

THE SACRED
WRITINGS OF ...



JOHN
CASSIAN

The Sacred Writings of John Cassian

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John Cassian - A Biography

By Maurice M. Hassett

A monk and ascetic writer of Southern Gaul, and the first to introduce the rules of Eastern monasticism into the West, b. probably in Provence about 360; d. about 435, probably

near Marseilles. Gennadius refers to him as a Scythian by birth (natione Scythia), but this is regarded as an erroneous statement based on the fact that Cassian passed several years of his life in the desert of Scete (heremus Scitii) in Egypt. The son of wealthy parents, he received a good education, and while yet a youth visited the holy places in Palestine, accompanied by a friend, Germanus, some years his senior. In Bethlehem Cassian and Germanus assumed the obligations of the monastic life, but, as in the case of many of their contemporaries, the desire of acquiring the science of sanctity from its most eminent teachers soon drew them from their cells in Bethlehem to the Egyptian deserts. Before leaving their first monastic home the friends promised to return as soon as possible, but this last clause they interpreted rather broadly, as they did not see Bethlehem again for seven years. During their absence they visited the solitaries most famous for holiness in Egypt, and so attracted were they by the great virtues of their hosts that after obtaining an extension of their leave of absence at Bethlehem, they returned to Egypt, where they remained several years longer. It was during this period of his life that Cassian collected the materials for his two principal works, the "Institutes" and "Conferences". From Egypt the companions came to Constantinople, where Cassian became a favourite disciple of St. John Chrysostom. The famous bishop of the Eastern capitol elevated Cassian to the diaconate, and placed in his charge the treasures of his cathedral. After the second expulsion of St. Chrysostom, Cassian was sent as an envoy to Rome by the clergy of Constantinople, for the purpose of interesting Pope Innocent I in behalf of their bishop. It was probably in Rome that Cassian was elevated to the priesthood, for it is certain that on his arrival in the Eternal City he was still a deacon. From this time Germanus is no more heard of, and of Cassian himself, for the next decade or more, nothing is known. About 415 he was at Marseilles where he founded

two monasteries, one for men, over the tomb of St. Victor, a martyr of the last Christian persecution under Maximian (286-305), and the other for women. The remainder of his days were passed at, or very near, Marseilles. His personal influence and his writings contributed greatly to the diffusion of monasticism in the West. Although never formally canonized, St. Gregory the Great regarded him as a saint, and it is related that Urban V (1362-1370), who had been an abbot of St. Victor, had the words Saint Cassian engraved on the silver casket that contained his head. At Marseilles his feast is celebrated, with an octave, 23 July, and his name is found among the saints of the Greek Calendar.

The two principal works of Cassian deal with the cenobitic life and the principal or deadly sins. They are entitled: "De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitiorum remediis libri XII" and "Collationes XXIV". The former of these was written between 420 and 429. The relation between the two works is described by Cassian himself (Instit., II, 9) as follows: "These books [the Institutes] . . . are mainly taken up with what belongs to the outer man and the customs of the coenobia [i.e. Institutes of monastic life in common]; the others [the "Collationes" or Conferences] deal rather with the training of the inner man and the perfection of the heart." The first four books of the "Institutes" treat of the rules governing the monastic life, illustrated by examples from the author's personal observation in Egypt and Palestine; the eight remaining books are devoted to the eight principal obstacles to perfection encountered by monks: gluttony, impurity, covetousness, anger, dejection, accidia (ennui), vainglory, and pride. The "Conferences" contain a record of the conversations of Cassian and Germanus with the Egyptian solitaries, the subject being the interior life. It was composed in three parts. The first instalment (Books I-X)

was dedicated to Bishop Leontius of Fréjus and a monk (afterwards bishop) named Helladius; the second (Books XI-XVII), to Honoratus of Arles and Eucherius of Lyons; the third (Books XVIII-XXIV), to the "holy brothers" Jovinian, Minervius, Leontius, and Theodore. These two works, especially the latter, were held in the highest esteem by his contemporaries and by several later founders of religious orders. St. Benedict made use of Cassian in writing his Rule, and ordered selections from the "Conferences", which he called a mirror of monasticism (*speculum monasticum*), to be read daily in his monasteries. Cassiodorus also recommended the "Conferences" to his monks, with reservations, however, relative to their author's ideas on free will. On the other hand, the decree attributed to Pope Gelasius, "De recipiendis et non recipiendis libris" (early sixth century), censures this work as "apocryphal", i.e. containing erroneous doctrines. An abridgment of the "Conference" was made by Eucherius of Lyons which we still possess (P. L., L, 867 sqq.). A third work of Cassian, written at the request of the Roman Archdeacon Leo, afterwards Pope Leo the Great, about 430-431, was a defence of the orthodox doctrine against the errors of Nestorius: "De Incarnatione Domini contra Nestorium" (P. L., L, 9-272). It appears to have been written hurriedly, and is, consequently, not of equal value with the other works of its author. A large part consists of proofs, drawn from the Scriptures, of Our Lord's Divinity, and in support of the title of Mary to be regarded as the Mother of God; the author denounces Pelagianism as the source of the new heresy, which he regards as incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.

Yet Cassian did not himself escape the suspicion of erroneous teaching; he is in fact regarded as the originator of what, since the Middle Ages, has been known as Semipelagianism. Views of this character attributed to him

are found in his third and fifth, but especially in his thirteenth, "Conference". Preoccupied as he was with moral questions he exaggerated the rôle of free will by claiming that the initial steps to salvation were in the power of each individual, unaided by grace. The teaching of Cassian on this point was a reaction against what he regarded as the exaggerations of St. Augustine in his treatise "De correptione et gratia" as to the irresistible power of grace and predestination. Cassian saw in the doctrine of St. Augustine an element of fatalism, and while endeavouring to find a *via media* between the opinions of the great bishop of Hippo and Pelagius, he put forth views which were only less erroneous than those of the heresiarch himself. He did not deny the doctrine of the Fall; he even admitted the existence and the necessity of an interior grace, which supports the will in resisting temptations and attaining sanctity. But he maintained that after the Fall there still remained in every soul "some seeds of goodness . . . implanted by the kindness of the Creator", which, however, must be "quickened by the assistance of God". Without this assistance "they will not be able to attain an increase of perfection" (Coll., XIII, 12). Therefore, "we must take care not to refer all the merits of the saints to the Lord in such a way as to ascribe nothing but what is perverse to human nature". We must not hold that "God made man such that he can never will or be capable of what is good, or else he has not granted him a free will, if he has suffered him only to will or be capable of what is evil" (ibid.). The three opposing views have been summed up briefly as follows: St. Augustine regarded man in his natural state as dead, Pelagius as quite sound, Cassian as sick. The error of Cassian was to regard a purely natural act, proceeding from the exercise of free will, as the first step to salvation. In the controversy which, shortly before his death, arose over his teaching, Cassian took no part. His earliest opponent, Prosper of Aquitaine, without naming him,

alludes to him with great respect as a man of more than ordinary virtues. Semipelagianism was finally condemned by the Council of Orange in 529.

Prolegomena.

Chapter I.

The Life of Cassian.

“Cassianus natione Scythia” is the description given by Gennadius of the writer whose works are now for the first time translated into English. In spite, however, of the precision of this statement, considerable doubt hangs over Cassian’s nationality, and it is hard to believe that he was in reality a Scythian. Not only is his language and style free from all trace of barbarism, but as a boy he certainly received a liberal education; for in his Conferences he laments that the exertions of his tutor and his own attention to continual study had so weakened him that his mind was so filled with songs of the poets that even at the hour of prayer it was thinking of those trifling fables and stories of battles with which it had from earliest infancy been stored; “and,” he adds, “when singing Psalms or asking forgiveness of sins, some wanton recollection of the poems intrudes itself or the image of heroes fighting presents itself before the eyes; and an imagination of such phantoms is always haunting me.” Further evidence of the character of his education is also supplied by the fact that in his work on the Incarnation against Nestorius he manifests an acquaintance not only with the works of earlier Christian Fathers, but also with those of such writers as Cicero and Persius,

These considerations are sufficient to make us hesitate before accepting the statement of Gennadius in what would at first sight be its natural meaning; although from the fact of his connection with Marseilles, where so much of Cassian's life was spent, as well as the early date at which he wrote (A.D. 495), it is dangerous to reject his authority altogether. It is, however, possible that the term "Scytha" is not really intended to denote a Scythian, but to refer to the desert of Scete, or Scitis, in Egypt, where Cassian passed many years of his life, and with which his fame was closely associated; and, therefore, without going to the length of rejecting the authority of Gennadius altogether, we are free to look for some other country as the birthplace of our author. But little light is thrown on this subject by the statements of other writers. Photius (A.D. 800) calls him *ÆRwmai`o*", which need mean no more than born within the Roman Empire; while Honorius of Autun (A.D. 1130) speaks of him as Afer. The last-mentioned writer is, however, of too late a date to be of any authority; and it is just possible that the term "Afer," like the "Scytha" of Gennadius, may be owing to his lengthy residence in Egypt. In the writings of Cassian himself there is nothing to enable us to identify the country of his birth with certainty; but, in describing the situation of his ancestral home, he speaks of the delightful pleasantness of the neighbourhood, and the recesses of the woods, which would not only delight the heart of a monk but would also furnish him with a plentiful supply of food; while in a later passage he says that in his own country it was impossible to find any one who had adopted the monastic life. From these notices, compared with a passage in the Preface to the Institutes, where the diocese of Apta Julia in Gallia Narbonensis is spoken of as still without monasteries, some ground is given for the conjecture that Cassian was really a native of Gaul, whither he returned in mature age after his wanderings were

ended, and where most of his friends of whom we have any knowledge were settled. On the whole, then, it appears to the present writer to be the most probable view that Cassian was of Western origin, and, perhaps, a native of Provence, although it must be freely acknowledged that it is impossible to speak with certainty on this subject.

Once more: not only is there this doubt about his nationality, but questions have also been raised concerning his original name. Gennadius and Cassiodorus speak of him simply as Cassianus. In his own writings he represents himself as addressed by the monks in Egypt more than once by the name of John. Prosper of Aquitaine (his contemporary and antagonist) combines both names, and speaks of him as "Joannes cognomento Cassianus." In the titles of the majority of the MSS. of his own writing he is merely "Cassianus," though in one case the work is entitled "Beatissimi Joannis quiet Cassiani." Are we, then, with the writer of the last-mentioned MS., to suppose that the names John and Cassian are alternatives; or, with Prosper, that John was his nomen and Cassianus his cognomen, or, more strictly, agnomen? The former view is, perhaps, the more probable, as he may well have taken the name of John at his baptism or at his admission to the monastic life. The theory which has sometimes been advocated — that he received it at his ordination by S. John Chrysostom — fails to the ground when we notice that he represents himself as called John during his residence in Egypt, several years before his ordination and intercourse with S. Chrysostom.

To pass now from the question of his name and nationality to the narrative of Cassian's life. Various considerations point to the date of his birth as about the year 360. Of his family we know nothing, except that in one passage of his writings he incidentally makes mention of a sister; while the language which he uses of his parents would imply that

they were well-to-do and pious. As we have already seen, he received a liberal education as a boy, but while still young forsook the world, and was received, together with his friend Germanus, into a monastery at Bethlehem, where he spent several years and became thoroughly familiar with the customs and traditions of the monasteries of Syria. Eager, however, to make further progress in the perfect life, the two friends finally determined to visit Egypt, where, as it was the country in which the monastic life originated, the most famous monasteries existed, and the most illustrious Anchorites were to be found. Permission to undertake the journey was sought and obtained from their superiors, a pledge being required of a speedy return when the object of their visit was gained. Sailing from some port of Syria, perhaps Joppa, the friends arrived at Thennesus, a town at the mouth of the Tanitic branch of the Nile, near Lake Menzaleh. Here they fell in with a celebrated Anchorite named Archebius, bishop of the neighbouring town of Panephrisis, who had come to Thennesus on business connected with the election of a bishop. He, on hearing the object of their visit to Egypt, at once offered them an introduction to some celebrated Anchorites in his own neighbourhood. The offer was gladly accepted, and under his guidance they made their way through a dreary district of salt marshes, many of the villages being in ruins and deserted by their inhabitants owing to the floods which had inundated the country and turned the rising grounds into islands, "and thus afforded the desired solitudes to the holy Anchorites, among whom three old men — Chaeremon, Nesteros, and Joseph — were famed as the Anchorites of the longest standing." Archebius brought them first to Chaeremon, who had already passed his hundredth year, and was so far bent with age and constant prayer that he could no longer walk upright, but crawled upon his hands and knees. The saint's hesitation at allowing himself to be thus interviewed by strangers was

soon overcome, and he finally gratified their curiosity by delivering three discourses, on the subjects of Perfection, Chastity, and the Protection of God. From the cell of Chaeremon Cassian and his companion proceeded to that of Abbot Nesteros, who honoured them with two discourses, on Spiritual Knowledge, and Divine Gifts; and from him they repaired to Joseph, who belonged to a noble family, and before his renunciation of the world had been “primarius” of his native city, Thmuis. He was naturally better educated than the others, and was able to converse with them in Greek instead of being obliged to have recourse to the help of an interpreter, as had been the case with Chaeremon and Nesteros. His first question referred to the relationship between Cassian and Germanus: were they brothers? And their reply — that the brotherhood was spiritual and not carnal — furnished the old man with a text for his first discourse, which was on Friendship, and which was followed up on the next day by one on the Obligation of Promises, called forth by the perplexity in which the travellers found themselves owing to their promise to return to Bethlehem, — a promise which they were loth to break, and which yet they could not fulfil without losing a grand opportunity of making progress in the spiritual life. In their difficulty they consulted Joseph; and, fortified by his authority and advice, they determined to break the letter of their promise and make a longer stay in Egypt, where they accordingly remained for seven years in spite of their brethren at Bethlehem, whose displeasure at their conduct, Cassian tells us, was not removed by their frequent letters home.

It was while Cassian and his fellow-traveller were still in the neighbourhood of Panephrisis that these energetic precursors of the modern “interviewers” paid a visit to Abbot Pinufius, a priest who presided over a large monastery. This man was an old friend of theirs, whose

acquaintance they had previously made at Bethlehem, whither (after an ineffectual attempt to conceal himself in a monastery in the island of Tabenna) he had fled in order to escape the responsibilities of his office. There he had been received as a novice, and had been assigned by the abbot as an inmate of Cassian's cell, until he was recognized by a visitor from Egypt and brought back in triumph to his own monastery. To him, therefore, Cassian and Germanus made their way; and by him they were warmly welcomed; the old man repaying their former hospitality by giving them quarters in his own cell. While staying in this monastery they were so fortunate as to be present at the admission of a novice, and heard the charge which Pinufius made to the new-comer on the occasion; and afterwards the abbot favoured them with a discourse "on the end of penitence and the marks of satisfaction." After this, resisting his pressing invitation to remain with him in the monastery, they proceeded once more on their travels, and, crossing the river, came to Diolcos, a town hard by the Sebennytic mouth of the Nile. Here was a barren tract of land between the river and the sea, rendered unfit for cultivation by the saltness of the soil and the dryness of the sand. It was, therefore, eagerly seized upon by the monks, who congregated here in great numbers in spite of the absence of water; the river from which it had to be fetched being some three miles distant. In this neighbourhood they made the acquaintance of Abbot Piamun, a most celebrated Anchorite, who explained to them with great care the characteristics of the three kinds of monks; viz., the Coenobites, the Anchorites, and the Sarabaites. This discourse had the effect of exciting their desire more keenly than ever for the Anchorites' life in preference to that of the Coenobite, — a desire which was afterwards confirmed by what they saw and heard in the desert of Scete. They next visited a large monastery in the same neighbourhood, which was governed by the Abbot Paul, and

which ordinarily accommodated two hundred monks, but was at that moment filled with a much larger number, who had come from the surrounding monasteries to celebrate the “depositio” of the late abbot. Here they met a certain Abbot John, whose humility had led him to give up the life of an Anchorite for that of a Coenobite, in order that he might have the opportunity of practising the virtues of obedience and subjection, which seemed out of the reach of the solitary. He was accordingly well qualified to speak of the subject which he selected for his discourse; viz., the aims of the Anchorite and Coenobite life. Another well-known abbot, whose acquaintance they now made, was Theonus, who, when quite a young man, had been married by his parents, and later on, on failing to obtain the consent of his wife to a separation, in order that they might devote themselves to the monastic life, had deserted her and fled away into a monastery, where after a time he had been promoted to the office of almoner. From him they heard a discourse on the relaxation of the fast during Easter-tide and Pentecost, and, later on, one concerning Nocturnal Illusions, and another on Sinlessness. By these various discourses the two friends were rendered more desirous than ever of adopting the Anchorite life, and less inclined than before to return to the subjection of the monastery at Bethlehem. A far better course seemed to them to return to their own home, probably (as we have seen) in Gaul, where they would be free to practice what austerities they pleased without let or hindrance. In their perplexity they consulted Abbot Abraham, who threw cold water on their plan in a discourse on Mortification, which was entirely successful in persuading them to relinquish their half-formed intention. They, therefore, remained in Egypt for some years longer; and it is to the time of their stay in the neighbourhood of Diolcos that their acquaintance with Abbot Archebius must be assigned. This man, so Cassian tells us, having discovered their desire to make some stay in the place,

offered them the use of his cell, pretending that he was about to go off on a journey. They gladly accepted his offer. He went away for a few days, collected materials, and then returned and proceeded to build a new cell for himself. Shortly afterwards some more brethren came. He at once gave up to them his newly built cell, and once more set to work to build another for himself.

It is difficult to determine whether a stay in the desert of Scete was comprised in the seven years which the two friends now spent in Egypt, or whether they visited it for the first time during their second tour, after their return from Bethlehem. On the one hand, the language used in Conference XVIII. cc. i. and xvi. would almost suggest that they made their way into this remote district during their first sojourn in Egypt; and, on the other hand, that employed in Conference I. c. i. might imply a distinct journey to Egypt for the sake of visiting this region: and in XVII. xxx. Cassian distinctly asserts that they *did* visit Scete after their return to Bethlehem in fulfilment of their promise. On the whole, it appears the more natural view to suppose that their first tour was not extended beyond the Delta, more distant expeditions being reserved for a future occasion. Adopting, then, this view, we follow the travellers, after a seven years' absence, back to the monastery at Bethlehem, where they managed to pacify the irate brethren, and, strange to say, obtained leave to return to Egypt a second time. On this occasion they penetrated farther into the country than they had previously done. The region which they now visited was the desert of Scete, or Scitis; that is, the southern part of the famous Nitrian Valley, a name which is well known to all students from the rich treasure of Syrian MSS. brought home from thence by the Hon. Robert Curzon and Archdeacon Tattam now more than forty years ago. The district lies "to the northwest of Cairo, three days' journey in the Libyan desert," and gains

its name of Nitria from the salt lakes which still furnish abundance of nitre, which has been worked for fully two thousand years. The valley has some claims to be considered the original home of monasticism. Some have thought that a colony of Therapeutae was settled here in the earliest days; and hither S. Frontonius is said to have retired with seventy brethren, to lead the life of ascetics, about the middle of the second century. Less doubtful is the fact that S. Ammon, a contemporary and friend of S. Antony, organized the monastic system here in the fourth century, and "filled the same place in lower Egypt as Antony in the Thebaid." Towards the close of the fourth century the valley was crowded with cells and monasteries. Rufinus, who visited it about 372, mentions fifty monasteries; and the same number is given by Sozomen, who says that "some were inhabited by monks who live together in society, others by monks who have adopted a solitary mode of existence." About twenty years later Palladius passed a considerable time here, and reckons the total number of monks and ascetics at five thousand. They were also visited by S. Jerome about the same time, and various details of the life of the monks are given by him in his Epistles. Some few monks still linger on to the present day to keep up the traditions of nearly eighteen centuries. They were visited (among others) by the Hon. Robert Curzon in 1833; and an interesting account of them is given by him in his volume on "the monasteries of the Levant:" but the latest and best account of them is that given by Mr. A. J. Butler, who succeeded in gaining permission to visit them in 1883, and has described his journey in his excellent work on "the ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt." Four monasteries alone remain; known as Dair Abu Makar, Dair Anba Bishoi, Dair es Suriani, and Dair al Baramus; but the ruins of many others may still be traced in the desert tracts on the west side of the Natron lakes, and the valley of the waterless river which at some very remote period is

supposed to have formed the bed of one of the branches of the Nile." The monasteries are all built on the same general plan, so that, as Mr. Butler tells us, a description of one will more or less accurately describe the others. Dair Abu Makar (the monastery of S. Macarius), the first which he visited, which lies strictly within the desert of Scete, is spoken of as "a veritable fortress, standing about one-hundred and fifty yards square, with blind, lofty walls rising sheer out of the sand." "Each monastery has also, either detached or not, a large keep, or tower, standing four-square, and approached only by a draw-bridge. The tower contains the library, store-rooms for the vestments and sacred vessels, cellars for oil and corn, and many strange holes and hiding-places of the monks in the last resort, if their citadel should be taken by the enemy. Within the monastery in enclosed one principal and one or two smaller court-yards, around which stand the cells of the monks, domestic buildings, such as the mill-room, the oven, the refectory, and the like, and the churches." The outward aspect can have changed but little since the fourth century. The buildings are perhaps stronger and more adapted to resist hostile attacks, but the general plan is probably identical with that adopted in the earliest monasteries erected in this remote region. Such, then, was the district to which Cassian and Germanus now made their way. Here they first sought and obtained an interview with Abbot Moses, who had formerly dwelt in the Thebaid near S. Antony, and was now living at a spot in the desert of Scete known as Calamus, and was famous not only for practical goodness but also for contemplative excellence. After much persuasion he yielded to their entreaties and discoursed to them "on the goal or aim of a monk," and, on the following day, on Discretion. They next visited Abbot Paphnutius, or "the Buffalo," as he was named, from his love of solitude. He was an aged priest who had lived for years the life of an Anchorite, only leaving his cell for the purpose of going to

the church, which was five miles off, on Saturday and Sunday, and returning with a large bucket of water on his shoulders to last him for the week. From him they heard of the “three kinds of renunciation” necessary for a monk. They also visited his disciple Daniel, who had been ordained priest through the instrumentality of Paphnutius, but was so humble that he would never perform priestly functions in the presence of his master. The subject of his discourse in answer to the inquiry of the two friends was “the lust of the flesh and the spirit.” The next ascetic interviewed was Serapion, who spoke of the “eight principal faults” to which a monk was exposed; viz., gluttony, fornication, covetousness, anger, dejection, “accidie,” vain glory, and pride. After this they proceeded on a journey of some eighty miles to Cellae, a place that lay between the desert of Scete (properly so called) and the Nitrian Valley, in order to consult Abbot Theodore on a difficulty which the recent massacre of a number of monks in Palestine by the Saracens had brought forcibly before them; viz., why was it that men of such illustrious merits and so great virtues should be slain by robbers, and why should God permit so great a crime to be committed? The difficulty was solved by Abbot Theodore in a discourse on “the death of the saints;” and thus the journey was not taken in vain. Two other celebrated monks were also visited by the friends, whose discourses are recorded by Cassian: viz., Abbot Serenus, who spoke of “Inconstancy of mind, and Spiritual wickedness,” as well as of the nature of evil spirits, in a Conference on “Principalities;” and Abbot Isaac, who delivered two discourses on the subject of Prayer. A few days after the first of these was delivered there arrived in the desert the “festal letters” of Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, in which he denounced the heresy of the Anthropomorphites. This caused a great commotion among the monks of Scete; and Abbot Paphnutius, who presided over the monastery where

Cassian was staying, was the only one who would allow the letters to be publicly read in the congregation. Finally, however, owing to the conciliatory firmness of Paphnutius, the great body of the monks was won over to a sounder and less materialistic view of the nature of the Godhead than had hitherto been prevalent among them.

These are all the details that can be gathered from Cassian's writings of his stay in Scete, further than which he does not appear to have penetrated, as, when he speaks of the Thebaid and the monasteries there, it is only from hearsay and not from personal knowledge, although his original intention had certainly been to visit this district among others.

In considering the date of Cassian's visit to Egypt there are various indications to guide us. In Conference XVIII. c. xiv., S. Athanasius is spoken of by Abbot Piamun as "of blessed memory;" and the language used of the Emperor Valens in c. vii. is such as to imply that he was already dead. The former died in 373, and the latter in 378. Again, in Conference XXIV. c. xxvi. Abbot Abraham is made to speak of John of Lycopolis as so famous that he was consulted by the very lords of creation, who sought his advice, and entrusted to his prayers and merits the crown of their empire and the fortunes of war. These expressions evidently allude to John's announcement to Theodosius of his victory over Maxentius in 388, and his success against Eugenius in 395. If they stood alone, we could scarcely rely on these indications of date with any great confidence because the Conferences were not written till many years later, and it is impossible to determine with certainty how far they really represent the discourses actually spoken by the Egyptian Fathers, or how far they are the ideal compositions of Cassian himself. But, as we have seen, it is certain that Cassian was actually in Egypt at the time of the

Anthropomorphite controversy raised by the letters of Theophilus in 399; and, as the other notices of events previously mentioned coincide very fairly with this, we cannot be far wrong in placing the two visits to Egypt between 380 and 400. About the last-named date Cassian must have finally left the country; and we next hear of him in Constantinople, where he was ordained deacon by S. Chrysostom, and, together with his friend Germanus, put in charge of the treasury, the only part of the Cathedral which escaped the flames in the terrible conflagration of 404. Thus Cassian was a witness of all the troublous scenes which attended the persecution of S. Chrysostom, whose side he warmly espoused in the controversy which rent the East asunder. And when the Saint was violently deposed and removed from Constantinople, the two friends — Germanus, who was by this time raised to the priesthood, and Cassian, who was still in deacon's orders— were chosen as the bearers of a letter to Pope Innocent I. from the clergy who adhered to Chrysostom, detailing the scandalous scenes that had taken place, and the trials to which they had been exposed. Of the length of Cassian's stay in Rome we have no information, but it is likely that it was of some considerable duration; and it may have been at this time that he was ordained priest by Innocent. Possibly, also, it was now that he made the acquaintance of one who was then quite young, but was destined afterwards to become famous as Pope Leo the Great; for some years afterwards (A.D. 430) it was at the request of Leo, then Archdeacon of Rome, that Cassian wrote his work on the Incarnation against Nestorius. Leaving Rome, Cassian is next found in Gaul, which (if we are right in the supposition that it was his birthplace) he must have quitted when scarcely more than a child. When he left it monasticism was a thing almost if not quite unknown there, but during his absence in the East a few monasteries had been founded in the district of the Loire by S. Martin and S.

Hilary of Poitiers. Liguge was founded shortly after 360, and Marmoutier rather later, after 371; and about the time of his return similar institutions were beginning to spring up in Provence. In 410 S. Honoratus founded the monastery which will ever be associated with his name, in the island of Lerins, and, in the eloquent words of the historian of the monks of the West, “opened the arms of his love to the sons of all countries who desired to love Christ. A multitude of disciples of all nations joined him. The West could no longer envy the East; and shortly that retreat, destined in the intentions of its founder to renew upon the coasts of Provence the austerities of the Thebaid, became a celebrated school of theology and Christian philosophy, a citadel inaccessible to the waves of barbarian invasion, an asylum for literature and science, which had fled from Italy invaded by the Goths; —in short, a nursery of bishops and saints, who were destined to spread over the whole of Gaul the knowledge of the gospel and the glory of Lerins.”

It must have been about the same time — a little earlier or a little later — that Cassian settled at Marseilles; and there, “in the midst of those great forests which had supplied the Phoenician navy, which in the time of Caesar reached as far as the sea-coast, and the mysterious obscurity of which had so terrified the Roman soldiers that the conqueror, to embolden them, had himself taken an axe and struck down an old oak,” two monasteries were now established, — one for men, built it is said over the tomb of S. Victor, a martyr in the persecution of Diocletian, and the other for women. Cassian’s long residence in the East and his intimate knowledge of the monastic system in vogue in Egypt made him at once looked up to as an authority, and practically as the head of the movement which was so rapidly taking root in Provence; and, although his fame has been overshadowed by that of the greatest of Western monks, S. Benedict of Nursia, yet his is really the credit of being, not

indeed the actual founder, but the first organizer and systematizer, of Western monachism: and it is hoped that the copious illustrations from the Benedictine rule given in the notes to the first four books of the Institutes will serve to show how much the founder of the greatest order in the West was really indebted to his less-known predecessor. "He brought to bear upon the organization of Gallic monasteries lessons learnt in the East. Although S. Martin and others were before him, yet his life must be regarded as a new departure for monasticism in the land. The religious communities of S. Martin and S. Victricius in the centre of France were doubtless rudimentary and half-developed in discipline when compared with that established by Cassian at Marseilles, and with the many others which speedily arose modelled upon his elaborate rules." The high estimation in which his work was held throughout the Middle Ages is shown not only by the immense number of MSS. of the Institutes and Conferences which still remain scattered throughout the libraries of Europe, but also by the recommendation of them by Cassiodorus, and by S. Benedict himself, who enjoins that the Conferences should be read daily by the monks of his order.

At Marseilles, then, Cassian settled; and here it was that he wrote his three great works,— the Institutes, the Conferences, and On the Incarnation against Nestorius; the two former being written for the express purpose of encouraging and developing the monastic life. Of these the Institutes was the earliest, being composed in "twelve books on the institutes of the monasteries and the remedies for the eight principal faults," at the request of Castor, Bishop of Apta Julia, some forty miles due north of Marseilles, who was desirous of introducing the monastic life into his diocese, where it was still a thing unknown. As Castor died in 426, and the work is dedicated to him, it

must have been written some time between the years 419 and 426. When it was first undertaken Cassian's design already was to follow it up by a second treatise containing the Conferences of the Fathers, to which he several times alludes in the Institutes as a forthcoming work, and which, like the companion volume, was undertaken at Castor's instigation. But, before even the first part of it was ready for publication, the Bishop of Aptus was dead; and thus, to Cassian's sorrow, he was unable to dedicate it to him, as he had hoped to do. He therefore dedicated Conferences I.-X. (the first portion of the work) to Leontius, Bishop (probably) of Frejus, and Helladius, who is termed "frater" in the Preface to this work, though, as we see from the Preface to Conference XVIII., he was afterwards raised to the episcopate.

This portion of Cassian's work must have been completed shortly after the death of Castor in 426. It was speedily followed by Part II., containing Conferences XI. to XVII. This is dedicated to Honoratus and Eucherius, who are styled "fratres." Eucherius did not become Bishop of Lyons till 434; but, as Honoratus was raised to the see of Arles in 426, the volume must have been published not later than that year, or he would have been termed "Episcopus," as he is in the Preface to Conference XVIII., instead of "frater."

The third and last part of the work, containing Conferences XVIII. to XXIV., is dedicated to Jovinian, Minervius, Leontius, and Theodore, who are collectively styled "fratres." Leontius must, therefore, be a different person from the bishop to whom Conferences I.-X. were dedicated; and nothing further is known of him, or of Minervius and Jovinian. Theodore was afterwards raised to the Episcopate, and succeeded Leontius in the see of Frejus in 432. This third part of Cassian's work was ready before the death of Honoratus, Bishop of Arles, who is spoken of in the

Preface as if still living; and, therefore, its publication cannot be later than 428, as Honoratus died in January, 429.

Thus the whole work was completed between the years 426 and 428; and now Cassian, who was growing old, was desirous of rest, feeling as if his life's work was nearly over. But the repose which he sought was not to be granted to him, for the remaining years of his life were troubled by two controversies, — the Nestorian, and the Pelagian, — or, rather, its offshoot, the Semi-Pelagian. Into the history of the former of these there is no need to enter here in detail. It broke out at Constantinople, where Nestorius had become bishop in succession to Sisinnius, in 428. The immediate occasion which gave rise to the controversy was a sermon by Anastasius, the Bishop's chaplain, in which he inveighed against the title Theotocos, as given to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This at once created a great sensation, as Nestorius warmly supported his chaplain, and proceeded to develop the heresy connected with his name, in a course of sermons. News of the controversy was brought to Egypt, and Cyril of Alexandria at once entered into the fray. After some correspondence between the two bishops, both parties endeavoured to gain the adherence of the Church of Rome early in the year 430; and now it was that Cassian became mixed up with the dispute. Greek learning was evidently at a low ebb in the Roman Church at this time; and it was, perhaps, partly owing to Cassian's familiar acquaintance with this language, as well as owing to his connexion with Constantinople, where the trouble had now arisen, that Celestine's Archdeacon Leo turned to him at this crisis for help. Anyhow, whatever was the reason, an earnest appeal from Rome reached him, begging him to write a refutation of the new heresy. After some hesitation he consented, and the result of his labours is seen in the seven books on the Incarnation against

Nestorius. The work was evidently done in haste, and published in 430, before the Council of Ephesus (for Cassian speaks of Nestorius throughout as still Bishop of Constantinople), and, judging from the way in which Augustine is spoken of in VII. Xxvii., before the death of that Father, which took place in August, 430. A great part of the work is occupied with Scripture proof of our Lord's Divinity and unity of Person; but, taken as a whole, the treatise is distinctly of less value than Cassian's earlier writings, and betrays the haste in which it was composed by the occasional use of inaccurate language on the subject of the Incarnation, and of terms and phrases which the mature judgment of the Church has rejected. But the writer's keen penetration is seen by the quickness with which he connects the new heresy with the teaching of Pelagius, the connecting link between the two being found in the errors of Leporius of Treves, who, in propagating Pelagian views of man's sufficiency and strength, had applied them to the case of our Lord, not shrinking from the conclusion that He was a mere man who had used his free will so well as to have lived without sin, and had only been made Christ in virtue of His baptism, whereby the Divine and human were associated in such manner that virtually there were two Christs. The connexion between Nestorianism and Pelagianism has often been noticed by later writers, but to Cassian belongs the credit of having been the first to point it out. Of the impression produced by his book we have no record. He appears to have taken no further part in the controversy, which, indeed, must have been to him an episode, coming in the midst of that other controversy with which his name is inseparably associated; viz., that on Semi-Pelagianism, on which something must now be said.

The controversy arose in the following way. During the struggle with Pelagianism between the years 410 and 420,

Augustine's views on the absolute need of grace were gradually hardening into a theory that grace was irresistible and therefore indefectible. "Intent above all things on magnifying the Divine Sovereignty, he practically forgot the complexity of the problem in hand and failed to do justice to the human element in the mysterious process of man's salvation." The view of an absolute predestination irrespective of foreseen character, and of the irresistible and indefectible character of grace, was put forward by him, in a letter to a Roman priest, Sixtus, in the year 418. Some years afterwards this letter fell into the hands of the monks of Adrumetum, some of whom were puzzled by its teaching; and, in order to allay the disputes among them, the matter was referred to Augustine himself. Thinking that the monks had misunderstood his teaching, he not only explained the letter but also wrote a fresh treatise, — "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio" (426); and, when that failed to satisfy the malcontents, he followed it up with his work "De Correptione et Gratia" (426), which, so far as the monks of Adrumetum were concerned, seems to have ended the controversy. Elsewhere, however, hesitation was felt in going the full length of Augustine's teaching; and, in the South of Gaul especially, many were seriously disturbed at the turn which the controversy had lately taken, and were prepared to reject Augustine's teaching, as not merely novel, but also practically dangerous. "They said, in effect," to quote Canon Bright's lucid summary of their position, "to treat predestination as irrespective of foreseen conduct, and to limit the Divine good-will to a fixed number of persons thus selected, who, as such, are assured of perseverance, is not only to depart from the older theology, and from the earlier teaching of the Bishop of Hippo himself, but to cut at the root of religious effort, and to encourage either negligence or despair. They insisted that whatever theories might be devised concerning this mystery, which was not a fit subject for popular discussion,

the door of salvation should be regarded as open to all, because the Saviour 'died for all.' To explain away the Scriptural assurance was, they maintained, to falsify the Divine promise and to nullify human responsibility. They believed in the doctrine of the Fall; they acknowledged the necessity of real grace in order to man's restoration; they even admitted that this grace must be 'prevenient' to such acts of will as resulted in Christian good works: but some of them thought — and herein consisted the error called Semi-Pelagian — that nature, unaided, could take the first step towards its recovery, by desiring to be healed through faith in Christ. If it could not, — if the very beginning of all good were strictly a Divine act, — exhortations seemed to them to be idle, and censure unjust, in regard to those on whom no such act had been wrought, and who, therefore, until it should be wrought, were helpless, and so far guiltless, in the matter." Of the party which took up this position Cassian was the recognized head. True, he did not directly enter into the controversy himself, nor is he the author of any polemical works upon the subject; but it is impossible to doubt that the thirteenth Conference, containing the teaching of Abbot Chaeremon on the Protection of God, was intended to meet what he evidently regarded as a serious error; viz., the implicit denial by the Augustinians of the need of effort on man's part.

Augustine was informed of the teaching of the School of Marseilles, as it was called, by one Hilary (a layman, not to be confounded with his namesake, the Bishop of Arles), who wrote to him two letters, of which the former is lost. The latter is still existing, and contains a careful account of what was maintained at Marseilles. Towards the close of it Hilary says that, as he was pressed for time, he had prevailed upon a friend to write as well, and would attach his letter to his own. This friend was Prosper of Aquitaine, also a layman and an ardent Augustinian, whose epistle has

been preserved as well as Hilary's. From these letters, and from the works which Augustine wrote in reply, we learn that the "Massilians" had been first disturbed by some of Augustine's earlier writings, as the Epistle to Paulinus; and that their distrust of his teaching on the subjects of Grace, Predestination, and Freewill had been increased by the receipt of his work "De Correptione et Gratia," although in other matters they agreed with him entirely, and were great admirers of his. Personally, they are spoken of with great respect as men of no common virtue, and of wide influence; and, though Cassian's name is never mentioned in the correspondence, yet it is easy to read between the lines and see that he is referred to.

Augustine replied to his correspondents by writing what proved to be almost his latest works, — the treatises "De Praedestinatione Sanctorum" and "De dono Perseverantiae." In these volumes Augustine, while freely acknowledging the great difference between his opponents and the Pelagians, yet maintained as strongly as ever his own position, and "did not abate an iota of the contention that election and rejection were arbitrary, and that salvation was not really within the reach of all Christians." Thus the books naturally failed to satisfy the recalcitrant party, or to convince those who thought that the denial of the freedom of the will tended to destroy man's responsibility. Prosper, however, was delighted with the treatises, and proceeded to follow them up with a work of his own, a poem of a thousand lines, "De Ingratis," by which he designates the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, whose opinions he speaks of as spreading with alarming rapidity. The date of this publication was probably the early part of 430. It was certainly written before the death of Augustine, which took place on August 28 of the same year. The removal from this life of the great champion of Grace did not bring to an end the controversy to which his

writings had given birth. The school of Marseilles continued to propagate its views with unabated vigour, in spite of the protests of Prosper and Hilary, who finally took the important step of appealing to Pope Celestine, from whom they succeeded in obtaining a letter addressed to the Gallican Bishops, Venerius of Marseilles, Leontius of Frejus, Marinus, Auxonius, Arcadius, Filtanius, and the rest. Celestine speaks strongly of their negligence in not having suppressed what he regarded as a public scandal, and says that "priests ought not to teach so as to invade the episcopal prerogative," an expression in which we may well see an allusion to Cassian, the leading presbyter, of the diocese of Marseilles, whose Bishop is named first in the opening salutation; and the letter concludes with some words of eulogium on Augustine "of holy memory." Never, perhaps, was Gallican independence shown in a more striking manner than in the sturdy way in which the Massilians clung to their views in spite of the authority of the Pope now brought to bear upon them. Prosper and Hilary on their return found the obnoxious teaching daily spreading, so that the former of them finally determined to put down, if possible, the upholders of the objectionable tenets by a direct criticism of Cassian's Conferences. This was the origin of Prosper's work "Contra Collatorem," against the author of the Conferences, a treatise of considerable power and force, although not scrupulously fair. The respect in which Cassian was held is strikingly shown by the fact that his antagonist never once names him directly, but merely speaks of him as a man of priestly rank who surpassed all his companions in power of arguing. The work consists of an examination of the thirteenth Conference, that of Abbot Chaeremon, on the Protection of God, from which Prosper extracts twelve propositions, the first of which he says is orthodox while all the others are erroneous. He concludes by warning his antagonist of the danger of Pelagianism, and expresses a