

SELECT LETTERS OF ST. JEROME

lentur vafriora licet et pingui aqualiculo farsos circumferant homines: Blesilla nostra ridebit nec dignabitur loquacium ranarum audire convicia, cum dominus eius dictus sit Beelzebub.

XL

AD MARCELLAM DE ONASO

1. MEDICI, quos vocant chirurgicos, crudeles putantur et miseri sunt. An non est miseria alienis dolere vulneribus et mortuas carnes clementi secare ferro? Non horrere curantem, quod horret ipse, qui patitur, et inimicum putari? Ita se natura habet, ut amara sit veritas, blanda vitia aestimentur. Esaias in exemplum captivitatis futurae nudus non erubescit incedere; Heremias de media Hierusalem ad Eufraten, fluvium Mesopotamiae, mittitur, ut inter inimicas gentes, ubi est Assyrius et castra sunt Chaldaeorum, ponat *περίζωμα* corrumpeundum: Hiezechiel stercore primum humano, dein bubulo panem de omni semente conspersum edere iubetur et uxoris interitum siccis oculis videt; Amos de Samaria pellitur: cur quaeso? Nempe ideo, quia chirurgici spiritalis secantes vitia peccatorum ad paenitentiam

¹ Matthew, x. 25.

² This letter is superscribed 'To Marcella concerning Onasus,' but most of the fierce invective is addressed personally to Onasus himself, of whom nothing else is known.

³ Isaiah, xx. 2.

⁴ Jeremiah, xiii. 7.

⁵ Ezekiel, iv. 9 ff. and xxiv. 15 ff.

⁶ Amos, vii. 12.

LETTER XXXVIII AND LETTER XL

Let men indulge in even sharper witticisms, if they please, and parade before us their fat-paunched friends. Our dear Blesilla will laugh at them, and will not deign to listen to the abuse of noisy frogs. She knows that her Lord was called by men Beelzebub.¹

LETTER XL

TO MARCELLA

*Onasus the windbag*²

Written A.D. 385

THOSE medical men whom folk call surgeons are thought to be cruel and really are pitiful. Is it not a pitiful business to feel the pain of another's wounds, and to cut dead flesh with the merciful knife? Is it not pitiful to show no horror at treating a malady which seems horrible even to the patient, and to be considered the sufferer's enemy? Man's nature is such that truth tastes bitter and pleasant vices are esteemed. Isaiah in token of the coming captivity does not blush to go abroad naked.³ Jeremiah is sent from mid-Jerusalem to Euphrates, the river of Mesopotamia, among hostile nations, the Assyrians and the camp of the Chaldaeans, and bidden there to hide his girdle and let it be marred.⁴ Ezekiel is ordered to eat bread made of every kind of grain and mingled first with man's and then with cow's dung, and he looks on at his wife's death with dry eyes.⁵ Amos is driven forth from Samaria.⁶ Why was all this, pray? It was because our spiritual surgeons by cutting into the faults of sinners exhorted

cohortabantur. Paulus apostolus: 'Inimicus,' inquit, 'vobis factus sum vera dicens.' Et quia salvatoris dura videbantur eloquia, plurimi discipulorum retrorsum abierunt.

2. Unde non mirum est, si et nos vitii detrahentes offendimus plurimos. Disposui nasum secare fetentem: timeat, qui strumosus est. Volo corniculae detrahere garrienti: rancidulam se intellegat cornix. Numquid unus in orbe Romano est, qui habeat 'truncas inhonesto vulnere nares'? Numquid solus Onasus Segestanus cava verba et in vesicarum modum tumentia buccis trutinatur inflatis? Dico quosdam scelere, periurio, falsitate ad dignitatem nescio quam pervenisse: quid ad te, qui te intellegis innocentem? Rideo advocatum, qui patrono egeat: quadrante dignam eloquentiam nare subsanno: quid ad te, qui disertus es? Volo in nummarios invehi sacerdotes: tu, qui dives es, quid irasceris? Claudum cupio suis ignibus ardere Vulcanum: numquid hospes eius es aut vicinus, quod a delubris idoli niteris incendium submovere? Placet mihi de larvis, de noctua, de bubone, de Niliacis ridere portentis: quicquid dictum fuerit, in te dictum putas. In quodcumque vitium stili mei mucro contorquetur, te clamitas designari, conserta manu in ius vocas et satiricum scriptorem in prosa stulte arguis. An ideo bellus videris, quia fausto vocaris nomine? Quasi

¹ Galatians, iv. 16.

² Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI. 497, of Deiphobus. Nasus = nose. Onasus = Onesimus = 'the helpful.'

men to repentance. The apostle Paul says: 'I have become your enemy because I tell you the truth.'¹ And because the Saviour's words seemed hard, very many of His disciples went away.

So it is not surprising if we too offend very many when we try to strip away their vices. I am prepared to cut a foul-smelling nose: those who suffer from a wen may well shake in their shoes. I intend to rebuke a chattering crow: the fellow-bird may well see that he too is offensive. But is there only one man in the whole Roman world who has 'a nose lopped short with shameful wound'?² Is Onasus of Segesta the only person who puffs his cheeks and weighs out words with nothing in them like a bladder full of wind? I say that certain people have reached a certain position by crime, perjury, and false pretences. What is that to you, who know yourself to be innocent? I laugh at the advocate who himself needs a defender; I sneer scornfully at his eloquence which would be dear at a farthing. What is that to you, who are a good speaker? It is my pleasure to attack those priests who think only of money. Why do you, who are a rich man, become angry? I would fain burn limping Vulcan in his own furnace. Are you a friend or a neighbour of his, that you strive to save the idol's shrine from the flames? I like to laugh at ghosts, night-birds, hooting owls, and all the portents of Egypt: anything I say you think is aimed at yourself. Against whatever vice my pen's sword-point turns, you cry out loudly that you are its mark, you join issue and call me into court, and foolishly try to prove that I am a writer of satire in prose. Do you seem to yourself a fine fellow, because you bear the lucky name of Onasus,

non et lucus ideo dicatur, quod minime luceat, et Parcae ab eo, quod nequaquam parcant, et Eumenides Furiae, et vulgo Aethiopes vocentur argentei. Quodsi in descriptione foedorum semper irasceris, iam te cum Persio cantabo formosum:

'Te optent generum rex et regina, puellae
Te rapiant: quicquid calcaveris tu, rosa fiat.'

3. Dabo tamen consilium, quibus absconditis possis pulchrior apparere: nasus non videatur in facie, sermo non sonet ad loquendum, atque ita et formosus videri potes et disertus.

XLIII

AD MARCELLAM

1. AMBROSIVS, quo chartas, sumptus, notarios ministrante tam innumerabiles libros vere Adamantius et noster Χαλκέντερος explicavit, in quadam epistula,

¹ Persius, *Satires*, II. 37, altered.

² Not the great Bishop of Milan who lived a century after Origen, but a friend of Origen.

³ 'Chalkenteros,' 'the man with entrails of brass,' an epithet usually applied to the Alexandrian scholar Didymus, because of his unwearied industry, is here transferred to

'the Helpful'? Have you never heard the saying: *Lucus a non lucendo*? Are not the Fates called the Sparerers, because they spare no man? Are not the Furies called *Angels of Mercy*? Do not common people often use the name 'silver boys' for negroes? Still, if my pictures of ugliness make you angry, to-day I will call you beautiful and sing with Persius:¹

'May kings and queens their daughters to you lead
And for your favours as a bridegroom plead.
May girls their eager hands upon you lay
And where you walk red roses deck the way.'

I will give you, however, one piece of advice. There are some things you must hide, if you are to appear handsome. Let your nose not be seen upon your face and let your tongue never be heard in conversation. Then you may possibly be thought both good-looking and eloquent.

LETTER XLIII

TO MARCELLA

The country life

Written A.D. 385

AMBROSE,² who supplied Origen with parchment, money, and copyists, and thus enabled our man of brass³ and adamant to bring out his innumerable

Origen, who was sometimes called 'Adamantius,' probably for the same reason.