## Alcuin of York, The Disputation of Pippin, trans. Damian Fleming

- 1. **Pippin**: What is a letter? **Alcuin**: Keeper of history.
- 2. **P.** What is a word? **A.** Betrayer of the mind.
- 3. **P.** What produces words? **A.** The tongue.
- 4. **P.** What is the tongue? **A.** Whip of the air.
- 5. **P.** What is air? **A.** Protection of life.
- 6. **P.** What is life? **A.** Happiness of the blessed, sorrow of wretches, expectation of death.
- 7. **P.** What is death? **A.** An Inevitable event, uncertain journey, tears of the living, support of a will, robber of a human.
- 8. **P.** What is a human? **A.** A possession of death, transitory traveler, guest of a place.
- 9. **P.** To what is a human similar? **A.** To an apple.
- 10. **P.** How is a person situated? **A.** Like a candle in the wind.
- 11. **P.** Where is a person placed? **A.** Within six walls.
- 12. **P.** Which? **A.** Above, below, before, behind, right and left.
- 13. **P.** How many companions has he? **A.** Four.
- 14. **P.** Which? **A.** Hot, cold, dry, wet.
- 15. **P.** In how many ways is he changeable? **A.** Six.
- 16. **P.** In which? **A.** In hunger and fullness, rest and labor, waking and sleep.
- 17. **P.** What is sleep? **A.** Image of death.
- 18. **P.** What is the freedom of man? **A.** Innocence.
- 19. **P.** What is the head? **A.** Summit of the body.
- 20. **P.** What is the body? **A.** Domicile of the soul.
- 21. **P.** What are hairs? **A.** Clothes of the head.
- 22. **P.** What is the beard? **A.** The distinction of sex, honor of age.
- 23. **P.** What is the brain? **A.** The preserver of memory.
- 24. **P.** What are the eyes? **A.** Leaders of the body, vessels of light, guides of the mind.
- 25. **P.** What are the nostrils? **A.** Path of smells.
- 26. **P.** What are the ears? **A.** Collectors of sounds.
- 27. **P.** What is the face? **A.** Image of the mind.
- 28. **P.** What is the mouth? **A.** Feeder of the body.
- 29. **P.** What are the teeth? **A.** Millstones of things bitten.
- 30. **P.** What are the lips? **A.** Doors of the mouth.
- 31. **P.** What is the throat? **A.** Devourer of food.
- 32. **P.** What are hands? **A.** Workmen of the body.
- 33. **P.** What are the fingers? **A.** Pluckers of stings.
- 34. **P.** What is the lungs? **A.** Keeper of air.
- 35. **P.** What is the heart? **A.** Receptacle of life.
- 36. **P.** What is the liver? **A.** Protection of warmth.
- 37. **P.** What is the gall bladder? **A.** Awakening of anger.
- 38. **P.** What is the spleen? **A.** Fit for laughing and happiness.

- 39. **P.** What is the stomach? **A.** Digester and of foods.
- 40. **P.** What is the womb? **A.** Keeper of fragile things.
- 41. **P.** What are the bones? **A.** Strength of the body.
- 42. **P.** What are the hips? **A.** Crossbeams of columns.
- 43. **P.** What are the legs? **A.** Columns of the body.
- 44. **P.** What are the feet? **A.** Moveable foundation.
- 45. **P.** What is blood? **A.** Moisture of the veins, nourishment of life.
- 46. **P.** What are the veins? **A.** Fountains of the flesh.
- 47. **P.** What is heaven? **A.** Revolving sphere, unmeasured summit.
- 48. **P.** What is light? **A.** The appearance of all things.
- 49. **P.** What is day? **A.** Incitement of labor.
- 50. **P.** What is sun? **A.** Splendor of the world, beauty of heaven, thanks of nature, honor of day, distributor of hours.
- 51. **P.** What is the moon? **A.** The eye of night, bountiful of dew, foretelling of storms.
- **P.** What are stars? **A.** Picture of the summit, governors of sailors, adornment of night.
- 53. **P.** What is rain? **A.** Conception of earth, generatrix of fruits.
- 54. **P.** What is a cloud? **A.** Night in the day, labor of the eyes.
- 55. **P.** What is wind? **A.** Disturbance of air, motion of waters, dryness of land.
- 56. **P.** What is earth? **A.** Mother of things growing, nurse of the living, cellar of life, devourer of all.
- 57. **P.** What is the sea? **A.** Way of boldness, border of the earth, divider of regions, reception of rivers, fountain of rains, refuge in dangers, thanks in desires.
- 58. **P.** What are rivers? **A.** Unfailing course, refreshment of the sun, irrigation of the land.
- 59. **P.** What is water? **A.** Support of life, washing of filths.
- 60. **P.** What is fire? **A.** Excessive heat, warming of things born, maturity of fruits.
- 61. **P.** What is cold? **A.** Feverishness of the limbs.
- 62. **P.** What is frost? **A.** Persecutor of grass, destroyer of leaves, bind of the earth, fountain of waters.
- 63. **P.** What is snow? **A.** Dry water.
- 64. **P.** What is winter? **A.** Exile of summer.
- 65. **P.** What is spring? **A.** Painter of the earth.
- 66. **P.** What is summer? **A.** Re-clothing of the earth, maturation of fruits.
- 67. **P.** What is autumn? **A.** Storehouse of the year.
- 68. **P.** What is a year? **A.** The four-team chariot of the world.
- 69. **P.** Who leads it? **A.** Night and day, cold and hot.
- 70. **P.** Who is its driver? **A.** Sun and Moon.
- 71. **P.** How many palaces does it have? **A.** Twelve.
- 72. **P.** Who are the chiefs of the palaces? **A.** Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces.
- 73. **P.** How many days do they reside in each palace? **A.** The sun, thirty days and ten and a half hours; the moon, two days and eight and a half hours.
- 74. **P.** Master, I fear to go too high. **A.** Who led you into the height?

- 75. **P.** Curiosity. **A.** If you are afraid, let us descend. I shall follow wherever you should go.
- 76. **P.** If I knew what the ship was, I would prepare it for you, so that you might come to me. **A.** The ship is a wandering home, a where-you-wish dwelling, traveler without footprints, the neighbor of sand.
- 77. **P.** What is sand? **A.** The wall of the land.
- 78. **P.** What is grass? **A.** The clothes of the land.
- 79. **P.** What are vegetables? **A.** Friends of doctors, praise of cooks.
- 80. **P.** Who is it, who makes bitter things sweet? **A.** Hunger.
- 81. **P.** What is it, which makes a man not weary? **A.** Money.
- 82. **P.** What is sleep for one waking? **A.** Hope.
- 83. **P.** What is hope? **A.** Mitigation of labor, doubtful event.
- 84. **P.** What is friendship? **A.** Equality of minds.
- 85. **P.** What is faith? **A.** Certitude of an unknown and marvelous thing.
- 86. **P.** What is a marvel? **A.** Recently I saw a man standing, struggling, walking, who never was.
- 87. **P.** How is that possible, tell me. **A.** It was an image in water.
- 88. **P.** Why do I not understand this by myself, when I have seen that very man just as many times? **A.** Because you are a youth of good talent and natural genius, I shall propose certain other marvels to you; see if you might figure these out by yourself.
- 89. **P.** Let us do it, though, so that if I should say otherwise than it is, you will correct me. **A.** I shall do as you wish.
- 90. **A.** Someone unknown speaks to me without tongue or voice, who has never been before nor will be afterwards, and I was not hearing him nor knew him. **P.** Perhaps a dream vexed you, master?
- 91. **A.** Indeed, son; hear another: I saw a dead one produce a live one, and in the anger of the live one, the dead ones are consumed. **P.** From the rubbing of trees fire is born, consuming trees.
- 92. **A.** It is true. I heard dead ones speaking a lot. **P.** Never well, unless they are hung in the air.
- 93. **A.** Truly. I saw an extinguished fire rest in water. **P.** I reckon you wish to signify a flint-stone in water.
- 94. **A.** I see a dead one sitting on a live one, and in the laughter of the dead one, the live one dies. **P.** Our cooks know this one.
- 95. **A.** They do know, but place a finger over you mouth lest the lads hear what it is. I was on a hunt with others, in which if we caught anything, we carried nothing with us, and what we were not able to catch, we carried home with us. **P.** This is the hunting of rustics.
- 96. **A.** It is. I saw something born, before it was conceived. **P.** You saw and perhaps you ate it.
- 97. **A.** I did eat it. What is, which is not, and has a name, and gives an answer to one sounding? **P.** Ask the rushes in the woods.

- 98. **A.** I saw a guest running with its home; and he was silent and his house was sounding. **P.** Get me a net and I'll show.
- 99. **A.** Who is it, whom you are not able to see except with you eyes closed. **P.** Who snores will show this one to you.
- 100. **A.** I saw a man holding eight in his hand, and from the eight he suddenly snatched seven, and six remained. **P.** Boys in school know.
- 101. **A.** What is it, if you take away the head, it rises up higher? **P.** Go to bed and you'll find out there.
- 102. **A.** There were three: one was never born and died once; another was born once and never died, a third was born once and died twice. **P.** The first is the same as the earth, the second, my lord, the third, a poor man.
- 103. A. Nevertheless, tell me the first letters of their names. P. i., .v., .xxx. (1, 5, 30).
- 104. **A.** I saw a woman flying, with an iron snout, a wooden body and a winged tail, carrying death. **P.** She is the companion of soldiers.
- 105. **A.** What is a soldier? **P.** Wall of the empire, fear of enemies, glorious servitude.
- 106. **A.** What is, which is and is not? **P.** Nothing.
- 107. **A.** How is it able to be and not be? **P.** It is in name, and is not in thing.
- 108. **A.** What is a silent messenger? **P.** What I hold in my hand.
- 109. **A.** What do you hold in your hand? **P.** Your letter master.
- 110. A. Read happily, son!