

Death of St. Mary of Egypt (April 2)

From Ælfric's Lives of Saints

The most praiseworthy conversion, both in deeds and in morals, and the great repentance, and the very valiant conflict of the venerable Mary of Egypt, and how she fulfilled her life-time in the desert, all this did Paul, the venerable deacon of the church of holy Neapolis, translate from the Greek language into Latin.

Verily it is read, that Raphael the archangel was speaking to Tobit, after the loss of his eyes, and again after their glorious enlightenment, and after the past dangers from which he was delivered, thus saying: 'Truly it is very harmful that the secrets of mankind be revealed; and again it is a great disgrace for the soul that one should conceal the glorious works of God.

For these reasons I will in no wise be silent concerning the holy records. He hath made known to me that I may fall into the disgraceful sentence of the slothful servant, who hid the talent received from his Lord, without increase, in the earth; but let no man be too unbelieving in me, when writing about those things, which I have heard and learnt by enquiry in this wise ; may it never be that I should falsify the holy narratives or keep silence from speech.

Account of the Above-named Saint

There was a certain man in a minster in the country of Palestine; he was greatly graced by his conduct in life, and was from childhood highly instructed and learned in monastic customs, and was named Zosimus. This man verily, as I said before, lived from the beginning in a minster in Palestine, and he had become the most approved in works of self-denial, and in all the monastic rules. And he blamelessly observed all the directions of the rule, and the perfection of the monastic service, and added similar practices for himself thereto, because he desired to subject his flesh to the spirit. So truly was he perfected in all monastic customs, that very often monks came to him from distant places, and from [other] minsters, that they might bind themselves to his example and to his lore, and subject themselves to the imitation of his self-denial. He kept all these customs in himself, and he never turned away his mind from the meditation of the Holy Scriptures.

And all the goodnesses which he practised, he practised in the spirit, and one work he kept unceasingly and never tired of; that was psalm-singing, praise, and meditation on Holy Scripture. Very often also, according to what they said, he was made to be worthy of the divine illumination through a revelation from God of the heavenly vision, so that [it is] neither a wonder, nor eke an incredible thing, concerning those whom the Lord Himself said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, because they shall see God.'

So much the more shall those behold the openness of the divine enlightenment, who ever cleanse their bodies by sober habits, and by a mind ever awake to receive hereafter the future meed in the eternal blessedness; even as Zosimus himself said, that he himself had been committed to the minster from his mother's womb; and until his three and fiftieth year he was dwelling there under the rule, and after this

he was assaulted by certain thoughts, as if [supposing that] he were perfected in all things, and needed not in his mind the example of any more teaching ; and he was thus speaking — ' whether there can be any monk on earth who can teach me anything new, or advance me in any thing of which I myself know nothing, or that I have not myself fulfilled in monastic works; or whether there be any of those who love the desert, who can be before me in his deeds."

Thinking these [things], and others like to these within himself, there stood before him an angel and said to him, ' Oh, thou Zosimus! very well-pleasingly hast thou done; nevertheless there is no man that showeth himself perfect. Much greater is the conflict which is before thee than that which is passed, though thou know it not; but that thou mayest perceive and understand how great are other ways of salvation, go out of thy native country and come to the minster that is placed near Jordan.' Then, verily, he departed immediately from that minster wherein he had lived from his childhood, and came to Jordan, the holiest of all waters; he went then within the minster to which the angel had directed him. Then began he first to speak to the monk who kept the minster-gate, and he made him known to the abbot, and brought him to him.

Then after the performance of prayer, as is the custom with monks, he said to him, 'When camest thou hither, brother, or for what reason hast thou joined thyself to such humble monks?'

Zosimus answered him, ' There is no need for me, father, to tell thee whence I come; but I have sought you here for the sake of learning, because I have heard of many spiritual habits here amongst you, such as are wellpleasing to God beyond expression.'

The abbot said to him, ' God, who alone preserveth and healeth so many infirmities, strengthen thee and us in His divine commands, and direct us to perform those works which please Him. No man may edify another unless he frequently look to himself, and unless he be himself working with sober mind, having God for a witness. Nevertheless, because thou hast said that Christ's true love brought thee hither to us, to seek us as a humble monk; now dwell here with us if thou camest for that purpose, and may the Good Shepherd feed us all together with the grace of the Holy Ghost.'

At these words thus spoken by the abbot, Zosimus bowed his knees; and, after the performance of prayer, dwelt in the minster, where he saw verily all the elders shining in manners and deeds, fervent in spirit, and serving the Lord; where was unceasing steadfastness in God's praise every day, and also by night. And there were never useless speeches there, nor thought of gold and silver, or of other treasures; nor even was the name [of them] recognised amongst them; but this alone was most earnestly striven for by them all, that each of them should be dead in body and living in spirit.

At the same time they had verily an unfailling [custom], that is to say, divine conversations. Their bodies indeed they fed with mere necessaries alone, viz. with bread and water, to the end that they might show themselves the keener in the true love of God. Zosimus beholding these works applied himself zealously to perfection among his fellow-workers, who renewed without ceasing the divine Paradise.

Then after this approached the time of the holy Lenten fast which is appointed for all Christian men to celebrate, and for cleansing themselves for the worship of the divine Passion, and His resurrection. Now

the gate of the minster was never opened, but it was always locked, and they thus fulfilled their course without any distraction; neither was it ever to be opened, unless by chance any monk went out for any necessity. The place was so desert (lonely) and so secret, that it was not only that it was unfrequented, but even unknown to the people of the country themselves; in this wise the rule was kept from old times, and on account of these works it is to be believed that God led Zosimus to the minster. Now after this, I will relate how the ordinance of the minster was being kept.

On the Lord's day of the first fastingweek, which we name Holy Day, the Divine Mysteries were customarily celebrated there, and then they received the communion of the living and undefiled body of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then after that, after breaking their fast together in some degree, they were all gathered in the house of prayer with bended knees and humble prayer, and greeted each other, and humbly besought their abbot's blessing, that they might be the more surely strengthened for the divine conflict. These things being thus fulfilled, the gates of the minster were opened, and they then sung together this canticle, [Ps. 27], Dominus illuminatio mea et solus mea; quem timebo.

And thus they went out together; one or two they left in the minster, [but] it was not to the end that they should keep safe the acquired treasures — there was no such thing there — but that they might not leave the house of prayer without divine solemnities; and each of them fed himself even as he could or would: some bare with them a sufficiency for the body, some apples of the palm-trees [dates], some beans moistened with water, some nothing save the body alone and the garment, but they were fed with [that which] might wait upon the necessity of nature, that is. with the herbs which grew in the desert; and there each one bound himself in self-denial, even as it seemed well to him, so that none of them knew the ways or deeds of others. When they had gone over the river Jordan, then each one sundered himself far from the others, and none of them joined himself again to his companions; but if any of them saw another afar [coming] towards him, immediately he turned out of his [chosen] direction, and went another way, and lived by himself, and continued in perpetual prayers and fastings.

Verily after accomplishing the fast in this manner, they returned again to the minster before the Lord's resurrection-day, that is to say, on the festival which we commonly call Palm-day; each one had within himself, in his own conscience, the witness of his own labour, as to what he was employed in, and the seeds of what labours he was sowing; and none of them asked another in what wise he had fulfilled the conflict of the labour. Verily this was the rule of the minster, and thus perfectly was each one preserved, as I before said, so that he joined himself to God in the desert; and they fought with themselves in order that they might not please men, but only God Himself.

Then verily Zosimus, according to the customary law of the minster, went over the river Jordan, having with him a very little for the necessities of the body; and in the observance of his rule went across the desert, taking at due time a meal, and [supplying] the necessity of nature, sitting at night upon the earth, and resting little; and he slept wheresoever the close of evening found him.

And again, in the early morning, [he kept] proceeding on his journey as he was unceasingly determined, and going about, because he desired, as he said afterwards, to meet a father in the desert who might edify him in some thing which he himself knew not before.

And thus for six and twenty days he continued his journey, as if he were certainly going towards some man. When the hour of noon approached, he stopped for some time, abstaining from the journey, and turning eastwards; and prayed in the usual way, because he was accustomed at a fixed hour of the day to determine the course of his journey, and to sing standing, and to pray with bended knees. Whilst then he sang, and with fervent regard looked up and beheld the sky, then he saw on his right side, as he stood in prayer, as if some one was appearing to him in the likeness of a human form bodily, and thereupon he was at first much affrighted, because he thought it was a delusion of an [evil] spirit which he there saw. But nevertheless he instantly fortified himself with the sign of Christ's rood, and cast away his fear from him. Then also the end of his prayer was indeed fulfilled; he turned his eyes, and there actually saw a person hastening westwards in the desert, and in truth it was a woman that was visible there; she was very swart of body by reason of the sun's heat, and the locks of her head were as white as wool, and they [reached] no farther than to the neck.

Zosimus was on this wise earnestly beholding, and on account of the [long] desired sweetness of the glorious vision he ran very quickly, being rendered glad, in the direction whither he had seen that hastening which had there appeared to him. Truly before, in all those days, he had seen no human appearance, neither the form of any beasts or of birds or of wild animals; and he therefore ran eagerly, desiring to know what manner of wild creature that might be which appeared to him. Verily as soon as Zosimus saw her, then, overcoming his old age, and making nothing of the labour of his journey, he ran on advancing with a very swift course, because he desired to associate with that which there fled away; for he was pursuing her, and she was fleeing.

Then was Zosimus, by his running, in some measure made nearer. When he was so near that she could hear his voice, then began he to send forth such a voice as this, with loud calling, and thus said, weeping, 'Why fleest thou me, an aged sinner, thou servant of God? Wait for me, for the hope of the reward for which thou hast so greatly toiled. Stand and give me the blessing of thy prayer, through the God who rejecteth no man from Him.' These words Zosimus verily pronounced with tears.

Then came she, running, to a certain place, in which were signs as it were of a dried up burn [stream]; when they had come thither, then she shot into the burn, and again up on the other side.

Then Zosimus crying aloud, and in no direction advancing forwards, stood there on the other side of the burn which was there visible, and added tears to tears, and multiplied sighs upon sighs, so that nothing was heard there save the lamentation of mourning.

Then indeed the figure which fled there sent forth this voice and thus spake, 'Thou, Abbot Zosimus, have pity on me for God's sake, I pray thee, because I cannot show myself to thee and turn towards thee; for I am a person of female sex, and totally bereaved of bodily clothing, even as thou thyself seest, and having the shame of my body uncovered. But if thou desirest to grant me, a poor evil-doer, thy salutary prayers, then cast me hither thy mantle with which thou art clothed, that I may cover my womanly weakness, and turn to thee and receive thy prayers.'

Then indeed a great awe and fright seized Zosimus, because he heard her name him by his name, whom she had never before seen, nor had ever heard tell it before, except that he manifestly perceived that she was enlightened with divine foreknowledge. Then he confidently did even as she had prayed him, ungirded the mantle with which he was clothed, and, turning his back, threw it to her. This she then received, and covered her body, and girded herself about the part that she most required to do, and [which there] was most need to conceal.

Then she turned to Zosimus and said to him, ' Why hadst thou, oh Abbot Zosimus, so great need to see me, a sinful woman, or what desirest thou to have from me or to know, that thou hast not slacked to perform so great labour on my account?'

Then he straightway prostrated himself on the earth, and besought her blessing; she in turn prostrated herself and besought his blessing.

Then after the space of many hours the woman said to Zosimus, 'It befitteth thee, Abbot Zosimus, to pray and to bless, because thou art authorised by the sacerdotal dignity, and thou preachest Christ's mysteries with the gifts of divine things, serving at his holy altar for many years.'

These words verily brought upon Zosimus great awe and fright, and he trembled, and was suffused with drops of sweat. Then he began to sigh as if utterly weakened and choked in his breath, and thus said, 'Oh thou spiritual mother, reveal now who thou art in that appearance, because thou art verily God's handmaiden. Intercede for me now, [thou who art] rendered dead to the younger portion as regards this world; herein appeareth in thee the divine love most of all, that thou hast named me by name whom thou never before sawest. But because grace is not discovered by (personal) merit, but [its] wont is to be witnessed by the soul's deeds; bless thou me for the Lord's sake, I pray thee, and give me the prayer, never to be taken away, of thy perfection.'

Then she began to sympathise with the wise old man's steadfastness, and said, 'God be blessed who taketh care for the salvation of souls.'

Then she gave Zosimus [her blessing, he] answering, ' Amen.'

Then they both arose from the earth. Then began the woman again to speak to the old man, and thus said: 'Oh man, for what purpose camest thou to me, a sinner? Nevertheless, since the grace of the Holy Ghost has directed thee so that thou mayest perform some small service to the advantage of my poor body, tell me how, now-a-days, Christ's people are governed in the world, and how the emperor's [matters stand]; or how the flock of Christ's right-believing congregation is now pastured.'

Zosimus answered her: 'Oh thou holy mother, God hath granted permanent peace to thy holy prayers. [But fulfil the consolation of an unworthy] monk, and for the Lord's sake [pray for the] world and for me, a sinful man, that the toil of this journey may not be [rendered vain] to me, and the way over so much desert.'

[Then said she:] 'It becometh thee, abbot Zosimus, to pray for me and for all, because that [thou art in the priesthood, as I before said. [But for thy sake] and because we have the command of obedience, [that which is commanded me by thee] I will do with a good will.'

And thus saying, she, [having turned to the east,] with eyes uplifted towards heaven and with her arms stretched out, began to pray with the motions of her lips in silence, so that no voice at all was heard that anyone could perceive; and thus Zosimus could not understand anything of the prayer.

He stood indeed, as he himself said, trembling and looking down upon the earth, and speaking nothing at all. He swore verily, taking God as a witness to his words, that while she thus [continued] in the perseverance of her prayer, and he lifted up his eyes a little while from the earth, that he saw her lifted up, as it were the space of a man's ell, above the earth, and began to pray hanging in the air. When he saw this, he was seized with great fright, and prostrated himself on the earth, and was suffused with sweat and vehemently agitated. He durst not speak anything, save only, to himself, ['Lord, have mercy upon me']. Whilst then he lay prostrate on the earth, he [was troubled in his mind, considering whether] at all it might be a spirit that, by some strange appearance, was praying there.

She then, I mean the woman, turned about and lifted up the monk, thus saying: 'Why dost thou trouble thy thoughts to take offence at me, as if I were some spirit praying deceitfully? But know, thou man, that I am a sinful woman, though endued, nevertheless, with holy baptism; and I am no spirit, but embers and ashes, and all flesh, and [having no spiritual appearance.'

When she had thus said], she blessed her face with the holy sign of the cross, and she fortified her eyes and lips and even her breast with the sign of blessing, and thus said: 'God deliver us. Abbot Zosimus, from our adversary and from his instigations, because that great is his spite against us.'

The old man, hearing these words, prostrated himself, [and seized her feet, saying with tears: 'I conjure thee, by the Lord Jesus Christ, our true Lord, who condescended to be born of a virgin, for whose sake thou hast wasted this thy flesh, to hide nothing from thy servant, as to who thou art, and whence, and when or for what reason thou didst first dwell in this solitude; but tell me all things about thyself, that thou mayest make manifest the wondrous doings of God. For as to hidden wisdom and a hidden treasure, what use is there in either, as it is written? Tell me everything for God's sake; for thou wilt not say anything for vainglory or ostentation, but to satisfy me, who am a sinner and unworthy. For I trust in God, for whom thou livest and with whom thou hast converse, that for this very cause I was directed to this wilderness, that God might make manifest the things concerning thee. For it is not in our power to resist the judgments of God. Unless it had been acceptable to Christ the Lord to make known both thee and thy strivings, He would neither have permitted thee to be seen by any one, nor would He have strengthened me to set out on so long a journey, who was not able to travel anywhere, nor strong enough to walk beyond my cell.'

Chap. XII.

Whilst he was speaking thus, and saying other things besides, the woman lifted him up, and said: "Of a truth I blush — pardon me, father abbot — to tell thee the vileness of my deeds; yet, since thou hast seen my body naked, I will also lay bare to thee the very performances of my deeds, that thou mayest know how replete is my soul with vile lechery and shame of confusion. For, as thou hast thyself truly supposed, I do not wish to tell the things concerning myself out of any vainglory. For of what shall I be able to boast, who was made a vessel of election by the devil himself? For I know that, if I begin to narrate] all the things concerning me, thou wilt soon flee from me in the manner in which a man may flee from an adder, Nevertheless, I will relate all to thee, concealing nothing, and will first of ail pray thee, that thou wilt not grow weary of praying for me, that I may merit and meet with at least some share of mercy in the day of judgment.'

The old man, suffused with tears, began to weep bitterly. Then began the woman to tell and relate all the things that had happened to her, thus saying:

I had a brother and a home in Egypt, and there dwelt with my relatives. Then, in the twelfth year of my age, I began to despise their love and betook myself to the city of Alexandria. But I am ashamed to recount now how at the outset I first polluted my virginity, and how ceaselessly and insatiably I [gave myself up] to sins, and continued in subjection to sinful lusts. It must now indeed be told briefly; yet I now the rather tell of them, that thou mayest perceive the unlawful burning of my misdeeds that I felt in my love of fornication.

But pity me, abbot; even for seventeen years I openly surpassed a number of people, continuing in the desire of fornication. Neither did I lose my virginity for any man's presents, nor would I indeed receive anything from any one who desired to give me somewhat; but I was greatly excited with the heat of sinful lust, so that I desired that they would come to me in greater numbers without any price, to the end that I might the more easily satisfy my culpable desires for wicked living. Nor do thou suppose that I would receive anything for any world's wealth, but ever lived in poverty, because I had, as I said before, insatiable desires, so that I ceaselessly polluted myself in the puddle of wicked adultery, and this was my misery; and this I accounted as life, that I might thus ceaselessly fulfil the vexations of the flesh..

Whilst thus lived, I saw at a certain season a great multitude of Africans and Egyptians running together as it were towards the sea. Then I suddenly met one of them, and asked him whither he supposed that the multitude desired to hasten. He answered me, and spake thus, saying, that they wished to go to Jerusalem out of reverence for the Holy Rood, which should receive due honour not many days afterward. Then said I to him: "Thinkest thou that they will take me too, if I wish to go with them? "

Then said he: "If thou hast the passage-money, none of them will refuse you."

Then said I to him: "Brother, verily I have no passage-money to give; but I wish to go and embark in one of the ships, and they shall support me, though they do not wish it; and I will entrust

myself to them; and let them have my body at their pleasure for the passage-money, that they may the more readily receive me." Pity me, abbot, because I desired to go with them, that I might have the more associates in the passion of my desires. I said before to thee, "pity me, thou 'holy man;" in order that thou shouldst not compel me to recount my shame. God knoweth that I fear my own words, because I know that these words of mine pollute both thee and the very air.'

Zosimus indeed, bedewing the earth with his tears, said to her: 'Ah, thou spiritual mother, say on, I pray thee, for God's sake, and be not silent as to the sequel of so sanctifying a history.'

And then she said thus: 'The young man soon heard the shamefulness of my words, and departed from me, laughing. Thereupon I soon cast from me the flax-stick [better, spindle] which I was seldom wont to have in my hands, and ran to the sea, where I saw them assembled. Then I saw ten young men standing together on the shore, sufficiently comely in body and in demeanour, and very suitable, methought, for my bodily lust. Then I shamelessly, as I was wont, went amongst them, and said to them: "Take me with you on your voyage; I shall not be displeasing to you." And I soon excited them all to wicked vices and shameful jestings, with many other filthy and lewd expressions. Then they, seeing my shameless behaviour, took me with them in their ship, and rowed away.'

Oh, Zosimus, how can I relate to you, or what tongue may say, or what ear hear, the evil deeds that took place upon the voyage, and that were done in the passage; and how I compelled to sin both the wretches who were willing and the wretches who gave me money. There is no description of lewdness, utterable or unutterable, which I did not allure to and teach, and first performed. Be now satisfied with this; for I wonder how the sea could suffer and endure my unrighteous desires, or how the earth at any rate did not open her mouth, and sink me all alive down into hell, who led so many souls into the snare of perdition, except that I suppose God sought my repentance. He who suffereth none to perish, but saveth all who believe upon Him. For verily He desireth not the death of the sinner, but patiently expecteth his conversion.

Thus we, with great haste, journeyed on to Jerusalem; and as many days as I lived in the city before the day of the festival [of the Rood], I associated myself with similar, and even worse, foul deeds. I did not restrict myself to the young men who associated with me on the sea or on the journey, but I also gathered together many of the strangers and citizens in the deeds of my sins, and betrayed and contaminated them.

When the festival of the elevation of the precious Rood arrived, I went before the young men, as before, enticing them to the snare of perdition. Then indeed I saw them all run with one accord to the church early in the morning. Then began I to run with the runners, and together with them endeavoured to arrive before the temple. When the time came for reverencing the Holy Rood, then I began violently to push among the people against the people, and so with much toil I, poor wretch, arrived at the temple-door with those who were entering therein. When I ought to have entered at the door, the rest began to enter without any hindrance; but the

divine might prevented me from going in, and I was soon thrust out from amid all the people, until I stood behind alone in the vestibule.

Then I began to think that this had happened to me on account of my womanly want of strength, and so I began once more to mix myself with others, that I might somehow push my way in. But I toiled in vain, whenever I touched the threshold of the doors. And they were all received therein without any hindrance, when I alone was pushed out. Just as if some strong company of men opposed me to prevent my entrance, so the sudden vengeance of God barred the door to me, until I was again standing in the vestibule of the temple.

Thus thrice or four times I endeavoured to behold and also to fulfil my will; and when I in no wise succeeded, then I began to think earnestly about it, and my body was extremely wearied by the compulsion of the pressure.

Then, verily, I departed thence, and stood alone in a corner of the vestibule, and earnestly deliberated in my mind, and considered for what cause the sight of the quickening tree was denied me. Then indeed a knowledge of salvation touched my mind and the eyes of my heart, while pondering with myself that the filthiness of my misdeeds had closed the entrance against me.

Then I began to weep bitterly, and in great sorrow to beat my breast, and sighing from my inmost heart to bring forth sorrowful sobbings. Then from the place where I stood I beheld the likeness of the holy Mother of God standing there; and I eagerly spake to her, without turning away from beholding her, and saying:

Oh! thou glorious lady, who according to the birth of the flesh didst bear the true God, well I wot that it is not fitting nor meet that I, who am so grievous a sinner, should behold thy form, and should pray with looks that have been so repeatedly polluted. Thou wast ever known as a virgin, keeping thy body pure and undefiled; wherefore indeed it is very right that I who am so foul should be separated and cast out from thy pure virginity. Nevertheless, inasmuch as I have heard that the God whom thyself barest was made man for that very reason, that He might call sinners to repentance, assist me now, who am desolate and deprived of any help. Permit me and give me leave to open the entrance of thy holy church, that I may not be exiled from the sight of the precious Rood on which the Saviour of all the earth was fastened, whom thou, a virgin, didst conceive and, still a virgin, didst bear, who poured out His own blood for my redemption. But command now, O glorious lady, that for me, unworthy though I be, the doors may be unclosed to let me greet the divine Rood, and I will give myself up to thee and choose thee for my protector against thine own Son; and I promise you both that I will never hereafter pollute my body with the dire lust of evil fornication; but, as soon as I see the Rood of thy Son, O holy virgin, I will thereupon forsake this world and its deeds with all things that are therein; and will afterwards go whithersoever thou dost advise me to go for my protection.

Thus saying, I was led by the fervour of belief, and touched with faith, and being made bold by the pity of the worthy mother of God, I stirred myself from the place where I said this prayer, and again mingled with those who were entering.

After this there was nothing to push me out or to keep me from the temple-door; and so I entered with those who were entering. Then indeed a strong terror seized me, and I was all trembling and troubled, as I again approached the door that before was fastened against me; just as if all the force that had formerly debarred me from entering the door had afterwards assisted my entrance in advancing. Thus was I filled with spiritual mysteries within the temple, and I was considered worthy to pray for the mysteries of the honoured and quickening Rood. Then I beheld there the mysteries of the holy God, how He is ever ready to receive the repentant. Then I cast myself forward on the floor, and kissed the sacred earth. As I went out, I again arrived at the place whence I before saw the holy mother's likeness, and bent my knees before the holy presence, saying these words:

Oh, thou most benign lady, who hast shewn me thy gracious mercy, and didst not cast from thee my unworthy prayers, I have seen the glory that we sinners by our merits never behold; glory be to Almighty God, who through thee receiveth the sorrow and repentance of sinners and misdoers. What more can I, a despairing wretch, think or tell of? Now is the time to perform and fulfil, as I before said, thy favourable protection. Direct me now in the way that thou wilt; let an evident guide to salvation and a teacher of truth now appear to me, going before me in the way that leadeth to amendment.

While I thus spoke, I heard a voice calling afar off: "If thou wilt pass over the river Jordan, there thou shalt experience and find good rest."

When I heard this voice, and understood that it was uttered on my account, I spake with weeping, looking towards the likeness of the holy mother of God, and saying: "O lady, queen of all the earth, through thee came salvation to all mankind; do not forsake me."

Thus saying, I went out from the vestibule of the temple, and went hastily onward. Then I met a certain man who gave me three pence, wherewith I bought for myself three loaves, which I considered sufficient subsistence as provision for my journey. Then I asked the man of whom I bought the loaves, which was the way that led most directly towards the river Jordan. As soon as I knew about the way, I ran continually, still weeping, upon my journey, continually adding enquiry to enquiry; and so fulfilled the day's journey weeping. Verily it was the under-tide of the day when I [first] desired to see the holy worshipful Rood; and now the sun was declining towards its setting, and the even-tide approached.

Then I arrived at the church of St. John the Baptist, built beside the Jordan, and went in thither, and there prayed. Soon after, I went down into the river Jordan and washed my hands and face with the holy water, and then participated in the quickening and pure mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ in the same church of St. John, the holy forerunner and baptist. There also I eat a

half part of one loaf, and drank of the water, and lodged there at night, and then, early in the morning, crossed over the river. Then began I to pray once more to my guide, the holy Mary, that she would direct me according to her will.

So came I into this wilderness, and until this present day I have kept apart thence [i.e. from the world], ever fleeing and awaiting my God, and rejoicing [in Him], who saves from the terror of this world all that turn to Him.'

Zosimus said to her: 'O my lady, how many years hast thou now dwelt in this wilderness?'

The woman answered him, 'It is seven and forty years, as I suppose, since I went forth from the holy city.'

Zosimus said to her: 'And what mightest thou find for thee to eat, or upon what food hast thou fed thee until now?'

She answered him: 'I brought hither two and a half loaves with me when I passed over Jordan; in no short time, they became dried up and hardened, like stone; and these I partook of, using them for some time.'

Zosimus said to her: 'And couldst thou pass through the length of so many seasons without loving the burning of fleshly inclination?'

She then, as if troubled, answered him: 'Now thou askest me of the things that I myself greatly dread, whenever all the perils that I underwent recur to my memory, and the foolish thoughts that often disturbed me, so that I again endure some misery from such thoughts.'

Zosimus said: 'Ah, lady, do not leave anything that thou wilt not tell me, but disclose all things in due order.'

Then said she: 'Abbot, believe me, for seventeen years I fought against the desires of the appetites of the gentle and irrational wild animals. When I began to hunger, then the flesh-meats came amongst my desires; I yearned for the fishes that were in Egypt; I longed for the wine, wherein I formerly delighted to indulge unto intemperance; and even now it is extremely among my desires, because I formerly indulged in it beyond measure when I was in the world. Even here I was extremely athirst on account of the want of water in this wilderness, scarcely enduring my terrible necessity. It was as if an excessive longing after wanton poems troubled me, when they brought it into my mind to sing the devilish song which I formerly learnt in the world; but thereupon I, weeping and knocking my breast with my hands, reminded myself of my promise and of the protection that I had before chosen; and so, transporting myself in my thoughts beyond this desert, I arrived before the likeness of the good and holy mother of God who for merly received me into her favour; and I prayed, weeping before her, that she would drive away from me the foul thoughts that vexed my miserable soul. Then indeed I wept, sorrowing excessively; and, severely beating my breast, I then beheld light shining all around me; and soon after a steadfast peace came to me. Pity me now, abbot; how can I tell thee my thoughts, since I dread to compel myself again to evil living, lest extreme fire should burn within my wretched body. And when I

perceived such thoughts arise within me, vexing me utterly unto the thought of uncleanness, then I prostrated myself upon the earth, and suffused my cheeks with tears, because that I had certainly trusted that I would resist them; so that I [would not rise again] from the earth, before the sweet voice in its usual manner lighted upon me, and drove away from me my troubled thoughts. Verily I continually raised the eyes of my heart to my security in trouble, praying her to support me in this wilderness unto a right repentance — her who bare the lord of all purity. And thus, during the course of seventeen years, I was striving in every way against manifold perils, as I before said, unto this present day, and the holy mother of God aided me and directed my ways.'

Zosimus said to her; ' And didst thou not want any means of subsistence or any clothing?'

She answered him and said: ' For seventeen years, as I said before, I made use of the loaves, and afterwards lived upon the roots that I found in this wilderness. The raiment indeed that I had when I passed over Jordan perished, being torn asunder by extreme oldness, and after that I suffered manifold miseries, at one time from the icy coldness of winter, and at another time from the immoderate scorching of the sun's heat. I was terribly parched by the excessive burning, and again by the extreme frosty coldness of the winter; so that I often came down upon the earth, and lay almost entirely motionless without spirit. Thus was I striving long and wrestling in manifold and various hardships and in extreme temptations; and afterwards, even to this present day, the divine might preserved me and my wretched soul and body; always considering with myself, from how many evils she had preserved me. Verily I am fed to the full with sufficient sustenance, that is to say, with the promise of my salvation; and I am clothed upon with the protecting garment of the word of God, who encloses and embraces everything. Verily man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of God's mouth.'

Then indeed Zosimus, hearing her utter the words of the holy scriptures, both of the Gospels and of many other books, said unto her: 'Ah, mother! didst thou ever learn the psalms or other holy writings?'

When she heard this, she glanced smilingly towards him and said: 'Believe me, I have never seen anyone but thee or wild beasts, nor creature of any kind since I passed over the water of Jordan and arrived hither in this wilderness; nor did I ever learn to read, nor ever listened to any of those people who pondered and read. But the word of God is quick and sharp, teaching this human intelligence within me. And this is now the end of those things that are accomplished concerning me. Now I beseech thee, entreating thee by the incarnate Word of God, to pray for me, a miserable sinner.'

When she had said this, the old man ran towards her with bent knees, to prostrate himself upon the earth, crying aloud with sorrowful tears: 'Blessed be God, who alone worketh manifold wonders; and blessed be thou, O Lord God, who hast shewn me the gloriousness that thou givest to them that dread Thee. Now I wot verily that Thou forsakest none of them that seek Thee.'

Then she, however, anticipated the old man, and suffered him not to prostrate himself fully upon the earth; but said to him, 'O man, thou hast heard these things. Behold I also beseech thee, by the Lord Jesus Christ our Redeemer, not to recount them to any man before God shall release me from the bonds of the flesh. But now that these things are disclosed, go home in peace. And I will again appear to thee,

within the space of a year, at this same season, and thou shalt see me. And do thou at least truly as I now bid thee: when the holy Lenten fast recurs in the coming year, do not pass over Jordan as men are wont to go from your minster.'

Then began Zosimus to wonder yet again, how she knew with such exactness the rule of the minster; and he said nothing more except that he praised God who in so many ways giveth to the men that love Him, when He is besought.

Then she spake again: ' Now, Zosimus, abide, as I said before, in thy minster; for verily, though thou shouldst desire to come hither sooner, thou mayest not. Then on the holy eve of the holy festival, that is to say, on the holy Thursday before the Lord's Easter-day, put into a sacred vessel a certain portion of the divine Body and of the life-giving blood, and bring it with thee, and wait for me on the side of Jordan pertaining to the world, until I come to thee to receive the quickening mysteries. Verily, since I partook of the Lord's Body and Blood in the church of His holy forerunner, before I crossed over Jordan, I have never since enjoyed or tasted the holy elements; wherefore I pray thee not to despise my request, but bring me at any rate the divine and life-giving mysteries at the hour when the Saviour distributed to His disciples the divine feast. Tell also John, the abbot of the minster in which thou art, diligently to take heed to himself and to his flock also, because that there are some customs there for him to set right and to improve. But I desire that thou wilt not tell him these things at this present time, before God bid thee.'

Thus saying, she also asked the old man for a prayer, and quickly hastened to the inner part of the wilderness.

Then Zosimus prostrated himself on the ground, kissing the spot on which her feet had stood, praising God, and giving many thanks; and so returned, praising and blessing our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he returned by the very same path through the wilderness whereby he had before come thither, and came to the minster at the very same hour, at which it was their custom of Easter to assemble together. All that year he was diligently silent about the vision, [not] daring to say any of the least things which he saw there, but continually and earnestly prayed to God in private, that He would again shew him the desired presence. With manifold sighs he awaited the slowness of the year's circuit.

When the holy season of the Lenten fast arrived, on the Lord's day which we call the Holy-Day , the brethren went abroad after the customary prayers and psalm-singings; and he himself was left in the minster, and there remained kept in by a bodily infirmity. Zosimus very readily called to mind the holy command, when she said to him that he would not be able to go out of his minster though he wished it. Nevertheless, not many days after, he recovered of the sickness, and served in the minster. Truly, when the monks returned home and assembled themselves together on the holy eve of the sacred day, then he did as was bidden him before, and put into a little cup some portion of the pure Body and of the precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and took in his hand a little basket filled with dried figs, and with the fruits of the palm-tree that we call finger-apples [dates], and a few lentils steeped in water, and arrived in the evening on the banks of the river Jordan, and there sorrowfully awaited the arrival of the holy woman, when she should come thither.

Zosimus in no wise slumbered, and earnestly looked towards the wilderness; and, considering with himself, thus thought and spake: ' Ah, what if she come here, and heed me not, and has turned from me, and gone back! ' Thus speaking he wept bitterly, lifting up his eyes to heaven, and humbly prayed to God, thus saying: ' O Lord, do not banish the vision that Thou didst before shew me, that I may not at any rate return hence in vain, bearing the reproach of my sins.'

As he was praying thus with tears, again another thought came into his mind: 'And how now if she cometh? How shall she cross over the river, now that there is no ship wherein she may come to me, who am unworthy? Ah! me miserable! me, who am banished from a vision so righteous!'

Whilst he thought thus, he saw where she stood on the other side of the stream. Zosimus seeing her, rose up with great and happy joy, and praising God. Nevertheless he doubted in his mind, how she should cross over the waters of Jordan. Then indeed he saw that she blessed the waters of Jordan with the sign of the cross of Christ; then the brightness of the moon illuminated all the darkness of the night, as soon as she dipped into the water with the sign of the cross.

So she went towards him, walking on the soft waves as if on dry land. Zosimus wondering and endeavouring to bend his knees before her, she began to cry aloud from the waters and to forbid him, and spake thus: 'What art thou doing, abbot? Know that thou art God's priest, and hast with thee the divine mysteries.'

He then, obeying her, at once rose up. As soon as she came off the water, she said to him: 'Father, bless me.'

Verily, extreme amazement came upon him at so wondrous a miracle, and he thus spake: 'Oh! thou truthful one, good is he who promises for those who early purify themselves to be like Himself; glory be to Thee, O Lord God, who has shewn me, by means of this Thy handmaid, how much, by my own perception, I [fail] in the measure of the perfection of others.'

Then, she, Mary, begged that she might begin the true prayer of belief, that is to say, *credo in deum*; and, after that, the Lord's Prayer, the *pater-noster*. These ended, she gave the old man the kiss of peace, as the custom is, and then received the holy mysteries, Christ's Body and Blood, with extended hands; and, looking up to heaven, and mourning with tears, thus spake: 'Lord, now let thy handmaid depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.'

Again she said to the old man: 'Pity me, abbot, and now fulfil the second request of my prayer; go now straightway to thy minster with God's peace; and come again, in about a year's space, to the bourn where we first spake to each other. I pray thee, for God's sake, not to draw back from this, but to come; and then thou shalt see me, even as God will.'

Then said he to her: ' Oh! that it were permitted me to follow thy footsteps, and to enjoy the sight of thine honoured countenance! But I pray thee, mother, to grant me, an old man, a small request, namely, that thou deign to receive from me just a little of that which I have brought hither.'

And she said: ' Reach hither the basket that thou hast brought with thee.' Then immediately she touched with the very tip of her finger the lentils (which are peas), and put into her mouth about the quantity of three grains, and said thus, that such a gift sufficed for one who kept her soul steadfast in purity.

And she said to the old man: ' Pray for me, and protect me, for my unhappy state.'

At once he touched her feet with tears, praying that she might worship in the holy assembly of God.

And then she left him, weeping and sighing; and he dared in no wise to hinder her. She could in no wise be hindered; but again [began] to touch the Jordan by dipping in it the mark of the holy rood, and went over the water's soft waves just as she did before thitherwards.

Then Zosimus returned with great joy, and was suddenly filled with great awe. Regretfully he reproached himself that he had [not] asked the Saint's name. Nevertheless he hoped that, in the succeeding year, he might know it.

Then, after the space of a year had passed away, he came to the wilderness, and diligently hastened towards the wonderful vision; and went for a long while, seeking hither and thither, until that he should perceive a sure token of the desired vision and some indication of the place; eagerly looking, with the sharpness of his eyes, both on the right hand and on the left, just like a most skilful hunter, if he could catch there that sweetest creature.

When he could not find anything that stirred, he began to suffuse himself with tears; and, with eyes uplifted, prayed and said: 'Make known to me, O Lord, that hidden treasure which thou didst once deign to reveal to myself; I pray thee, Lord, for Thy glory's sake.'

When he had thus prayed, he arrived at the place where the bourn was marked out where they first spake together; and there, standing on the other side, he saw as it were a shining sun, and the body of the holy woman lying lifeless; and the hands were laid as they should be, and turned eastwards. Then he immediately ran thither, and washed her feet with his tears; he did not dare to touch any other part of the body.

Then, with much weeping, he performed the burial-service, with psalm-singing and other prayers that belonged to that matter. Then he began to think whether this would have pleased her.

Whilst he thought this, there was pointed out to him a writing upon the earth, thus expressed; 'Abbot Zosimus, bury and compassionate the body of Mary; render to the earth that which is the earth's, and dust to dust. Add also to pray moreover for me, (who am) departing from this world, on the ninth night of the month that [is called] April, that is, the Ides of April, on the feast-day of the Lord, and after the time of the Eucharist.'

When the old man had read the letters, he first of all looked to see who had written them, because she herself said before that she had never learnt anything of the kind. Yet he looked extremely pleased that he knew her name, and he perceived clearly that as soon as she had received the divine mysteries at the

Jordan, in the same hour she had arrived thither [i.e. at the bourn], and had immediately departed from this world.

And the journey which Zosimus had performed with much toil in twenty days, all that Mary had fulfilled in the course of an hour, and immediately departed to God.

Then Zosimus glorified God, and suffused his own body with tears, and said: ' Now is the time, poor Zosimus, for thee to perform that which is bidden thee. But what am I, unhappy one, to do? For I know not wherewith to dig, now that I lack both spade and mattock.'

Whilst he thus spake secretly in his heart, he saw there as it were a piece of wood lying, and that but a little one. Therewith he began to dig very diligently; and [the earth] was very hard, and he could not dig into it, because he was much weakened, both by fasting and by the long toil, and he was exhausted with sighing and sweat, and sighed heavily from the depth of his heart. When he looked around him, he saw a lion of exceeding bigness stand beside the holy body; and it licked the traces of its [the body's] feet.

Then was he affrighted, for fear of the huge wild beast; and most of all, because the holy woman had before said to him, that she had never seen a wild beast there. But he soon protected himself on every side by the sign of the cross, and by the power of her who lay there.

Then began the lion to fawn upon the old man, and greeted him with its moving limbs. Then Zosimus said to the lion: 'O thou huge wild beast, if thou wert sent hither by God that thou mightest enclose in the earth the body of this holy handmaiden of God, fulfil now the work of thy service. I verily am weakened by age, so that I cannot dig, nor have I anything suitable for undertaking this work; nor can I speed on so great a journey, to bring [tools] hither. But do thou now perform this work, at the divine behest, with thy claws, until that we two enclose this holy body in the earth.' Immediately after his words, the lioness, by means of her claws, wrought a grave with her arms, as great as sufficed to bury the saint in.

And he with his tears washed her feet, and with prayers that poured forth continually prayed that she would intercede for them all; and so he covered the body over within the earth, as naked as when he first saw her, except for the protection of the torn strip which Zosimus formerly threw to her, wherewith Mary had covered a part of her body.

Then they at the same time departed; the lioness [going] to the remoter part of the desert like the gentlest lamb; whilst Zosimus departed to his minster, glorifying God and blessing Him, and praising Him with praises.

As soon as he came to the minster, he related to them all every circumstance from the beginning, and concealed none of all the things that he had seen or heard; so that they all worshipped the wonders done by God, and magnified the day of her happy departure with awe and love and much faith.

Afterwards John perceived how to amend some of the customs of the minster, as the saint had predicted; but, with God's help, he soon amended them. And Zosimus continued serving in the minster for a hundred years, and then departed to God.

Glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth, ever world without end. Amen.