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Excerpt

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SELECT NARRATIVES.

BY the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of *f. 2 b*
the Living God, I begin, I the sinner, John the Recluse of
Beth-Mari Kaddisha, to write select narratives about the
holy women, first the book of the Blessed Lady Thecla,
disciple of Paul, the Blessed Apostle. My brethren, pray
for me.

EUGENIA.

The Acts and the Martyrdom of the Blessed Eugenia *f. 21 a*
and of her father Philip and of all who were martyred with
them.

Whilst Commodus was reigning, ruler of the transitory
world, in the great and famous city of Rome, in his own
seventh consulate, he gave the command of a province to
Philip, one of his magnates, and sent him to Alexandria
the great city, which is in the land of Egypt, and he thus
gave him the command of all who were in the country,
rich and poor, great and small, and of all the Roman
troops who were there, that they should be obedient and *f. 21 b*
submissive to the laws and to the commandments which
should be established and decreed to them by him. Now
when Philip received the command of the province from
the Emperor with his consort Claudia and his two sons,
Avita and Sergius, and his daughter the virgin Eugenia,

L. E.

A

they travelled from Rome to Alexandria and arrived quickly. But immediately when they had entered that country he sent decrees through every city and province, and thus it was written in them. By the commandments of the victorious Emperors. All the Egyptians shall be governed by the laws of the Romans, and they shall live by their customs continually.

Now Eugenia the daughter of this Eparch Philip was about sixteen years old, and she was proficient in much wisdom and in the learning of the Greeks and the Romans, and she was very skilful in speech; so that the philosophers and the wise men were amazed at her wisdom and her discourse and at the erudition of her mind.

f. 22 a

Now upon a certain day her father asked her, saying to her, Art thou willing, my daughter, that I should betroth thee to Aquilina the son of Hypatus? For behold! we know him that he is a wise and rich man and worthy of being thy betrothed.

f. 22 b

But she answered and said to her father: It is expedient that I should espouse him who loveth integrity, and purity, and holiness; rather than this man concerning whom thou hast told me that he hath transient riches and possessions. For far better is he who hath promised glorious things to the soul which is pure from evil, than the natural man who is mortal and transitory. For there had fallen into her hands the book of the story of the discipleship of Thecla the holy virgin, and of Paul the Apostle; and by it the eyes of her understanding were enlightened in the fear of God. For when she read in it she wept passionately in secret, continually, and sighed bitterly; and she was the more grieved because she was the daughter of people who were heathens and were without the knowledge of God. Now truly when she read in this story of the discipleship of Thecla the

virgin, she was desirous in her soul, longing every day that she might be of the religion of the Christians, and continue in the doctrine and in the reading of their sacred books. And on a certain day she asked of her parents that they would grant this favour to her and allow her to go from the city to a certain village to amuse herself, and they consented and allowed her to go, because they loved her greatly.

Now there went with her many eunuchs and servants for her honour. Now as the litter in which she was sitting with the pomp of noble women was going along, Eugenia was reading within it in the book of Thecla, and was meditating on a passage in it. And she said to the two eunuchs who were with her, whose names were these, Proteus and Hyacinthus: Do not disregard what the poets in the error of their hearts imagine and say concerning God, and what things also the philosophers in the error of their hearts falsify and deny about God, who is God in truth f. 23 a and verity. For is such truth perchance found amongst those who are called gods as that which is made known in these sacred books of theology about the true God and about His mighty power? But little to a degree, and very miserable and childish is a soul which calls stones and bits of carved wood, blind and deaf and without feeling, gods, and calls them to its help.

Now as the Blessed Eugenia said these things for the salvation of these her two eunuchs, the three of them began to consider together amongst themselves, discussing and investigating concerning the true God and concerning the worship of His Divinity. And they said to each other: There is nothing more important than this, that a man should fear the true God, and should be a worshipper and honourer of Him alone, in his faith and in his love and in his good works. Now when they had talked about these things and things like them with each other, as if in answer

f. 23 b they heard the Christians who were singing and saying :
All the gods of the nations are demons ; but the Lord made
the heavens.

When the Blessed Eugenia heard these things, she commanded that her litter should be instantly detained and should stand still. For the fear of the Christ entered into her heart when she heard this singing and she answered and said to the two eunuchs who were with her : We have quickly found evidence concerning the truth which the sacred books speak about concerning the true power of God who is to be worshipped, and about the perdition and vanity of the polluted worship of idols. But now we have learned the truth about both religions. What therefore shall we do that we may approach that glorious wisdom, and by means of a better life may be able to attain to these mysteries of the Divinity? Let us henceforth look to ourselves, my brethren. For how long shall we occupy ourselves with these useless things of error? Let us cast from ourselves all these vanities of this world, and instead of them let us meditate on the living words of God, and on saving faith. Let our minds be established, that by these things we may be able to flee and escape from the snares of Satan and from the net of the adversary, and that we may hold and may be established in the faith of the Christ the Saviour of the souls of men.

f. 24 a

And again the Blessed One answered and said to Proteus and to Hyacinthus : The fashion of this transient world has appointed me your mistress ; but now the fear of God, which is implanted in our hearts by His love, makes me your sister, and henceforth, my brethren, I counsel you that we be one soul in the faith of God, in one love of God, despising and rejecting all the honours and desires and luxuries of this world, and progressing in love and in faith, and coming near to the glories of

the world that passeth not away for ever; having nothing opposed to us to hinder us by its hateful counsels that we should henceforth be removed from all this blessedness which meets us by the grace of God and by our good will.

And now as I speak to you and instruct you, so do. f. 24 b
Remove in the first place the hair from my head, and all this ornament that is upon me, and take away your own afterwards, and let us change our dress and direct the course of our journey this night to believing people, the servants of the living God. Let the two of you holding me on my right hand and on my left, gently with secrecy let me down from this litter without anyone perceiving it; and let the litter be going on empty, and let those who are with it be imagining that I am sitting inside it, and we three all alike in man's clothing will go joyfully to the people of God.

Now the counsel of the Blessed One pleased these eunuchs, and the next day they did joyfully as she had said to them. Now the Christ in whom they fully believed sent immediately in a very little while His grace to them. For as soon as she descended from her litter, and they f. 25 a began to travel and to go on the road, the saint of God, the bishop Helenus, happened to be accompanying them with a great multitude who were with him, praising and singing and saying together: The paths of the righteous are straight, and the paths of the holy are ordered.

Then said the Blessed Eugenia to Proteus and to Hyacinthus: Do ye understand the force of these words that they are singing now? Do ye know that upon us is accomplished the meaning of the words which we are hearing now from the Christians who are singing and praising their God; those which we also were speaking to each other yesterday concerning the truth of God, and concerning His mighty power? For we heard before

f. 25 b
holy men singing and praising God and saying that all the gods of the nations are demons, and we removed ourselves far from the ruinous worship of idols: and now again lo! we hear thousands of men singing together and saying: The paths of the righteous are straight and the ways of the just are equal. Now since we have heard these sacred words, let us go in with a good will and mingle with this crowd of singers, and let us be of them and be numbered in their ranks, that we may enter with them into the life that passeth not away, although we have been called late, as if at eventide, to the knowledge of the truth.

f. 26 a
Now when they had entered and mingled with the crowd of Christians, they asked some of them, saying: Who is that old man who is sitting by himself in the midst of the people in a high place as if in honour? But some of the crowd answered and said unto them: That is the bishop Helenus, who has been educated from his birth in a monastery of Christian people, he who by his acceptable prayers was saved from the midst of a burning fire; and what is to be told concerning the beauty and excellence of his former deeds! For lo! a short time ago a certain wizard who dwelt here, whose name was Iraus, approached the people of the Christians with the wicked artifice of his magic, and desired to turn away their minds from the sacred writings of theology, and from the certain hope which is signified in their living words. He waxed bold in his wickedness and approached the bishop Helenus and began to speak to him vain words and of the corruption of his error. But when the holy man saw the impudence of his wicked words, and knew that he could not reply to him about the truth in words, he said with a loud voice in the presence of all the people who were assembled there: Why need we argue in words with the son of perdition who now disturbs us? For behold! he is not willing to

submit to our own words nor to our teaching that he may turn to the truth. For by the seductiveness and incitement of his words he has caused many to fall from the faith of God wherein they were standing. And behold! down to the present time he is eager in his wickedness that he may subvert and throw down those who are established and confirmed in their faith from the hope of their God. But henceforth in the first place it is incumbent on us to show by an experiment and by a deed that it is God who guides and helps all those who believe in Him and rely upon Him. He who by the hands of me, His humble and weak servant, is ready to show the glorious power of His sovereignty and the sublime redemption which He works for all His servants who love Him with their whole heart in truth and in verity. f. 26 b

And when the holy one, bishop Helenus, had said these things, he said again to all the people who were standing there and listening to them: Kindle a great fire in the midst of the city; and let us enter it together, I and this son of perdition who is leading you astray, and let us stand in the midst of the flame. And the one of us whom his God shall rescue from the fire and who does not burn, his religion is true, and his God is the true God and is able to save from the fire all those who trust in Him. f. 27 a

And when the bishop Helenus had said these things, this counsel pleased all the people; they said to him: Thou hast well said. Now when they had kindled a great fire, the holy bishop Helenus commanded that they both should go in together without fear, and that they should stand in the midst of the flame. But the wizard answered and said: Let it not be thus; but let us enter each of us alone. Now go thou in first, because thou hast counselled and incited the people that this should happen. And immediately, swiftly, the Blessed Helenus, with great con-

f. 27 b

fidence in God his helper, spread out his hands towards heaven, and with sobs and with many tears called to God in his prayers, saying: Thou knowest, our Lord Jesus the Christ, Son of the Living God, the readiness of my soul; Thou wert the fourth who didst appear to the three children of the house of Hanania in the midst of the furnace of fire. Thou knowest, my Lord and my God, that I had not one wish for human glory; but all my labour and longing and the eagerness of my soul is for the redemption of Thy people, over whom in Thy grace Thou hast appointed me a shepherd, whom the enemy and hater of good by means of his minister hath plotted to turn from the plain path of life. And because of this, for the redemption of Thy people I go joyfully into this fire, for there I shall find Thee before me. But sprinkle upon me swiftly the dew of Thy mercy, so that this fire may not at all touch me. And when he had said these things in his prayers, he signed himself with the sign of the cross and entered, and stood confidently exulting in the midst of the flame of the fire a long time, whilst in nothing was he hurt by that fire. Then when the people who were assembled there saw this great miracle which had happened they laid hold of Iraus the wizard and without his consent threw him into the fire. But when he began to burn the blessed bishop Helenus ran and seized him by his hand so that he might rescue him. For although he was justly tortured in that fire, as his impudence deserved, yet the bishop Helenus seized and brought him out of it alive.

f. 28 a

But when all the people had insulted that wizard and stoned him with stones, they left him and went away from there.

But him whom ye see, the grace of God has magnified him whilst continually without ceasing he praises and glorifies and exalts God, who by His hand hath wrought redemption for His people.

Then the blessed Eugenia with those two eunuchs who were with her, Proteus and Hyacinthus, fell down before the holy bishop Helenus and did obeisance to him. And they implored and besought him to confirm them in the faith of the Christ; and they opened their mouths and persuaded him and besought him that by his hand they might approach to the knowledge of God completely. f. 28 b
The blessed one answered and said to them, My children, be ye continually in the church of God, and be ye zealous at all times in the holy service of your Lord, and thus the great day of the revelation of His coming shall find you watching and ready.

But the blessed Eugenia besought him and said unto him, I beseech of thee, my Lord, pray for me, and commend me to God, He whom thou servest gloriously from thy youth. For we three, my Lord, are by family Romans, and children of those who worship idols. But the mercy of thy Lord and His grace hath called us. When we heard His voice we did not delay to follow it, but immediately swiftly we left the vain worship of idols. And as we were seeking to journey after the sacred footsteps of thy holiness the grace of God brought us hither. And when the blessed ones had related these things to the holy Helenus he was silent and did not speak to them, for all the things that f. 29 a
had been related to him had been revealed to him by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. And because it was evening they knelt and received a blessing from him, and thus they departed from his presence. But on the following day they came to the church and desired to appear to the blessed bishop. But a certain priest who dwelt with him chanced to be there; an illustrious and excellent man, whose name was Eutropius. And they persuaded him to go in and remind the bishop about them. And he went in to him with eagerness and said to him: Three young men,

brethren, have come here of those who have forsaken the fear and the worship of idols, and they desire to become servants of the Christ, and to be numbered amongst His people, and to be amongst those who believe in Him and are admitted to His glorious mysteries. And they desire so great a gift by the hand of thy holiness and long to be worthy. Then said the blessed Helenus, I praise Thee, our Lord Jesus the Christ, that Thou hast caused us to attain to all this, and by Thy grace hast deemed us to be worthy. I will see those of whom Thou hast already told me by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. And he commanded and they entered his presence, and he rose immediately and prayed. And when he had finished his prayer, he took hold of the hand of Eugenia with those two who were with her, and said to them, How have ye received the knowledge of the truth, and committed yourselves to God, and [how] did ye ask to see me His humble servant? What have ye heard about me that ye have come to me? Reveal it to me, for I wish to know it from you, and I seek to see the good fruits of your promptitude, if it be that you wish to approach God with all your mind.

f. 29 b

And the blessed Eugenia answered and said to him: We have considered amongst ourselves that it is not fitting that we should name the adorable name of God on stones and wooden things without feeling. And whilst we were discussing amongst ourselves which is the true religion in which the most high and adorable God delights, the grace of our Lord brought us hither. For we heard some of you who were singing together and saying that all the gods of the nations are demons, but the Lord made the heavens. And when we heard this blessed voice, we dismissed immediately and swiftly the religion of idols from us. And we forsook their worship in haste. And we came hither eagerly, and we journeyed with all the people of the

f. 30 a