

Man's Forgetfulness of Eternity.

ST. John Damascene gives an apt illustration of man's foolish and perverse attachment to earthly things, by a most ingenious parable, wherein he truthfully portrays the state of this life. « A certain man, » says he, « was pursued by a furious unicorn, which made the very mountains tremble and the valleys resound with its roaring. Heedless, through fear, of the path before him, the man rushed headlong into a deep ravine. Stretching out his arm to catch at anything that might stay his fall, he happened to alight upon the branches of a tree which grew out at the side of the ravine, and seized upon it with much joy, hoping he had thus both escaped the fury of the beast and the danger of his fall. Looking toward the foot of the tree, he perceived two large rats, the one white, the other black, which were incessantly gnawing its root and had already progressed so far, that the tree was about to fall. At the bottom of the pit, he beheld a most deformed dragon with flaming eyes fixed upon him, and with open jaws, awaiting his fall to devour him. On the side of the pit where the tree grew, there appeared four poisonous asps shooting forth their mortal sting. However, upon noticing the leaves of the tree, he perceived some of them distilling certain drops of honey, which so greatly pleased him that, forgetting the dangers which threatened him on all sides, he devoted himself wholly in gathering and tasting, drop by drop, that small quantity of honey, without reflecting or making further account either of the fierce unicorn above him or of the horrible dragon beneath him, of the poisonous asps beside him, or the weakened tree, which was ready to fall and precipitate him into the deep. — This image represents to us the state of man, who, forgetful of the manifold perils of transitory life, surrenders himself entirely to vain pleasures. For the unicorn signifies death, which follows and pursues man from the very hour of his birth ; the pit is the world full of evils and miseries ; the tree illustrates the course of life, the two rats typifying day and night, which continually second one another consuming it ; the four asps are the four elements or humors, of which the body of man is composed, the excess of any one of which distempers the whole constitution of the body, and at last destroys it ; the horrid dragons recall the eternity of hell, which distends its throat and jaws to swallow sinners ; the small drops of honey are the pleasures and delights of this world ; and so great is the diversion which they cause, that a man, though seeing himself encompassed on all sides by so many