

St. Theodore of Studium: SELECTED POEMS and LETTER TO THE POETESS CASIA

translated by Alice Gardner, 1905

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In translating Theodore's Iambics, I have merely attempted to give a general notion of the meaning and character of the pieces through the medium of English blank-verse, the accepted equivalent for this classical measure. In dealing with the Church hymns, I have endeavoured to follow as far as possible the metre of the original as to accents and number of syllables. The result is necessarily very inadequate, owing partly to the poverty of the English language in natural dactyls and anapaests.]

I.

IAMBICS TO THE DOORKEEPER

Be diligent, my child, and wait in fear
On this thy task. Here is God's entrance-gate.
Attend with caution, and with care reply.
Repeat and utter only what is fit.
Be silent on whate'er might evil work
To those within, without, our brethren here,
And strangers there. Open and shut with care.
Grant to the poor his boon. Or give good words.
Thus when thou goest hence, thy meed is sure.

TO THE KEEPER OF THE INFIRMARY

Oh blessed task, to bear the sick man's load!
That work is thine, my child. Then labour well,
In diligence and zeal to run thy course.
When daylight dawns, stand thou by every couch,
To minister to each with fitting words,
And then to bring the timely gift of food,
To each what suits him best, as reason bids;
Each one belongs to thee. Neglect him not,
Thus shall thy service reap a rich reward,
Light unapproachable, the joy of Heaven.

TO THE SEWERS OF LEATHER

A noble art is his who works the shoes,
'Tis like the Apostle's. Seek to emulate
The zeal of Paul, who sewed the leather skins.
Welcome the daily task appointed you
As Christ's own workmen, thinking still of Him.
Cut well the leather, follow well your art,
Make old things new, and work the new aright,
Throw nought away, and waste not by misuse,
In negligence, if all is not the best;

Nor cut too close, but find the proper mean.
Thus doing all things fitly, ye shall win
The race, accomplishing the martyr's course.

THE DORMITORY

O Thou who givest sleep, and ease from toil
To those whom daylight calls to labour still,
Grant Thou to me, O Christ, Thou Word of God,
Sleep light and gentle, swift to come and go,
And pure from fancy visions profitless,
But filled with dreams of all things fair and good.
Then rouse me up, what time the clapper sounds,
Alert and sober, fit for sacred song.
Set well my feet to praise Thee while I go,
From evil spirits keep my spirit free,
And purify my tongue to harmony,
To sing and magnify Thy glorious might;
That rising early after perfect rest
I may behold the light of Thy commands.

II. LITURGICAL POEMS

HYMN FOR THE BURIAL OF A MONK

Proemium

(Scansion different--probably an older verse adopted by Theodore)

Gone from things transitory, piously departed,
He rests in peace with the righteous ones.
O Christ, who art God,
E'en if as man he has sinned with us upon the earth,
Thou who art sinless, lay not to his charge
What he willingly did amiss
And what unwillingly;
So prays the Mother who bore Thee.
Thus may we join all our voices as we sing for him
Our Alleluia.

Troparion I

[Irmos by Romanus the Melodist]

Passing strange is the sight and the mystery
For he breathes not, my comrade of yesterday,
And the voice that was speaking it speaketh not,
And the eye that beheld, it beholdeth not.
Each of his members is silenced.
His decree hath God sent out against him as 'tis written,
And no more will he come to his place of old,
Where we mortals are singing and sounding the strain
Our Alleluia.

Troparion II

As a son of the day thou art gone afar,
But for us there are tears for the loss of thee,
As we think of the graces adorning thee,
All thy love, all thy zeal, all thy gentleness.
We keep thy glories in our memory.
On thy shoulders thy cross didst thou carry still in patience,
And didst follow the Lord on thy earthly way,
Wherefore come, and to God let us sound forth the strain,
Our Alleluia.

Troparion III

Tell me now, worthy friend, what I ask of thee,
Tell me where thou dost dwell who art snatched away?
With what souls has thy lot been appointed thee?
Hast risen to the regions celestial?
Hast thou attained to the things thou hopedst for?
Hast thou found an abode in the shining light?
O tell me Where the choirs of the living make melody,
As the shout of their triumph goes up to the Lord,
Their Alleluia.

Troparion IV

For thy voice it was pleasant to hearken to,
Thy converse was gentle and courteous,

Thou wert brother beloved of the brotherhood,
Loving good, hating evil, and pitiful;
The truth thou spokest in sincerity,
With no craft in thy tongue to resist the Lord's commandment.
But on all men thy face looked in kindness,
And for this he will love thee who sings to the Lord
His Alleluia.

Troparion V

Thou hast gone through thy conflict of holiness,
Thou hast finished thy course in obedience,
Thou hast passed through the trenches, O valiant one,
Of all lustful desire thou art conqueror,
And to shame hast thou put the Evil One,
And in meekness thy neck hast thou bowed beneath thy shepherd,
And excelled in thy humble obedience,
And for this will he love thee who sings to the Lord
His Alleluia.

Troparion VI

Yet we seem in the spirit to look on thee,
And to see thee as still with us sojourning,
When together we joined in our harmony,
Working our God-given work in piety;
Work that delighted all our hearts to do;
And we fervently long for thee our sometime companion,
But our wishes are vain, for we find thee not,
With whom fain would we sing as we raise to the Lord
Our Alleluia.

Troparion VII

For a dream is our life and a vanity,
This thou knewest, for God had instructed thee,
Thou hast left thy parents at his word to thee.
And thy bretheren and companions and family,
So great was thy desire for the Lord himself,
All the world and its glory didst thou esteem as nothing,
And instead thou hast life for eternity,
And for this he will love thee who sings to the Lord
His Alleluia.

Troparion VIII

Yet thou seemest to speak to us hearkening,
"O my brothers attend to the word I say
'Tis the hour, come and fight while the strife is on,
Now is the day, there is work to do
Now ere the stadium is closed to you,
O beloved, give diligence Belial to conquer,
That the glory from Christ may redound to you,
And a song shall ye sing to the praise of the Lord,
Your Alleluia.

Troparion IX

"O how pleasant the life ye have chosen you!
O how sweet'tis to dwell in a brotherhood!
For the Saviour himself has commended it,
When he spake by King David in psalmody.
Rejoice then, bretheren, in all joyfulness
In obeying your shepherd and each one loving other,
And your passions send far and spurn away,
That your song may resound with the praises of God
Your Alleluia.

Troparion X

"Yet a word would I say in farewell to you,
O my brothers, no longer you look on me,
And my voice never more shall be heard of you,
Till the Judge gives his sentence concerning me.
That day so terrible when we mortals
Shall present ourselves trembling before the throne Eternal,
Whence each soul shall receive all its recompense,
And the living shall sound forth the praises of God,
Their Alleluia.

Troparion XI

"Great the terror and fear all surrounding you,
Hasten then, wait not, zealously all of you,

In obedience ever directing you,
Let the law be your rule and accomplish it.
For Satan lurketh like a lion hid,
And he roars as he seeks for the prey of spirits living,
By hardness with meekness rise victorious, --
That ye all may sound forth to the praise of the Lord
Your Alleluia."

Troparion XII

We have heard all the things thou hast said to us:
Since to thee has the Ruler seemed pitiful,
For us all do thou evermore supplicate,
That receiveing instruction we go our way,
And fight and labour in all discipline,
That our shepherd may bear his rule over us in wisdom
And that God may give grace to us each and all,
That we all may sound forth to the praise of the Lord
Our Alleluia.

ON THE CRUCIFIXION

Triodion, for Friday of the Third Week in Lent

'Twas a skull the name had given
To the place where they crucified thee, Christ,
The Jews; their heads they wagged at thee
In laughter and in contumely.
Thou didst endure it,
To deliver us all.

On the Cross they wrote a title,
And the tongues of the superscription three;
On Thee, one of the Trinity.
And Thou must suffer, Pilate said,
As thou wert willing,
To deliver us, Christ.

Of the Trinity in Glory
The triple light the faithful shall adore.
As Light the Father worshipping,
As Light the Son they glorify,
As Light the Spirit
They proclaim in their song.

HYMN FOR SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY (from the Triodion)

Part of a Canon

Day of terror, I behold Now
Thine appearance, glory unuttered,
Fearfully I look for the judgment to come,
Now Thou art enthroned
Quick and dead will now be judged,
Lord God who art omnipotent.

When Thou comest, O my God,
There will be Thousands, there will be myriads,
Princes of the Heavens in attendance on Thee;
And me wilt Thou summon.
I must come before Thy face
O Christ in all my wretchedness.

Come and take to thee, my soul,
Take all the terror, think of the judgement,
When we all shall see that the Lord is at hand,
Lament in thy mourning;
Thus in purity be found,
And bear the test appointed thee.

Now the fear doth quell my soul
Of fires of Hell that never are quenched,
Worm that doth not die, and the gnashing of teeth.
But save and deliver
And appoint to me, O Christ,
A place with Thine elected ones.

'Tis Thy voice, ever adored,
Which doth Thy saints to their glory summon
Joyfully; that voice shall I hear, even I,
The feeble one, finding
Of the Kingdom in the Heavens
The blessedness unspeakable.

Enter not, I would beseech,
In judgment, reckoning my transgressions,

Searching all my words, taking court of intents;
But remembering mercy,
Overlooking all my faults
Save me, O Thou Omnipotent.

III. LETTER TO THE POETESS CASIA

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The friendly relations of Theodore with the celebrated poetess, Casia, are much what we might expect, considering the great respect in which Theodore was held by many pious Byzantine ladies, and also the resemblance of their tastes and styles in religious poetry. At the same time, the subject presents several difficulties. Almost all that can be told about Casia is put together in a most interesting article, by Dr. Krumbacher, published in the -Sitzungsberichte- of the Bavarian Academy for 1897, which contains copious selections from her poems. Dr. Krumbacher places the birth of Casia about the year 810, so that she would be about sixteen at the time of Theodore's death, and the letter would seem to come very naturally from an old and revered friend to a clever and literary young girl. The text is not throughout perfectly clear, but may be roughly translated as follows.]

"You have again favoured us, most honoured Madam, with writings so able and so learned as to fill us with admiration and with thankfulness to the Lord. Especially as all this wisdom is found in a quite youthful maiden! I cannot say that you have attained to the standard of the ancients, for we of the present time, both men and women, fall far short of our predecessors in knowledge and in skill. But among those of to-day, you shine pre-eminent. Your speech is beautiful beyond all temporal beauty, and what is yet more excellent, your life accords with your speech, and in neither is there any uncertainty of foot. If indeed you desire in the present persecution to suffer for Christ, you are not one who, after one chastisement, becomes impatient, and unable to support the burning passion of a good confession (in which may you ever be preserved). For you know assuredly that nothing is so fair or so joyful as to suffer for the truth and to abound in sufferings. Gold and silver, fame and luxury, all that seems to be desired of earthly goods, is in reality of no worth. It is but a flowing stream, a vision, a shadow.

Your choice of the monastic life comes, you say, from the persecution. This is not strange to me, though it may seem strange. Why so? Each one judges of what is to come from what has gone before, and conversely. If there is smoke, there has been fire; if there has been confession of Christ, the desire for monastic perfection will shine forth. You are happy in respect of both. But do not look for consecration from me -- who am a sinner -- but from that hand the imposition of which will sanctify you. I would send many greetings to her who has brought you forth again into the light of truth, the Mother of your day. I have received her presents and yours, and consecrate them as a gift to the Lord by thanksgiving, praying for you both. Of a truth I am burdensome to you, but you shall be relieved from your spiritual burden by Him who taketh away the sin of the world."

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The St. Pachomius Orthodox Library, July/August 1995 O Lord, remember Thy servants the Lady Casia, the translator Alice, and the scribes George, Alexia, Demetrios, Matthew, Michael, Norman, Edward and Mariette.

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THE END, AND TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

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