204 Wood (*Lignum*)

Upon wood a burden is carried; fire is emitted from wood; wood alters liquors; wood saves the sailors.

Concerning the first, 1 Pet. [2:24]: “His own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree.” Sins, that is, the penalty for sins. There is the figure by metonymy as when the cause is put for the effect.

Concerning the second, from the wood of the cross we ought to kindle in us divine love.

¶ The figure for this, 3 Kings 17[:12]: “Behold I am gathering two sticks.” And on the altar concerning this fire it is said in Lev. 6[:12]: “The fire on my altar shall always burn.”

About which see above chapter [174] Fire (*Ignis*).

Concerning the third, Eccli. 38[:5]: “Was not bitter water made sweet with wood?” Note there in the *Historia*, Exodus,[[1]](#endnote-1) because through the memory of the cross the tribulations of the world were sweetened.

Concerning the fourth, Wis. 14[:5]: “Men trust their lives even to a little wood and passing over the sea by ship are saved.” So, it is evident in the thief crucified with Christ how quickly he went to paradise. Therefore, it can be said that of Wis. 14[:7]: “Blessed is the wood, by which justice comes.” For wood is of life by these who seize it like salvation; it is for the fugitive to seize the corner of the altar as is evident concerning Joab, [3 Kings 2:28].

¶ Again, the cross is called the wood of life both by reason of the fruit and by reason of the effect. The reason of the fruit because from the fruit of the tree it took the name. Formerly the cross was accustomed to carry corrupt fruit, Deut. 21[:23]: “He is accursed of God that hangs on a tree.” But now he carries the fruit to you.

Again, by reason of effect because it confers life to those having it, Prov. 11[:30]: “The fruit of the just man is the tree of life.” Adam received it and was more abundantly restored than his offence. And so, man justly recouped through the cross the life which he had lost, 1 Pet. [2:24]: “Who his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree.”

¶ Third, by the wood of the cross life was conserved to these who have life. On whose wood others wishing to lack birdlime and snare fly high from the earth by spreading their wings in the shape of the cross. So, the cross of Christ saves man from the birdlime of voluptuousness and the snare of cupidity adhering to him. And it is said with merit that the tree of life, which was put in the middle of paradise, that is, of the Church militant so anyone could tie himself to it. But note here that he who would be revivified by the cross is required that he take it up and be stuck to it. So, we see that a medicine is only as effective as it cooperates with nature. So, neither does the cross of anyone’s affliction render life of the soul unless his will accepts it.

¶ The example of Antiochus, [2] Mach. 9[:5], who although he was shown to be hard, he was not saved. Therefore, according to the counsels, Cant. 7[:8]: “I will go up into the palm tree and will take hold of the fruit thereof.” For in the upper part of the tree are the riper and sweeter fruits, so in the taking up of the cross, the penances are the fruits received, but in the consummation are the sweet fruits.

¶ Note here that the rich of the world freely eat good fruits, but they do not freely ascend the trees. So, a cat loves fish, but it does not want to get its feet wet.

¶ Concerning the third, note that the blind man needs a guide whom he holds by the cloak or by a stick, but humanity was blinded by sin and given to that guide in the incarnation whom he needed that man follow or by the cloak of innocence which if he could not perhaps by the stick of penitence. “Blessed be he that shall take and dash your little ones against the rock,” Psal. [136:9]. Here it is also to be noticed that who does well and securely, but he ought to hold on. It is required that he stick to it by the feet of affection and the hand of operation, otherwise if he loosened his hand because of the itch of delight he can easily fall. Therefore, if humanity was damned for this because a woman took the fruit from it as is evident, Gen. 3[:6]. But also, humanity was saved when he undertook the tree’s fruit from the woman. Therefore in Wis. 14[:7] it is said, “For blessed is the wood, by which justice comes.”

¶ Certainly justice is the virtue by which each is rendered what is his. The woman rendered to the tree what the woman took from the tree, namely, fruit for fruit, fruit of the womb for the fruit of the tree. Here it can be noted what the Master writes in his *Historia* on the book 3 Kings [10:1],[[2]](#endnote-2) concerning the Queen of Sheba who saw in the house of Solomon the tree on which Christ would be suspended, etc. And this can be said which Daniel 4[:7-9] saw, “In the midst of the earth,” that is in Jerusalem, and the height thereof was exceeding great ... reached unto heaven,” because by the cross heaven was refilled with saints, and it follows, “it was food for all in it,” that is, Christ. “Under it dwelt beasts,” that is the animals, “and in the branches thereof the fowls of the air,” that is the, the contemplatives, etc. This cross is figured by “The sticks” which “the widow woman” gathered, 3 Kings 17[:10] which were exactly two. One for the length and one for the width is the metaphor and when duality signified charity. And here note that the woman collected these sticks during a time of famine so that she might cook food for herself, so Christ on the cross was cooked as food for us by which we might be refreshed before we die. Therefore, the cross is figured by the tree which John saw, Apo. 22[:2], which stood “on both sides of the river,” that is, the transitory world, namely, in part of prosperity and in part of adversity and he carried away the fruits unique to the months because always fruit is found on the cross.

Again, this is the wood which under Eliseus swam in the water and extracted the iron axe, 4 Kings 6[:5-7]. According to Aulus Gellius,[[3]](#endnote-3) iron is that which falls often in the waves of water but emerges by the cross.

Again, the cross is figured by two pieces of wood which Ezekiel the prophet joined by the transverse, Ezech. 37[:19].

¶ Again, this is the cedar wood, which was offered with cooked with hyssop, and imbued “in the blood of the sparrow” on one side for the cleansing of leprosy, Lev. 14[:6].

Again, this is “the timber that” Habacuc 2[:11] saw “between the joints of the building.” Because the cross is between the building of the Church militant and triumphant which two join each other.

Again, it is figured by the wood which Moses erected with the brazen serpent for the healing of the stricken, Num. 21[:8-9].

¶ Again, the cross is the harp of David by the signal sound of which the evil spirit was put to flight, [1 Kings 16:16].

Again, it is the staff of Jacob upon which Christ returned him to his homeland, that is, to heaven “with two companies,” that is, angels and men, Gen. 32[:10]. And 1 Kings 17[:40] with his staff and five stone he defeated the Philistine, so Christ on the cross with five wounds defeated the devil. It is in our best interests to have his staff in our hands in exiting from the world as it is said in Exod. 21[:19] the vines from their fragility would fall upon the earth unless they were supported by a stick, so man being fragile in sin would fall unless he would be supported by the cross.

Again, James of Vitry says[[4]](#endnote-4) that if a wolf pursues a man and the man thrusts a club among them the wolf will not pursue further. So, if the sign of the cross comes between man and the devil. Wherefore Bernard,[[5]](#endnote-5) a great security for man is to carry the sign of the cross. For the devil fears seeing the sign by which he was beaten.

Again, Solinus says[[6]](#endnote-6) about the cirogillo, namely, the squirrel, which if it does not have good food in its own land applies itself to some bit of wood on the sea and erects its tail as if for a sail, and so crosses the sea to better food. So, man here lacking good food applies himself to the wood of the cross, raises him mind, and arrives to feed, Wis. 14[:5]: “Men trust their lives to a little wood, and passing over the sea by ship we are saved.”

¶ Again, it is read in the *Historia tripartita*, book 6, c. 83,[[7]](#endnote-7) that when Julian the Apostate favored the Jews against the Christians by giving them license for rebuilding the temple, which was made on a day he had been dissipated. At night and fire coming forth from the foundations it burned the diggers, the portico falling it crushed those sleeping. On the following day, the sign of the cross appeared shining forth in heaven, but in the clothing of Jewish men it appeared obscure, seeing which many of the Jews were converted to the faith.

¶ Again, the wood of the cross banishes bitterness, Exod. 15[:25]: “a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, they were turned into sweetness.”

Again, it frees from dangers, Wis. 14[:5]: “Men trust their lives to a little wood.”

Again, it heals the dwellers of the underworld, John 5[:4]: “He that went down first into the pond ... was made whole.” This is believed to have been by virtue of the wood of the cross which was floating there.

1. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* Exodus 32 (PL 198:1159): Animaequior est enim, qui sitit, si non invenerit potum, quam si inventum gustare non possit. «Dominus autem ostendit lignum Moysi, quod cum misisset in aquas, dulcoratae sunt.» Forte lignum illud talis efficaciae erat, et forte miraculose factum est, ut in solitudine in qua non erat lignum, inveniretur lignum. Hebraeus dicit, quia illud lignum naturaliter amarissimum erat, et ut mirabiliter innotesceret vis divina, amarum additum amaro, dulcedinem operatum est. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* Libri III Regum. 26 (PL 198:1370): Quae regina gratis suscipiens ad propria remeavit. Tradunt quidam eam rescripsisse Salomoni, quod praesentialiter ei dicere timuit, se vidisse scilicet quoddam lignum in domo Saltus, in quo suspendendus erat quidam, pro cujus morte regnum Judaeorum periret, et certis indiciis illud regi indicavit. Quod timens Salomon in profundissimis terrae visceribus occultavit illud. Pro cujus virtute aqua mota sanavit aegrotos, quod tamen in libris suis negant se habere Hebraei. Sed quomodo circa tempora Christi in probatica piscina superenataverit incertum est (Joan. V), et creditur fuisse hoc lignum crucis Dominicae. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 11.2.6 (LCL 200:304-305): “Nam vita” inquit, “humana prope uti ferrum est. Si exerceas, conteritur; si non exerceas, tamen robigo interficit. Item homines exercendo videmus conteri; si nihil exerceas, inertia atque torpedo plus detrimenti facit quam exercitio.”

“Indeed, human life is very like iron. If you use it, it wears out; if you do not, it is nevertheless consumed by rust. In the same way we see men worn out by toil; if you toil not, sluggishness and torpor are more injurious than toil.” [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. James of Vitry, *Historia Orientalis* (Duaci: Ex Officina Typographica Balthazaris Belleri, 1596), p. 14: Dicunt enim quod lupus quidam in via qua ambulabat aliquando ei obuiam venit, contra quem cum tres digitos Mahometus erexisset, lupus exterritus confestim fugiendo recessit. Affirmant etiam homines animales et bruti, quod bos quidam quandoque cum eo loqutus fuisset et quod arbor fici ad eius vocationem et imperium ad terram inclinata, ad eum humilitr accesssit.

<https://archive.org/details/IacobiDeVitriacoCardinalisLibriDuo1596/page/n67> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Bernard, *Sermones de diversis* 28.2 (PL 183:617): Propria jam ab eo lacrymarum unda exigitur, propriam bajulare crucem, propria mortificare membra, et propriam immolare hostiam necesse est. Sine causa aliter diceret: Credo. Propriis labiis expietur oportet propriorum maledictio labiorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Solinus cf. Alexander Neckham, *De Naturis Rerum* 124 (Wright p. 203): Nautam ipsum facit naturae instinctus, dum caudae erectae latitudinem pro sinu veli habet pro na ve autem cortice cui firmiter adhaeret utitur, aut assere tenui. Quis ei certitudinem stabilis aurae monstravit? Flumina latissima lintre sua transit, ripa potitur optata.

Cf. Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (New York: De Capo Press, 2006): The admirable wit of this Beast (Squirrel) appeareth in her swimming or palling over the Waters, for when hunger or some convenient prey of meat constraineth her to passe over a river, she seeks out some rinde or small bark of a Tree which she ferteth upon the water, and then goes into it and holding up her tail like a sail, letteth the wind drive her to the other side, and this is witnssed by Olaus Magnus in his descrption of Scandinavia, where is is ordinary among Squirrels, by reason of many rivers, that otherwise they cannot passe over....

<https://books.google.com/books?id=FXj-AQAAQBAJ&pg=PT56&lpg=PT56&dq=Solinus+on+squirrels&source=bl&ots=I-6GcfZXiF&sig=Wt-9Js3WmFXU5s3qZdxcx0oGDw8&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjZ_sfa8ZDVAhWCy4MKHVNsC2QQ6AEIQTAJ#v=onepage&q=%20squirrel&f=false> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cassiodorus, *Historia Tripartita* 6.43 (PL 69:1058-1059): Igitur Iulianus etiam Iudaeos contra Christianos armavit. Primumque convocans requisivit, cur eis praecipiente lege sacrificare, nequaquam immolationibus uterentur. Cumque respondissent uno tantummodo loco sibi offerendi sacrificium fuisse permissum, repente iussit Deo odibilis destructum resuscitare templum: credens infelix dominicum verbum se posse destruere; cuius per hoc veritatem magis ostendit. Haec itaque verba Iudaei libenter accipientes, cunctis per diversum terrarum orbem mandavere Iudaeis. Qui undique concurrentes, pecunias ad aedificium alacriter offerebant: ministravitque plurimum etiam imperator, non largitatis gratia, sed veritati repugnans. Misitque pariter praesidem, impiorum exsecutorem dignissimum praeceptorum. Aiunt enim quoniam ad repurgium faciendum argenteas hamas, et cophinos, et scaphas habuerunt. Cumque fodere iam coepissent, statuto quidem die hoc multitudo plurima faciebat: nocte vero, spontanea terra de valle crescebat. Solutis itaque prioris etiam fundamenti reliquiis, nova omnia praeparabant. Cumque gypsi et calcis multa modiorum millia praeparassent, vis magna ventorum repente respirans, tempestates atque procellae subito factae, quidquid congregatum fuerat disperserunt. Adhuc autem vesanientibus eis, et nequaquam divina longanimitate correptis, maximus primo terraemotus est factus. Et quisquis non fuerat mysteriis divinis imbutus, vehementer attritus est. Cum vero neque hoc terrerentur indicio, ignis ex fundamentis quae suffodiebantur egrediens, plurimos fodientium concremavit, aliorum membra dissolvit. Nocte quoque plurimis in vicina porticu dormientibus, cadens subito cum tecto ipsa porticus, dormientes oppressit. Alia vero die in coelo signum splendens crucis salutaris apparuit. Sed etiam Iudaeorum vestes crucis signaculo sunt impletae, non tamen splendenti, sed nigro colore signatae. Haec itaque Dei rebelles considerantes, et divina flagella contremiscentes, ad propria sunt reversi: confitentes esse Deum qui ab eorum progenitoribus ligno probatur appensus. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)