

EARLY FATHERS FROM THE PHILOKALIA

together with some writings of
St. Abba Dorotheus, St. Isaac of Syria and
St. Gregory Palamas

Selected and translated from the Russian text

DOBROTOLUBIYE

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To
OUR SPIRITUAL HELPERS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	page 11
TRANSLATORS' NOTE	16
ST. ANTONY THE GREAT (VOL. I)*	19
1. 170 Texts on Sainly Life	21
2. Directions on Life in Christ	39
ST. MARK THE ASCETIC (VOL. I)	57
1. Epistle to Nicholas	60
2. Directions from Discourses	63
3. Two Centuries on Spiritual Law	80
4. 226 Texts: To those who think to be justified by deeds	86
ABBA EVAGRIUS (VOL. I)	95
1. To Anatolius: Texts on Active Life	98
2. Century on Active Life	106
3. Miscellaneous Sayings from Various Texts	109
4. To Anatolius: On Eight Thoughts	110
5. Reflections on the Eight Thoughts	113
6. Instructions to Cenobites and others	115
7. On Various Evil Thoughts	117
ST. NILUS OF SINAI (VOL. II)	125
153 texts on Prayer	129
Some added texts on Prayer	144
ST. ABBA DOROTHEUS (VOL. II)	149
Directions on Spiritual Training	152
ST. ISAAC OF SYRIA (NINEVEH) (VOL. II)	179
Directions on Spiritual Training	183

* The volume numbers refer to the edition of the Dobrotolubiye published in Moscow, 1896-1901.

CONTENTS

ST. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR (VOL. III)	281
1. Four Centuries on Love	286
2. Contemplative and Active Texts.	347
THE BLESSED THEODORE (VOL. III)	385
Theoretikon	388
<i>Appendix I. St. Gregory Palamas (vol. V)</i>	401
1. On the Blessed Hesychasts	401
2. On Prayer and Purity of Heart	409
<i>Appendix II. The Practice of Unceasing Prayer, by one of the compilers of the Greek Philokalia</i>	412
<i>Appendix III. List of writers included in</i>	
1. The Greek Philokalia	416
2. The Slavonic Dobrotolubiye	417
3. The Russian Dobrotolubiye	417
INDEX OF PROPER NAMES	419

ST. ISAAC OF SYRIA

a gracious look, so, if a man's prayer is accompanied by tears, the great King of ages, God, forgives him the full measure of his sins and rewards him with a benevolent look.

As a man who carries a precious pearl on a road infested with brigands is in constant fear of being attacked and robbed, so a man who carries the pearls of chastity and journeys in the world—this road swarming with enemies—cannot be free from fear of these robbers, until he reaches the sanctuary of the tomb, that is, the land of repose.

As a man, who drinks wine on a day of mourning, becomes intoxicated and forgets to mourn the sadness of his situation, so a man intoxicated with love of God forgets in this world, that is, in this house of weeping, all his hardships and sorrows and, in his intoxication, becomes insensitive to all sinful passions. His heart is strengthened by hope in God, his soul is as light as a feathered bird, his mind constantly soars above the earth, his thoughts hover far above all that is human, and he enjoys immortality with the Most High.

130. Humility is the garment of the Deity. The incarnate Word was clothed in it and, through it, conversed with us in our bodies, covering the radiance of His greatness and His glory by this humility, lest the creature be scorched by the sight of Him. The creature could not have looked at Him, had He not taken on some part of it, and thus conversed with it. Therefore every man who clothes himself in garments of humility becomes clothed in Christ Himself, since Christ desired to be clothed also in His inner man in that likeness, in which He was seen by His creature and in which He lived with it.

131. Humility is a certain mysterious force, which perfected saints receive when they have completed their life. This force is given by the power of grace only to those who are perfect in virtue, for this virtue includes all in itself.

132. Not every man who is modest, silent and meek has attained to the level of humility; nor likewise a man who is humbled by the recollection of his trespasses and is filled with contrition about them, although such a thing is indeed praiseworthy. Such a man does not yet have humility, but strives to approach it—he only desires humility, but does not yet possess it.

DIRECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL TRAINING

A man who has perfect humility has no need to invent reasons for being humble, but shows humility without effort or self-compelling.

133. If anyone should ask how to acquire humility, we would answer: 'It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord' (Matt. x. 25). See how much humility was shown by Him Who has given us this commandment and Who gives us this gift; imitate Him and you will acquire it.

134. We must try in every way to avoid all that excites evil passions in us, but above all to cut off the causes of passions in ourselves and that which brings even the least passion into motion. But if, despite this, passions start moving, we must resist them and fight against them. The best method to achieve both alike is to plunge deep into the inner man and remain there in seclusion, constantly tending the vineyard of one's heart. When our mind remains there in solitude and seclusion, it is grace and not the mind, which wages war against passions.

135. The purpose of the advent of the Saviour, when He gave us His life-giving commandments as purifying remedies in our passionate state, was to cleanse the soul from the damage done by the first transgression and bring it back to its original state. What medicines are for a sick body, that the commandments are for the passionate soul. It is clear that commandments are directed against passions, for curing the delinquent soul.

136. Harm has come to us from transgressing the commandments. It follows, therefore, that health is restored by keeping them. Without keeping commandments, without first of all following this road which leads to purity of soul, we must not even hope or aspire for the soul to be purified. Do not say that God can grant us purification of soul through grace, even without our keeping the commandments. This is for the Lord to judge, and the Church does not direct that we should ask for such a thing. The Jews, at the time of their return from Babylon to Jerusalem, travelled by the natural way; but Ezekiel arrived there by supernatural means and it was by Divine revelation that he was made a witness of the renewal that was to come. So too with purity of soul. Some going by the road that many have trodden, through keeping commandments, in a life of many labours, arrive by sweat

DIRECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL TRAINING

himself, to see where he is walking, whether in what is against nature, according to nature or above nature.

258. A good thought falls into the heart only by God's grace; and an evil thought comes near a man only to tempt and to test.

A man who has reached knowledge of the measure of his weakness has reached perfect humility.

A heart aroused to constant thanksgiving attracts Divine gifts. The Lord suffers all human weaknesses, but abhors a man who is always complaining, and does not leave him without a lesson.

Grace is preceded by humility; chastisement is preceded by a high opinion of oneself.

A proud man is allowed to fall into irreverence—a man boasting of active virtue is allowed to fall into wantonness—a man who glories in his wisdom is allowed to fall into the dark nets of ignorance.

259. A man who, while remembering God, respects every man, by a hidden movement of God's hand himself receives help from every man.

A man who protects the injured has God as his Helper; a man who stretches his hand to aid his neighbour has God's arm to support him.

A man who accuses his brother of fault has God for his own Accuser.

A man who corrects his brother in his private chamber, cures himself of his own fault; but he who accuses a man before others increases the pain of his own sores.

A friend who exposes another in secret, is a wise physician; but he who tries to cure another before the eyes of many, is a reviler.

260. God admonishes with love—He does not wreak vengeance (may this never be!); He seeks only to make whole His image, but does not harbour anger.

A man who does good for the sake of a reward is apt to change quickly.

However perfect a man may become in this life in his striving after God, he must always remain behind Him; but in the future life God shows him His countenance—though not what He is.

However much the righteous enter into contemplation of God

DIRECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL TRAINING

However, this struggle is not ended in an hour; and grace does not return suddenly to dwell in the soul, but gradually. One thing alternates with another: at times temptation comes, at others, comfort.

274. A man whose zeal is not controlled by reason never achieves peace of mind; and a stranger to peace is a stranger to joy. If peace of mind is called perfect health, and unreasonable zeal is opposed to peace, this means that a man full of wrong zeal is a prey to a grievous disease.

A heart filled with concern about the impotence and weakness of his outward physical work takes the place of all this physical work. Physical work without concern of the mind is like a body without a soul.

A man who grieves in his heart, but gives freedom to his senses, is like a man who suffers physically but whose mouth is open to every kind of harmful food; or a man with an only son, whom he gradually kills with his own hands.

275. Deeds without mercy are before God like a man killing a son in the presence of his father.

Compared with God's providence and God's mercy the trespasses of all flesh are as a handful of sand thrown into the sea. And as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of the creatures.

To bear a grudge and pray, means to sow seed on the sea and expect a harvest.

As a flame of fire cannot but mount upwards, so must the prayers of the charitable ascend to heaven.

As water flows downhill, so does the force of irritation, when it finds a way into our heart.

276. Humility may come from fear of God, from love for God, and from joy.

A man humble from fear of God is always accompanied by modesty in all his members, a right ordering of the senses and a contrite heart.

A company of the humble is beloved by God, like the company of the Seraphim.

A chaste body is more precious before God than a pure offering.

ST. ISAAC OF SYRIA

These two virtues—humility and chastity—prepare in the soul a pledge of betrothal for the Holy Trinity.

277. Watch your stomach, but not as you watch your sight; for a struggle in the home is undoubtedly easier than one outside.

Do not believe, brother, that inner thoughts can be stopped unless the body is brought into a good and orderly state.

Fear habits more than enemies. He who feeds a habit in himself is like a man who gives food to fire.

Once a habit demands something and its request is not fulfilled, the next time you will find it weaker. But once you fulfil its will, the next time you will find it fall on you with much greater force.

278. He who is fond of mocking and of showing off before people should be no friend of yours; otherwise he will teach you the habit of giving way to weakness.

If anyone begins to criticise his brother in your presence, keep your head downcast. As soon as you do this, you will show yourself circumspect before God and before him.

If you give something to one in need, let cheerfulness on your face precede the gift, and speak to him words of comfort. If you do this, your friendly look will be dearer to his mind even than a gift that is more than he needs.

Let all your actions be preceded by bodily chastity and a pure conscience, for without them every act is vain before God.

279. If you are persecuted, do not persecute; if you are crucified, do not crucify; if you are offended, do not offend; if you are slandered, do not slander.

To seek justice against a man is not fitting in Christian life; there is no hint of it in Christ's teaching.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep; for this is a sign of purity.

Suffer with the infirm; shed tears with the sinners; rejoice with the penitent.

Be friends with all men, but in your thought remain alone.

280. Denounce no one, revile no one, even men of the most wicked lives. Spread your cloak over one who is falling and cover him.

Know that the reason why we must not go out of the door of our cell is that we should not know the wicked deeds of men;

DIRECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL TRAINING

then in the ignorance of our mind we shall see all men as good and saintly.

If you cannot labour with your body, at least make efforts in your mind.

If you cannot fast for two days, fast at least till evening; if you cannot fast till evening, be careful not to overeat.

If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be addicted to strife.

If you cannot close the mouth of a man who is judging his brother, at least refrain from joining him in this.

281. Know that if fire goes forth from you and scorches others, God will demand from your hand the souls which your fire has scorched. And if you yourself do not send forth fire, but are in agreement with one who does, and enjoy it, during judgment you will be counted among his accomplices.

Whatever ways men tread in the world, they find no peace until they come to hope in God.

The heart finds no respite from labours and stumblings, until hope enters it and brings it peace and joy. Lips we worship said of hope: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. xi. 28).

The light of the mind gives birth to faith; faith gives birth to the comfort of hope; hope makes strong the heart.

282. The Son of God suffered on the cross; therefore we, sinners, boldly rely on repentance.

Sufferings of the mind suffice to replace all labour of the body.

St. Gregory says: 'He is a temple of grace who is united with God, and is always concerned with thought of His judgment.'

The blessed Basil says: 'Unceasing prayer produces a clear thought of God in the soul, and the setting up in ourselves of memory of God is the coming of God to dwell in us.' Thus we become the temple of God. A contrite heart serves to prepare us for our rest in God.

283. What we gather during our negligence shames us during our prayer.

Sobriety helps a man more than works; and licence (letting thoughts go) harms him more than (bodily) inactivity.

Inactivity produces domestic strife, which disturbs a man, but

he has power to stop it. For as soon as he gives up inactivity and goes back to the place of his work, these attacks fall away and withdraw. But what comes from licence is not the same as what comes from inactivity. So long as during his inactivity a man stays within the realm of his freedom, he can turn back and, by establishing his rule, regain order in himself; for he is still within the realm of his freedom. But by giving himself licence (for thoughts with enjoyment) he goes outside the realm of his freedom. If a man had not completely given up watching over himself, he would not be forcibly and involuntarily constrained to submit to what brings him no peace.

284. O man, do not give licence to any of your senses, lest you lose the possibility of regaining your freedom. Inactivity is harmful only to the young, but licence harms also the old and the perfect. Those whom inactivity leads to evil thoughts can again return to watching over themselves and re-establish themselves in their lofty life. But those who, founding their hope on their works, have neglected to watch over themselves, are made captive and led from lofty to dissolute life.

285. Not only when we make a slip in something should we grieve, but particularly when we become set in that same thing; for even the perfect frequently slip, but to become set therein is complete darkness.

The grief we feel when we slip is accepted by grace as a pure doing.

If, trusting in repentance, a man deliberately slips a second time, he is dishonest with God; death comes to him unexpectedly and he does not reach the time when he hoped to fulfil the works of virtue.

286. Every man who gives free rein to the senses, gives free rein to the heart, for the work of the heart fetters the outer senses.

✓ If a man practises this work with good judgment, it shows clearly in three ways: he is not tied by material profits, he dislikes indulging his belly and he never allows himself to be irritated. Where these three defects exist, there is no true order within, even if outwardly all appears irreproachable.

A reasonable disdain of things of the flesh produces non-attachment, scorn of ease and of the admiration of men.

DIRECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL TRAINING

If a man accepts readily and joyfully a loss for the sake of God, he is inwardly pure.

A man who does not look with gratification on someone who has done him honour, and is not indignant if he is insulted, has in this life become dead to the world.

287. Do not feel hatred for a sinner, for we shall all be taken to account. If you have to oppose him for the sake of God, weep for him.

And why should you hate him? Hate his sin, and pray for him, and so imitate Christ, Who was not wroth with sinners, but prayed for them.

Be a preacher of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy one; for although your debt to Him is so great, yet He is not seen exacting payment from you and gives you great rewards for the small efforts you make.

288. Fear God out of love for Him, and not for the awesome name that He is given.

Love Him as you should love Him, and not for what He will give you in the future, but for what we have received in the present, and for this world alone, which He has created for us.

Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being?

Who intercedes for us before Him, when we do not remember Him?

When we were not, who brought this body of ours to life?

Whence comes the thought of knowledge to enter the clay?

What immeasurable goodness it is that leads again our sinful nature to regeneration!

Come, ye men of understanding, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise and amazed to wonder worthily at the mercy of our Creator?

289. In the degree that a man despises this world and shows zeal in fearing God, God's Providence comes near him—and he is secretly aware of the help of Providence and pure thoughts are given him to understand it.

If a man willingly deprives himself of worldly blessings, God's mercy accompanies him and His loving-kindness supports him to the degree that he deprives himself of them.

The souls of those who are not strong enough to win true life

ST. ISAAC OF SYRIA

by a voluntary renunciation of all things God leads to virtue by involuntary sufferings, as we see in the beggar Lazarus.

God is near the grieving heart of a man who calls to Him in his affliction. Even if the Lord sometimes subjects a man's body to privations and other afflictions, to the soul of the sufferer He shows great loving-kindness, according to the severity of his suffering in his afflictions.

290. If the desire for love of Christ does not so conquer everything in you that joy in Christ strips you of passions in every affliction, then know that the world in you is more alive than is Christ.

When illness, want, exhaustion of the body, fear of harming the body perturb your thought enough to tear you away from the joy of hope and your constant care to please the Lord, then know that the flesh lives in you, and not Christ.

To speak simply, whatever attachment is master in you over the rest, it is that that lives in you.

If you suffer no lack in anything you need, your body is healthy and no adversities threaten you, and if you say that, with all this, you can advance towards Christ in purity, then know that your mind is sick and you are deprived of the taste of Divine glory.

291. That you may not say that there has been no man whose mind could rise completely above his infirmity, when his body was being destroyed by trials and afflictions, no man whose love for Christ could conquer the sufferings of his mind, I shall call to your memory the martyrs. See how their patience, supported by the force of their love of Christ, overcame great sufferings and physical pain.

And not they alone showed such fortitude; there have been philosophers, pagans, who did not know the true God, but who showed a wonderful strength of courage. One of them laid down a rule for himself to keep silence—and did not break this rule even when threatened with death. Others completely mastered natural lust; yet others easily endured calumnies; some calmly suffered grievous diseases; and others showed patience in afflictions and great tribulations.

If they endured it all for the sake of an empty glory and hope, must not we the more greatly endure, we monks, called to communion with God?