

SELECT LETTERS OF ST. JEROME

non et lucus ideo dicatur, quod minime luceat, et Parcae ab eo, quod nequaquam parcant, et Eumenides Furiarum, et vulgo Aethiopes vocentur argentei. Quodsi in descriptione foedorum semper irascaris, 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. AMBROSIIUS, 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

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'the Helpful'? Have you never heard the saying: *Lucus a non lucendo?* Are not the Fates called the Sparers, 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.

quam ad eundem de Athenis scripserat, refert numquam se cibos Origene praesente sine lectione sumpsisse, nunquam venisse somnum, nisi e fratribus aliquis sacris litteris personaret, hoc diebus egisse vel noctibus, ut et lectio orationem susciperet et oratio lectionem.

2. Quid nos, ventris animalia, tale umquam fecimus? Quos si secunda hora legentes invenerit, oscitamus, manu faciem defricantes continemus stomachum et quasi post multum laborem mundialibus rursus negotiis occupamur. Praetermitto prandia, quibus onerata mens premitur. Pudet dicere de frequentia salutandi, qua aut ipsi cotidie ad alios pergimus aut ad nos venientes ceteros expectamus. Deinceps itur in verba, sermo teritur, lacerantur absentes, vita aliena describitur et mordentes invicem consumimur ab invicem. Talis nos cibus et occupat et dimittit. Cum vero amici recesserint, ratiocinia subputamus. Nunc ira personam nobis leonis inponit, nunc cura superflua in annos multos duratura praecogitat, nec recordamur evangelii dicens: 'Stulte, hac nocte repetunt animum tuam a te; quae autem praeparasti, cuius erunt?' Vestes non ad usum tantum, sed ad delicias conquiruntur. Ubicumque compendium est, velocior pes, citus sermo, auris adtentior; si damnum, ut saepe in re familiari accidere solet, fuerit nuntiatum, vultus maerore deprimitur. Laetamur ad nummum. obolo

¹ St. Luke, xii. 20.

books, in a letter written to his friend from Athens, declares that he never took a meal in Origen's company without something being read, and that he never fell asleep save to the sound of some brother's voice reciting the Scriptures aloud. Day and night it was their habit to make reading follow upon prayer, and prayer upon reading, without a break.

Do we, poor creatures of the belly, ever behave like this? If we spend more than an hour in reading, you will find us yawning and trying to restrain our boredom by rubbing our eyes; then, as though we had been hard at work, we plunge once more into worldly affairs. I say nothing of the heavy meals which crush such mental faculties as we possess. I am ashamed to speak of our numerous calls, going ourselves every day to other people's houses, or waiting for others to come to us. The guests arrive and talk begins: a brisk conversation is engaged: we tear to pieces those who are not there: other people's lives are described in detail: we bite and are ourselves bitten in turn. With this fare the company is kept busy, and so at last it disperses. When our friends have left us, we reckon up our accounts, now frowning over them like angry lions, now with useless care planning schemes for the distant future. We remember not the words of the Gospel: 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?'¹ We buy clothes, not solely for use, but for display. When we see a chance of making money, we quicken our steps, we talk fast, we strain our ears. If we are told that we have lost, as often must happen in business, our face is clouded with sorrow. A penny makes us

contristamur. Unde, cum in uno homine animorum tam diversa sit facies, propheta dominum deprecatur dicens: 'Domine, in civitate tua imaginem eorum dissipa.' Cum enim ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei conditi sumus, ex vitio nostro et personas nobis plurimas superinducimus, et quomodo in theatralibus scaenis unus atque idem histrio nunc Herculem robustus ostentat, nunc mollis in Venerem frangitur, nunc tremulus in Cybelen, ita et nos, qui, si mundi non essemus, odiremur a mundo, tot habemus personarum similitudines, quot peccata.

3. Quapropter, quia vitae multum iam spatium transivimus fluctuando et navis nostra nunc procellarum concussa turbine, nunc scopulorum inlisionibus perforata est, quam primum licet, quasi quemdam portum secreta ruris intremus. Ibi cibariorum panis et holus nostris manibus inrigatum, lac, deliciae rusticanae, viles quidem, sed innocentes cibos praebeant. Ita viventes non ab oratione somnus, non saturitas a lectione revocabit. Si aestas est, secretum arboris umbra praebebit; si autumnus, ipsa aeris temperies et strata subter folia locum quietis ostendit. Vere ager floribus depingitur et inter querulas aves psalmi dulcius decantabuntur. Si frigus fuerit et brumales nives, ligna non coemam: calidius vigilabo vel dormiam, certe, quod sciam, vilis non algebo. Habeat sibi Roma suos tumultos, harena saeviat, circus insaniat, theatra luxurient, et

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 20. A.V. has 'when thou awakest,' but R.V. gives 'in the city' in margin = *in civitate tua* of Vulgate. (Psalm lxxii. 20.)

merry: a halfpenny makes us sad. Therefore, as the phases of one man's mind are so conflicting, the prophet prays to the Lord, saying: 'O Lord, in thy city scatter their image.'¹ For while we were created in God's image and likeness, by reason of our own perversity we hide ourselves behind changing masks, and as on the stage one and the same actor now figures as a brawny Hercules, and now relaxes into the softness of a Venus or the quivering tone of a Cybele, so we who, if we were not of the world, would be hated by the world, have a counterfeit mask for every sin to which we are inclined.

Therefore, as to-day we have traversed a great part of life's journey through rough seas, and as our barque has been now shaken by tempestuous winds, now holed upon rugged rocks, let us take this first chance and make for the haven of a rural retreat. Let us live there on coarse bread and on the green-stuff that we water with our own hands, and on milk, country delicacies, cheap and harmless. If thus we spend our days, sleep will not call us away from prayer, nor overfeeding from study. In summer the shade of a tree will give us privacy. In autumn the mild air and the leaves beneath our feet point out a place for rest. In spring the fields are gay with flowers, and the birds' plaintive notes will make our psalms sound all the sweeter. When the cold weather comes with winter's snows, I shall not need to buy wood: whether I keep vigil or lie asleep, I shall be warmer there, and certainly as far as I know, I shall escape the cold at a cheaper rate. Let Rome keep her bustle for herself, the fury of the arena, the madness of the circus, the profligacy of the theatre, and—for I must not forget our Christian

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quia de nostris dicendum est, matronarum cotidie visitetur senatus: nobis adhaerere Deo bonum est, ponere in domino spem nostram, ut, cum paupertatem istam caelorum regna mutaverint, erumpamus in vocem: 'Quid enim mihi restat in caelo et a te quid volui super terram?' Quo scilicet, cum tanta reppererimus in caelo, parva et caduca quaesisse nos doleamus in terra.

XLIV

AD MARCELLAM

UT absentiam corporum spiritus confabulatione solemur, faciat unusquisque, quod praevalat. Vos dona transmittitis, nos epistulas remittimus gratiarum, ita tamen, ut, quia velatarum virginum munus est, aliqua in ipsis munusculis esse mysteria demonstremus. Saccus orationis signum atque ieiunii est; sellae, ut foras pedes virgo non moveat; cerei, ut accenso lumine sponsi expectetur adventus; calices mortificationem carnis ostendunt et semper animum ad martirium praeparatum—'Calix' quippe 'domini inebrians perquam optimus'—quod autem et matronis offertis muscaria parvis animalibus ventilanda, procul ab illis abesse debere luxurias, quae cito cum isto interiturae mundo oleum vitae suavioris

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

² Psalm xxiii. 5. Gallican psalter.

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friends—the daily meetings of the matrons' senate. For us it is good to cleave to God, and to put our hopes in the Lord, so that, when we have exchanged this poor life for the kingdom of heaven, we may cry aloud: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.¹ Assuredly, when we have found such wealth in heaven, we may well grieve to have sought after poor passing pleasures here on earth.

LETTER XLIV

TO MARCELLA

A letter of thanks

Written A.D. 385

LET us comfort ourselves for bodily absence by spiritual conversation, each and every one of us doing what we can do best. You send us gifts, we send you back letters of thanks; with this addition, as it is an offering to virgins who have taken the veil, that we point out to you that there are certain mysteries hidden in those dear presents of yours. Sackcloth is a sign of prayer and fasting; chairs warn us that a virgin does not go abroad; tapers are a reminder to have our lights burning as we await the Bridegroom's coming; cups signify mortification of the flesh and readiness for martyrdom—'How excellent is the Lord's cup that maketh drunk those who partake thereof!'² Furthermore, when you offer matrons fans to keep off flies, you show them that they must drive away all those wanton pleasures, which with this world so quickly perish and corrupt the oil of our