of straying, nor of falling by the way.

"What, then, is the road of God," you say, "and who are they who run therein?" The ways of the Lord are straight, and the righteous walk therein. Righteousness, therefore, is the way; and, in case you are disturbed at my speaking of runners and now of walkers, walking quickly, let me tell you, is the same as running. He did the like who said, *I have run the way of Thy commandments*, (Ps 119:23) and in another place, *Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way, and walk in the law of the Lord*. (Ps 1:1) He meant you to regard walking and running as meaning the same thing; he does not mean to make himself out as being more blessed than the blessed.

So, then, you know the road, you know who your companions are to be along the road, you know a heritage awaits you in your native land. You know the road by which

you are to go, with whom you are to go, and where you are to rest. The way by which you are to go is righteousness. Those with whom you are to go are those who love and follow after righteousness. And your journey's end, wherein you are to rest, is both the Author of righteousness and the Fountain of life. No road is straighter than righteousness; no company is better than that of righteous men; no rest is quieter than God. Travel in confidence, travel with speed, that you may quickly reach your goal and rest in bliss. To travel fast is to love ardently.

See, then, how your whole welfare hangs on charity. Through charity you choose the road, through charity you run the road, through charity you reach your native land. Shall I tell you how you choose the road of righteousness by charity alone? *If any man love Me*, says the Lord, *he will keep My words*; (Jn 14:23) of the same word in another place we read, *Thy word is truth*; (Jn 17:17) and of truth again the psalmist says, *I have chosen the way of truth, I have not forgotten Thy judgements*. (Ps 119:30) So if the word of God is truth, surely the way of truth is chosen through that charity, whereby the Lord's word is fulfilled.

Is, then, the way of righteousness not chosen without charity, nor run without it either? Hear the witness of the same psalmist whom I quoted just now; *I ran the way of Thy commandments*, he says, *when Thou didst enlarge my heart*. (Ps 119:32) For what is a heart enlarged, but a heart flaming with love and filled with charity? By charity, therefore, the heart is enlarged, and with a heart enlarged the way of righteousness is run. So you choose by charity, you run by charity, you grasp your object and enjoy by charity. *God is Charity*, says the apostle John, *and he that dwelleth in charity dwelleth in God, and God in him*. (1 Jn 4:16) He therefore who has charity has God, possessed God, abides in God.

V

CHARITY GOD'S ROAD TO MAN

O blessed charity, whereby we love God, choose God, run to God, and reach God, and possess Him! O charity, what further shall I say of you? I have called you our leader on the road to God, what if I call you further the road of God Himself? For truly, charity, you are His road. But you are not a road like other roads. *I will no show you a more excellent road*, (1 Cor 12:31) says Paul; for he was talking, charity, of you. You re the supremely excellent road, the best of roads, that straightens crooked paths and shows the straight. You are the origin of all straight roads, all straight roads lead from you and run back into you. For God's commandments are His roads, and they all hang on you, and have their being in you. You are the plenitude of righteousness, the Law's perfection, the fulfilment of virtue, the recognition of truth.

You, therefore, are a road, O charity. What sort of road? A road supremely excellent, that takes and guides the wayfarer, and brings him to his goal. Whose road are you? You are at once man's road to God, and God's to man. O blessed road, that knows no traffic save that of our salvation! You bring God down to men, you direct men to God. He comes down when He comes to us; we go up when we go to Him; yet neither He nor we can pass to the other, save by you. You are the mediator, reconciling the opposed, making the separated friends, and in a manner putting

them, unequal as they are, on equal footing. You bring God low, and lift us up, drawing Him down to the depths and exalting us to the heights. And yet you do this in such wise that His descent to us is tender and not mean, and our uplifting is not proud, but glorious. It is, therefore, a mighty power that you wield, O charity; for you alone could draw God down from heaven to earth.

How strong a bond yours is, whereby both God was able to be bound, and man, who was bound, broke the fetters of iniquity! I do not know that there is anything that I could say more to your praise than that you drew God down from heaven, and lifted man to heaven from the earth. Great is your might, that through you God should thus far be brought low, and man thus far exalted. I think of God, born of a woman, a wordless baby, swaddled, crying in a cradle, sucking at the breast. I see Him later, seized and bound, wounded with scourges, crowned with thorns, spattered with spittle, pierced, nailed, and given gall and vinegar to drink. First He bore indignities, and later outrages; and yet, if we look for the reason why He condescended to the one and bore the other, we find not any, except charity alone.

O charity, how much can you achieve? If you could do so much with God, how much more will you do with man? If God went through such great things for the sake of man, what, then, shall man refuse to bear for God?

But perhaps you conquered God more easily than you can conquer man; perhaps you can prevail with God more readily, because God's obligation to be overcome by you is in proportion to His happiness in being overcome.¹ You had the wisdom first to conquer Him, the easier victor;

1. *Sed fortassis facilius vicis Deum quam hominem, magis praevalere potes Deo quam homini, quia quo magis beatum, eo magis Deo est debitum a te superari.* I give the Latin, because the last clause is obscure, and I may have got it wrong.

when in obedience to yourself you had made Him come down from the throne of His Father's glory to take on Him the weakness of our mortal state, you still had us, the rebels. You brought Him, bound with your chains and wounded by your arrows, that man might be more ashamed to offer you resistance, seeing how you had triumphed even against God. You wounded the Impassible, you bound the Invincible, you drew the Unchangeable, you made the Eternal mortal. All this you did to soften our hard hearts, to prick our dull susceptibilities, so that your arrows might pierce them the more easily as they shook off their torpor.

Nor did you this in vain, for many have been conquered thus by you, many already have given you their hand. Many already there are who bear your arrows sticking in their hearts, and want them to go in more deeply still. For they have been wounded in a lovely and sweet way, and they neither grieve nor blush to have received the wounded you give. O charity, great is your victory! You wounded first the One, and through Him subsequently you have conquered all.

VI

CHARITY BOTH GOD AND GIFT OF GOD

O charity, I have praised you as best I could, and I am wondering if there be some better thing that I could add in praise of you. For I do not know whether it is a greater thing to say that you are God, or to say that you have conquered God. If the first be greater, then gladly and with boldness will I say this too that *God is charity, and he that dwelleth in charity dwelleth in God, and God in him* (1 Jn 4:16). Listen, O man, if you are still disposed to think it a small thing to have charity, listen; I tell you, *God is charity*. Is it a small thing to have God dwelling in oneself? It is a so great thing to possess charity, because charity is God. It is the exclusive prerogative of charity thus to be called God, so that He can be coupled with nothing else in the same way. We do not say, for instance, that God is humility, or God is patience, in the same way that we say that God is charity; because, though every virtue is the gift of God, it belongs to charity alone to be called not only the gift of God, but God.

Charity is the gift of God, however, for this reason: that the Holy Ghost is given by God to the faithful, and charity is God, because the same Spirit is consubstantial and co-eternal in the selfsame Godhead with Him by Whom He is given. God, then, bestows the other gifts of grace even on those of whom He disapproves; but He keeps charity, as being His own self, for the peculiar reward of those He loves.

Charity is therefore the unique fountainhead, wherein the stranger has no share; for, as we said, even those who are estranged from God by reason of their wicked life sometimes receive the other gifts of grace. But a bad man cannot have charity; and whoever has got it is not yet a stranger to God, but dwells him God, and God in him.

Charity so utterly belongs to God that He Himself will have no dwelling where charity is not. *If any man love Me*, he says, *he will keep my word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.* (John 14:23) If charity is with you, therefore, God has come to you, and He is dwelling in you; if you depart from charity, He also goes away and does not stay with you. If you have never had charity, God has never come to you, nor dwelt with you. If you have given up the charity you once began to have, He has departed from you. If you have gone on with charity as you began, God is with you, and is remaining with you.

VII

THE EFFECTS OF CHARITY

Charity heals every sickness of the soul, charity digs up all vices by the roots, charity is the wellspring of all the virtues. Charity enlightens the mind, cleanses the conscience, rejoices the soul, and reveals God. Pride does not puff up the soul where charity abides, envy does not ravage it, anger does not distract it, no evil sadness troubles it, greed does not inflame it, and luxury defiles it not. It is always pure, it is always chaste, always serene, always happy, always peaceable, always kind, and always gentle. It is always undisturbed when things go wrong and restrained when they go well. It always despises the world and loves God; by loving it appropriates all other people's blessings, and it gladly shares its own with all. It has no fear of poverty, and no great longing for wealth.

He in whom charity abides is always thinking when he may get to God and leave the world, when he may escape from occasions of falling and find true peace. His heart is always lifted up, and his desire always set on things above. When he is walking or sitting, when he is busy or at rest, whatever he is doing, his heart does not depart from God. When he is silent, God is in his thoughts; when he speaks, he wants to speak of nothing except God and things pertaining to the love of God. By encouraging others he kindles himself, and commends charity to all; not only with his lips but also by his actions he makes it plain to others

how sweet the love of God is, and how bitter and impure that of this present world. He scorns the glory of this world, rebukes anxiety, and shows how foolish it is to put one's trust in things that do not last. He marvels at the blindness of those who love these things; he marvels that they have not finished long ago with all these transitory, perishable matters. He thinks that what is sweet to him is sweet to all, that all like what he loves, that what he knows is manifest to all.

These are the tokens by which charity makes itself known, and marks out those in whom it dwells, not only in their inward will, but also in their outward conversation.

CONCLUSION

So much already have I said of charity, and yet much remains that could and should be said, and just as much for which there are no words. What, then, good charity, dear charity, what can I fitly say in praise of you? Assuredly, so many having lauded you so greatly in the past, my insignificance would not have dared to speak of you at all, have I been able ever to have said enough.

Descend on us, therefore, O sweet and lovely charity, enlarge our heart and widen our desire, extend the vessel of our mind, increase the space within the dwelling of our heart, so that it may be big enough to hold God as its Guest and its Inhabitant. May our sole Redeemer and Saviour, Jesus Christ the Son of God, impour you and outpour you on our hearts through His Holy Spirit, that He Himself together with the Father may deign to come to us, and make His dwelling in us, Who with the same Father and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth God to ages of ages.

AMEN.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S LOVE FOR THE BRIDE

*I will get Me to the mountain of myrrh,
and to the hills of Lebanon,
and I will speak to My bride.
“Thou art all fair, My neighbour,
thou art all fair, My friend;
there is no spot in thee.
Come, O fair one, to Lebanon, from Lebanon.
Come to Lebanon to Lebanon.
Thou shalt come, thou shalt be crowned.
Come from without, within unto thyself.
Thou shalt come, and thou shalt pass over
to Main Seir and Hermon,
from the lions' lairs,
from the leopards' mountain.”*

A version of Song of Songs 4:6–8.

HIS VISIT TO HER

I will get Me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hills of Lebanon, and I will speak to My bride.

A Bridegroom is here speaking, who has one who is espoused to Him; He promises that He is going to visit her. Observe, therefore, that this Bridegroom is not always at home; He is wary, perhaps, lest His love lose value; and, because she would more quickly weary of Him, were He always present, He now withdraws Himself, and now again, at a fit time, returns, so that having been missed when He was absent, when He is present He may be more closely held.

Now, at the moment of speaking the aforesaid words, He was away from her. But lest prolonged delay should tend to generate forgetfulness, He is intended to return; therefore He says, *I will get Me*. He tells Himself what He will do, for what is sweet to do is sweet also to say, and I know not why it is, but we are never loth to speak of anything for which we have a great desire. *I will get Me*, He says; He goes alone, for a peculiar love admits not one to share its secret. He goes alone, for He Who will not suffer anyone to share His love desires no companion on His journey. But do you want to know Who is this Bridegroom, and who is this bride? God is the Bridegroom, and His bride the soul.

The Bridegroom is at home sometimes, and then He fills the mind with inward joy. At other times He goes away; then He withdraws the sweets of contemplation. But what is there about the soul, that she should thus be called the bride of God? She is the bride, as dowered by the gifts of grace. She is the bride, as linked with Him in a pure love.

She is the bride, because by the breath of the Holy Ghost she must be fertilized with the offspring of the virtues.

There is no soul who has not received a betrothal-gift from this Bridegroom.¹ But there are two betrothal-gifts, the general and the particular. The general betrothal-gift consists in the fact of our having been born, of our feeling, perceiving, and judging. The particular one consists in our regeneration, in our having obtained the forgiveness of sins, and received the gifts of grace. And what each individual has, that is for him his betrothal-gift. For the rich man, the wealth whereby he is supported so that the irksomeness of poverty may not grind him down, is his betrothal-gift. For the poor man, it is the poverty that chastens him, lest having plenty he give way to greed. For the strong man, his strength is his betrothal-gift, that makes him tough and able for good works. For him whose health is weak, his weakness is his betrothal-gift, reducing him lest he do wrong. For the foolish person, his gift is his simplicity, that humbles him lest he give way to pride. And whatsoever thing without exception our human weakness in this life endures, this the kind Creator ordains either for the correction of our crookedness, or else to further our advance in virtue. In all things, therefore, we must give Him thanks, so that acknowledging His mercy in every circumstance we may be ever advancing in His love.

I will get Me, He says, to the mountain of myrrh and to the hills of Lebanon, and I will speak to My bride.

Myrrh, which is bitter to the taste and serves to keep dead bodies from corruption, denotes the mortification of the flesh. Lebanon, the name whereof means Whitening, denotes cleanness of heart. This, therefore, is the way by

1. Hugh has a separate treatise on this theme, *De Arrha Animae*. An English translation, *The Soul's Betrothal-Gift*, by F. Sherwood Taylor, was published by the Dacre Press in 1945.

which the Bridegroom comes to the bride. He comes by *the mountain of myrrh* and *the hills of Lebanon*, because He first slays the desire of the flesh by abstinence, and then through cleanness of heart He wipes away the ignorance of the mind. And lastly, coming to speech with the bride as it were on the third day, He inflames the soul with longing for Himself. For this reason He rightly spoke *the mountain*—not the hills—*of myrrh*, and of *the hills*—not the mountain—*of Lebanon*. For we must be steadfast in affliction, and humble when we make progress in virtue; and the height of a mountain signifies the eminence of spiritual courage, and the insignificance of hills sober humility.

Again, His saying *mountain* in the singular and *hills* in the plural shows that we lose little by mortification in respect of outward pleasure, whereas the benefit we find in the illumination of our inward mind is manifold.

We take *the mountain of myrrh*, therefore, as meaning strong resistance to the desire of the flesh; and we take *the hills of Lebanon* as meaning the illumination of the mind, as against ignorance. The Bridegroom's speaking we must understand as meaning charity, as opposed to hatred and hardness of heart. Power belongs peculiarly to the Father, wisdom to the Son, charity to the Holy Ghost. For when we sin through weakness, in sinning against power we sin against the Father; when we sin through ignorance, in sinning against wisdom we sin against the Son; but, when we sin through hatred, in sinning against charity we sin against the Holy Ghost. (Cf. Mk 3:28f) Sin committed against the Father and the Son is therefore remitted, here or hereafter; for a person who sins through weakness or ignorance has some excuse for his fault, and so must have some remission of its penalty, either in this life, if he has repented in such wise as to win mercy more easily; or else, if he has persisted in the evil, he will undergo a penalty less hard to bear in the life which is to come. But the offence of

those who sin through malice has no such excuse; their punishment therefore is not to be remitted. For if they repent in this life, they will have to bear the pain of making a full reparation; and, if they do not repent, they will be punished with full condemnation in the life to come. Such as these, therefore, obtain remission neither in this life, nor in that which is to come, not because pardon is denied to them, but because full satisfaction is required for full sin.

II

HIS PRAISE OF HER

I will speak, He says, *to My bride*. God has two ways of speaking to a soul. He speaks in one way to the harlot, and in another to the bride; in one way to the foul, and in another to the fair; in one way to the sinner, and in another to her who has been rendered righteous.¹ He rebukes the foulness of the one, and praise the other's beauty. He shakes the one with fear by His rebuke, and He inflames the other by His praise to love. He speaks to the one, when He shows her her stains; He speaks to the other, when He reminds her of the gifts that He has given her. He enlightens the darkness of the one, that she may know herself for what she is, and bewail what she has done; He touches the other with the sense of inward sweetness, so that she may reflect on what she has received, and not forget the Giver.

I will speak, He says, *to My bride*. It is as though He said, "If I then am the Bridegroom, and I have spoken to the bride, know that I can speak nothing but love." So after the Bridegroom has spoken thus with Himself, He forthwith set out upon His journey; and, when He arrived and saw the bride, moved as it were to admiration by her beauty, He broke out in these words:

*Thou art all fair, My neighbour!*²

Thou art all fair, My friend!

1. I.e., "justified" in the theological sense.

2. "Neighbour" is *proxima*, meaning literally she who is nearest, or very near.

Or you can take that with what precedes it; in which case we shall read, *I will say to My bride, Thou art all fair, My neighbour*, and so forth. But *Thou art all fair, My neighbour* is best taken thus: “thou art all fair, because thou art My neighbour”—that is, very near to Me; “if thou wert not very near, thou wouldest not be altogether fair.”

Consider why He says *Thou art all fair, My neighbour*. Every soul is either turned away from God, or turned towards Him. But of those who are turned away, one is far from Him, and another very far. And of those who are turned towards Him also, one is near, and another is very near. The soul that is far from Him is indeed ugly, but not completely so; but the soul that is farthest or very far from Him is altogether ugly. In the same way the soul that is near Him is fair, but not completely so; and the soul that is nearest, very near to Him, is altogether so.

Thou art all fair, My neighbour; there is no spot in thee. A man is altogether fair when nothing is lacking to his beauty. He is altogether ugly when nothing is lacking in his hideousness. “I am altogether fair,” the Bridegroom says, “for all beauty is in Me. Thou art altogether fair, for in thee is no ugliness at all; there is no spot in thee.”

III

HIS INVITATION TO HER

Come, O fair one, to Lebanon, from Lebanon. He invites and calls her, for He has come to her, not to remain with her, but to draw her to Himself. *Come to Lebanon; come to Lebanon; thou shalt come, thou shalt be crowned.* He says *come* twice in giving His invitation; and the third time he asserts, *Thou shalt come.* What is the force of this assertion? Surely it is simply the expression of the joy wherewith He rejoices with us in our good intention. It is as though He said, “I praise your obedience, I am not unaware of the devotion that you give to God. I call you, and you will respond; I invite you, and you are prepared. So you will come.”

But why does He say *Come* twice? So that he who is beyond himself may return to himself, and he who is in himself may rise above himself. He is in use in the first place, and He urges transgressors to return to the own hearts. He is also above us, so that when we have been made righteous He may invite us to Himself. “Come,” He says, “come. Come to yourself from without. Come in, and yet more in. Come wholly in above yourself to Me.”

“*Come from Lebanon, O bride, come from Lebanon.* Come from the Lebanon that has been made white to the Lebanon that has not been made white, but *is* white. Come from a heart made clean to the Cleanser of hearts, Who is not cleansed but clean. You will not get to Me if you stay in yourself; but rise above yourself, and you will find Me.”

Come, and thou shalt pass over to Mount Seir. Seir means shaggy or hairy. And Seir is the same as Edom, that is Esau. Esau and Jacob were two brothers. (See Gen 25:19–end) Esau was the firstborn, but he was supplanted by Jacob,

who was born after him. Esau was a hunter, given over to outdoor pursuits; Jacob was a simply man, who stayed at home. What do the two brothers stand for, if not the two urges that are in every man, the desire of the flesh and the desire of the spirit? The apostle says, *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is carnal.* (1 Cor 15:46) Esau, that is, is born first. But when the desire of the spirit gains in vigour, then the desire of the flesh grows weak. Thus Esau's place is taken by Jacob, the later born.

Again, the desire of the flesh gets that whereon it feeds from outside sources, as did Esau the hunter; but the desire of the spirit finds its delights within, like the simple Jacob. Seir, therefore, the hairy, is the shameful and unseemly impulse of the flesh. And it is well called hairy, for just as hair is rooted in the flesh but grows out beyond it, so does the fleshly instinct arise from necessity, but growing out beyond that it flows further into lust on every side. And just as hair can be cut without pain, but hurts if it is pulled out, so the desire of the flesh in respect of superfluities, being as it were exterior to the instinct, is cut off without loss; but where it is a matter of necessity, which is inside the flesh, as it were, then it cannot be uprooted without injury.

So much for Seir. Now let us see what *Mount* Seir means. For this Seir has a mountain, and a valley; and it also has a plain; but whereas it is weak in the valley and strong on the plain, on the mountain it is invincible. Seir on the mountain is the desire of the flesh in need; in the plain it is the same desire in sufficiency; and in the valley it is that desire given rein in lust. When the flesh takes only sufficient food to keep it alive, then it is Seir on the mountain. When it takes enough to keep it strong, it is Seir on the plain. But when it asks for luxury and licence, then it is Seir in the valley.

Why is it invincible on the mountain? Because as long as we are in this mortal state, food for the flesh is a necessity. Why is it strong on the plain? Because even a strong body is sometimes useful for the soul's advance. Why is it weak in the valley? Because it is always superfluous to delight the flesh. So in the valley indulgence of desire is forbidden; in the plain it is allowed; on the mountain it is rewarded. In the valley it is enslaved; in the plain it fights; on the mountain it reigns. In the valley it is luxury; in the plain it is temperance; on the mountain it is austerity. In the valley by the help of grace it is easily trodden underfoot; on the plain it is with difficulty overcome; on the mountain our daily need supplies it with constant powers of resistance, so that it shall not be overcome.

He therefore who cuts off what is superfluous is trampling Seir in the valley. He who makes some reduction in necessary things is conquering Seir on the plain. But he who allows nature only just enough to keep her going renders obedience on Seir the mountain, as the more precise.¹

You must know, however, that where Seir is easily conquered, there it is most dangerous to let it be the master. But where it is absolutely unconquerable, it cannot be borne without danger.²

Come, and thou shalt pass over to Mount Seir and Hermon. Hermon means "his accursed one." Whose accursed one? The one accursed of the accursed himself, anathema of

1. Another difficult passage. *Qui autem ad sustentamentum tantum naturae necessaria tribuit, quasi Seir in monte exactiori obsequium reddit.* I do not understand the meaning of *exactiori* here. *Exigentiori*, more demanding, asking something that cannot be refused, would give some sense; but that is not the word!

2. Hugh next discusses the alternative reading of *Savir* for Seir, *Savir* meaning either "night-bird" or "stench." As this adds nothing to his exposition, I have left it out.

anathema, so to speak. So we must first consider the meaning of anathema, and then think why the genitive is added. Anathema is separation; anathema of anathema, therefore, means separation of separation. And may it be that which has been separated is evil, then it will be a good thing to be separated from the separated thing. But what could be better described as anathema, accursed, separation, than the apostate angel? For he through pride at the beginning separated himself from the fellowship of the heavenly city, having deserved this by his offence. And being cut off from the unity of that body, because he did not want to be a member of the Head, he thus became himself the head of all the wicked. But we know that, whereas every man is a member of this head according to his first begetting, whereby he is both conceived and born in sin, each one of the other hand who through the mysteries of faith has been reborn and made a member of Christ is separated from the unity of the aforesaid body. Anathema, the accursed, the separated, therefore denotes the devil and his members; but the anathema of anathema, the cursed of the cursed and the separated from the separated, are those who have been separated from the body of the devil and made the members of Christ.

That is the significance of Hermon. Now let us consider the meaning of *Mount Hermon*. For what we said just now of Seir is true of Hermon, too; some are the mountain, some the plain, and some the valley. Those can be called the valley of Hermon, who have indeed through faith been separated from the devil, yet through their carnal life lie prostrate still in very low desires. The plain of Hermon is the faithful who, keeping a certain mean, have neither been dragged to the depths through the lusts of the flesh, nor have the power to reach the heights through spiritual

converse. And the mountain of Hermon is those who have not only been separated from the devil by faith, but also through their outstanding virtue and their steadfastness of mind have risen up in active opposition to him. And these, who he sees to be not only separated from himself, but also risen up against him, are of a truth the ones whom the old enemy detests the most. It is these, therefore, these whom he perceives not only to have left him but to be fighting against him, whom he strives to crush by ceaseless persecution. So the more they show their individual hostility to the common enemy of all, the worse will be the tribulations that they often bear.

We cannot, therefore, give a better interpretation of Mount Seir than the austerity¹ of the saints, not of Mount Hermon than of their endurance.

It goes on, *from the lions' lairs*. How otherwise shall we interpret the lions' lairs than as fierceness asleep? And what is fierceness asleep, but the ruthless lust of the flesh, which delights its victims for the moment certainly, when they indulge it, but subsequently tortures them, through conscience first and then through punishment. Let Solomon tell you how the penalty of future condemnation "sleeps" in fleshly lust indulged.

*The lips of the harlot, he says,
Drop as a honeycomb,
and her mouth is smoother than oil.
But her latter things are bitter as wormwood,
and her tongue as sharp as a two-edged sword.*²

1. This seems the nearest we can get to *parsimonia*, and rather better than "frugality."

2. Pr 5:3f. A quotation from Pr 9:16–18 follows in the text, but it is so confused that I have left it out.

Again, the Lord says to blessed Job about the ancient enemy:

*He sleepth under the shadow,
in the covert of the reed,
and in the moist places. (Job 40:21)*

For the devil tarries in hearts that, being cold within for want of the warmth of divine love, are swimming outwardly in a stream of fleshly lusts; and the pleasures that seem mild enough while they are being indulged in will be felt as fierce afterwards, when they receive their punishment.

It goes on, *from the leopards' mountains*. A leopard is the offspring of a lion and a pard or panther. The lion is fierce and the panther is spotted. So if the lion because of its fierceness stands for the evil spirits, then the panther because of its diversity fittingly denotes the heretics, who by shattering the unity of the faith with their various distorted doctrines as it were defile the body with spots. Who are the leopards, then, but the proud lover of this present world, whom the devil first makes traitors to the faith through heretical teaching, and then inflames to vices through love of this world? *The leopards' mountains* are the riches and pomps of this world; they pride themselves on these, and rail the more bitterly at the life of the elect when they behold them brought low and themselves exalted in the world. Rightly, therefore, does the Bridegroom say to the bride,

*Come, and thou shalt pass over to Mount Seir and Hermon,
from the lions' lairs, from the leopards' mountains.*

And what is the force of “*from* the lions’ lairs” and “*to* Mount Seir”? Surely it means from lack of self-control to chastity, from self-indulgence to austerity. And what is the meaning of “*from* the leopards’ mountains” *to* Mount Hermon? Surely it means from pride to humility, and from fierceness to gentleness.

Observe, too, that He says “from the lairs” and “from the mountains” in the plural, but “to the mountain” in the singular. It is from the lairs to the mountain, and from the mountains to the mountain—that is, our progress is from the many to the One. For the more we try to draw near to God by fleeing the world, the more we are gathered together into the One. Which may He grant us evermore to be.

Amen.