

St. Jerome

One of the four Latin Fathers of the Church (along with saints Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory), Jerome, born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophroniusborn at Stridon, a town on the confines of Dalmatia and Pannonia, about the year 340-2; died at Bethlehem, 30 September, 420., is best known for his version of the Latin Bible. Called the "Vulgate", Jerome's Bible was partially a revised edition of earlier Latin translations, but parts of his Old Testament were freshly translated from the original Hebrew. Jerome received a classical education and was for six years (373-379) a hermit in Syria.

Letter LVII

TO PAMMACHIUS ON THE BEST METHOD OF TRANSLATING

Written to Pammachius in A. D. 395. In the previous year, Jerome had rendered into Latin Letter LI. (from Epiphanius to John of Jerusalem) under circumstances which he here describes (2). His version soon became public and incurred severe criticism from some person not named by Jerome but supposed by him to have been instigated by Rufinus (12). Charged with having falsified his original, he now repudiates the charge and defends his method of translation ("to give sense for sense and not word for word", 5) by an appeal to the practice of classical (5), ecclesiastical (6), and N. T. (7-10) writers.

When at a subsequent period Rufinus gave to the world what was in Jerome's opinion a misleading version of Origen's First Principles, he appealed to this letter as giving him ample warranty for what he had done. See Letters LXXX and LXXXI (URL below).

1. The apostle Paul when he appeared before King Agrippa to answer the charges, which were brought against him, wishing to use language intelligible to his hearers and confident of the success of his cause, began by congratulating himself in these words: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused by the Jews: especially because thou art expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews." He had read the saying of Jesus: "Well is him that speaketh in the ears of them that will hear" and he knew that a pleader only succeeds in proportion as he impresses his judge. On this occasion I too think myself happy that learned ears will bear my defence. For a rash tongue charges me with ignorance or falsehood; it alleges that in translating another man's letter I have made mistakes through incapacity or carelessness; it convicts me of either an involuntary error or a deliberate offence. And test it should happen that my accuser - encouraged by a volubility which stops at nothing and by an impunity which arrogates to itself an unlimited license - should accuse me as he has already done our father (Pope) Epiphanius; I send this letter to inform you - and through you others who think me worthy of their regard - of the true order of the facts.
2. About two years ago the aforesaid Pope Epiphanius sent a letter to Bishop John, first finding fault with him as regarded some of his opinions and then mildly calling him to penitence. Such was the repute of the writer or else the elegance of the letter that all Palestine fought for copies of it. Now there was in our monastery a man of no small estimation in his country, Eusebius of Cremona, who, when he found that this letter was in everybody's mouth and that the ignorant and the educated alike admired it for its teaching and for the purity of its style, set to work to beg me to translate it for him into Latin and at the same time to simplify the argument so that he might more readily understand it; for he was himself altogether unacquainted with the Greek language. I consented to his request and calling to my aid a secretary speedily dictated my version, briefly marking on the side of the page the contents of the several chapters. The fact is that he asked me to do this merely for himself, and I requested of him in return to keep his copy private and not too readily to circulate it. A year and six months went by, and then the aforesaid translation found its way by a novel stratagem from his desk to Jerusalem. For a pretended monk - either bribed as there is much reason to believe or actuated by malice of his own as his tempter vainly tries to convince us - shewed himself a second Judas by robbing Eusebius of his literary property and gave to the adversary an occasion of railing against me. They tell the unlearned that I have falsified the original, that I have not rendered word for word, that I have put 'dear friend' in place

of 'honourable sir,' and more shameful still! that I have cut down my translation by omitting the words "aidesimptate Pappa". These and similar trifles form the substance of the charges brought against me.

3. At the outset before I defend my version I wish to ask those persons who confound wisdom with cunning, some few questions. Where did you get your copy of the letter? Who gave it to you? How have you the effrontery to bring forward what you have procured by fraud? What place of safety will be left us if we cannot conceal our secrets even within our own walls and our own writing-desks? Were I to press such a charge against you before a legal tribunal, I could make you amenable to the laws which even in fiscal cases appoint penalties for meddlesome informers and condemn the traitor even while they accept his treachery. For though they welcome the profit which the information gives them, they disapprove the motive which actuates the informer. A little while ago a man of consular rank named Hesychius (against whom the patriarch Gamaliel waged an implacable war) was condemned to death by the emperor Theodosius simply because he had laid hold of imperial papers through a secretary whom he had tempted. We read also in old histories that the schoolmaster who betrayed the children of the Faliscans was sent back to his boys and handed over to them in bonds, the Roman people refusing to accept a dishonourable victory. When Pyrrhus king of Epirus was lying in his camp ill from the effects of a wound, his physician offered to poison him, but Fabricius thinking it shame that the king should die by treachery sent the traitor back in chains to his master, refusing to sanction crime even when its victim was an enemy. A principle which the laws uphold, which is maintained by enemies, which warfare and the sword fail to violate, has hitherto been held unquestioned among the monks and priests of Christ. And can any one of them presume now, knitting his brow and snapping his fingers, to spend his breath in saving: "What if he did use bribes or other inducements! he did what suited his purpose." A strange plea truly to defend a fraud as though robbers, thieves, and pirates did not do the same. Certainly, when Annas and Caiaphas led hapless Judas astray, they only did what they believed to be expedient for themselves.
4. Suppose that I wish to write down in my note books this or that silly trifle, or to make comments upon the scriptures, to retort upon my calumniators, to digest my wrath, to practice myself in the use of commonplaces and to stow away sharp shafts for the day of battle. So long as I do not publish my thoughts, they are only unkind words not matter for a charge of libel; in fact they are not even unkind words for the public ear never hears them. You may bribe my slaves and tamper with my clients You may, as the fable has it, penetrate by means of your gold to the chamber of Danae; and then, dissembling what you have done, you may call me a falsifier; but, if you do so, you will have to plead guilty yourself to a worse charge than any that you can bring against me. One man inveighs against you as a heretic, another as a perverter of doctrine. You are silent yourself; you do not venture to answer; you assail the translator; you cavil about syllables and you fancy your defence complete if your calumnies provoke no reply. Suppose that I have made a mistake or an omission in my rendering. Your whole case turns upon this; this is the defence which you offer to your accusers. Are you no heretic because I am a bad translator? Mind, I do not say that I know you to be a heretic; I leave such knowledge to your accuser, to him who wrote the letter: what I do say is that it is the height of folly for you when you are accused by one man to attack another, and when you are covered with wounds yourself to seek comfort by wounding one who is still quiescent and unaggressive.
5. In the above remarks I have assumed that I have made alterations in the letter and that a simple translation may contain errors though not willful ones. As, however the letter itself shews that no changes have been made in the sense, that nothing has been added, and that no doctrine has been foisted into it, "obviously their object is understanding to understand nothing;" and while they desire to arraign another's want of skill, they betray their own. For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word. For this course I have the authority of Tully who has so translated the Protagoras of Plato, the Oeconomicus of Xenophon, and the two beautiful orations which AEschines and Demosthenes delivered one against the other. What omissions, additions, and alterations he has made

substituting the idioms of his own for those of another tongue, this is not the time to say. I am satisfied to quote the authority of the translator who has spoken as follows in a prologue prefixed to the orations. "I have thought it right to embrace a labour which though not necessary for myself will prove useful to those who study. I have translated the noblest speeches of the two most eloquent of the Attic orators, the speeches which AEschines and Demosthenes delivered one against the other; but I have rendered them not as a translator but as an orator, keeping the sense but altering the form by adapting both the metaphors and the words to suit our own idiom. I have not deemed it necessary to render word for word but I have reproduced the general style and emphasis. I have not supposed myself bound to pay the words out one by one to the reader but only to give him an equivalent in value." Again at the close of his task he says, "I shall be well satisfied if my rendering is found, as I trust it will be, true to this standard. In making it I have utilized all the excellences of the originals, I mean the sentiments, the forms of expression and the arrangement of the topics, while I have followed the actual wording only so far as I could do so without offending our notions of taste. If all that I have written is not to be found in the Greek, I have at any rate striven to make it correspond with it." Horace too, an acute and learned writer, in his Art of Poetry gives the same advice to the skilled translator: - And care not thou with over anxious thought. To render word for word. Terence has translated Menander; Plautus and Caecilius the old comic poets. Do they ever stick at words? Do they not rather in their versions think first of preserving the beauty and charm of their originals? What men like you call fidelity in transcription, the learned term pestilent minuteness. Such were my teachers about twenty years ago; and even then I was the victim of a similar error to that which is now imputed to me, though indeed I never imagined that you would charge me with it. In translating the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea into Latin, I made among others the following prefatory observations: "It is difficult in following lines laid down by others not sometimes to diverge from them, and it is hard to preserve in a translation the charm of expressions which in another language are most felicitous. Each particular word conveys a meaning of its own, and possibly I have no equivalent by which to render it, and I make a circuit to reach my goal, I have to go many miles to cover a short distance. To these difficulties must be added the windings of hyperbata, differences in the use of cases, divergences of metaphor; and last of all the peculiar and if I may so call it, inbred character of the language. If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator." And after a long discussion which it would be tedious to follow out here, I added what follows: - "If any one imagines that translation does not impair the charm of style, let him render Homer word for word into Latin, nay I will go farther still and say, let him render it into Latin prose, and the result will be that the order of the words will seem ridiculous and the most eloquent of poets scarcely articulate."

6. In quoting my own writings my only object has been to prove that from my youth up I at least have always aimed at rendering sense not words, but if such authority as they supply is deemed insufficient, read and consider the short preface dealing with this matter which occurs in a book narrating the life of the blessed Antony. "A literal translation from one language into another obscures the sense; the exuberance of the growth lessens the yield. For while one's diction is enslaved to cases and metaphors, it has to explain by tedious circumlocutions what a few words would otherwise have sufficed to make plain. I have tried to avoid this error in the translation which at your request I have made of the story of the blessed Antony. My version always preserves the sense although it does not invariably keep the words of the original. Leave others to catch at syllables and letters, do you for your part look for the meaning." Time would fail me were I to unfold the testimonies of all who have translated only according to the sense. It is sufficient for the present to name Hilary the confessor who has turned some homilies on Job and several treatises on the Psalms from Greek into Latin; yet has not bound himself to the drowsiness of the letter or fettered himself by the stale literalism of inadequate culture. Like a conqueror he has led away captive into his own tongue the meaning of his originals.
7. That secular and church writers should have adopted this line need not surprise us when we consider that the translators of the Septuagint, the evangelists, and the apostles, have done the same in dealing with the sacred writings. We read in Mark of the Lord saying Talitha cumi and it

is immediately added "which is interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise." The evangelist may be charged with falsehood for having added the words "I say unto thee" for the Hebrew is only "Damsel arise." To emphasize this and to give the impression of one calling and commanding he has added "I say unto thee." Again in Matthew when the thirty pieces of silver are returned by the traitor Judas and the potter's field is purchased with them, it is written: - "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken of by Jeremy the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver the price of him that was valued which they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." This passage is not found in Jeremiah at all but in Zechariah, in quite different words and an altogether different order. In fact the Vulgate renders it as follows: - "And I will say unto them, If it is good in your sight, give ye me a price or refuse it: So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Put them into the melting furnace and consider if it is tried as I have been tried by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver and cast them into the house of the Lord." It is evident that the rendering of the Septuagint differs widely from the quotation of the evangelist. In the Hebrew also, though the sense is the same, the words are quite different and differently arranged. It says: "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and, if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was priced at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." They may accuse the apostle of falsifying his version seeing that it agrees neither with the Hebrew nor with the translators of the Septuagint: and worse than this, they may say that he has mistaken the author's name putting down Jeremiah when it should be Zechariah. Far be it from us to speak thus of a follower of Christ, who made it his care to formulate dogmas rather than to hunt for words and syllables. To take another instance from Zechariah, the evangelist John quotes from the Hebrew, "They shall look on him whom they pierced," for which we read in the Septuagint, "And they shall look upon me because they have mocked me," and in the Latin version, "And they shall look upon me for the things which they have mocked or insulted." Here the evangelist, the Septuagint, and our own version all differ; yet the divergence of language is atoned by oneness of spirit. In Matthew again we read of the Lord preaching flight to the apostles and confirming His counsel with a passage from Zechariah. "It is written," he says, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." But in the Septuagint and in the Hebrew it reads differently, for it is not God who speaks, as the evangelist makes out, but the prophet who appeals to God the Father saying: - "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." In this instance according to my judgment - and I have some careful critics with me - the evangelist is guilty of a fault in presuming to ascribe to God what are the words of the prophet. Again the same evangelist writes that at the warning of an angel Joseph took the young child and his mother and went into Egypt and remained there till the death of Herod; "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son." The Latin manuscripts do not so give the passage, but in Hosea the true Hebrew text has the following: - "When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." Which the Septuagint renders thus: - "When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called his sons out of Egypt." Are they altogether to be rejected because they have given another turn to a passage which refers primarily to the mystery of Christ? Or should we not rather pardon the shortcomings of the translators on the score of their human frailty according to the saying of James, "In many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word the same is a perfect man and able also to bridle the whole body." Once more it is written in the pages of the same evangelist, "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." Let these word fanciers and nice critics of all composition tell us where they have read the words; and if they cannot, let me tell them that they are in Isaiah. For in the place where we read and translate, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots," in the Hebrew idiom it is written thus, "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a Nazarene shall grow from his root." How can the Septuagint leave out the word 'Nazarene,' if it is unlawful to substitute one word for another? It is sacrilege either to conceal or to set at naught a mystery.

8. Let us pass on to other passages, for the brief limits of a letter do not suffer us to dwell too long on any one point. The same Matthew says: - "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which

was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying. Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel." The rendering of the Septuagint is, "Behold a virgin shall receive seed and shall bring forth a son, and ye shall call his name Emmanuel." If people cavil at words, obviously 'to receive seed' is not the exact equivalent of 'to be with child,' and 'ye shall call' differs from! 'they shall call.' Moreover in the Hebrew we read thus, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." Ahaz shall not call him so for he was convicted of want of faith, nor the Jews for they were destined to deny him, but she who is to conceive him, and bear him, the virgin herself. In the same evangelist we read that Herod was troubled at the coming of the Magi and that gathering together the scribes and the priests he demanded of them where Christ should be born and that they answered him, "In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet; And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a governour that shall rule my people, Israel." In the Vulgate this passage appears as follows: - "And thou Bethlehem, the house of Ephratah, art small to be among the thousands of Judah, yet one shall come out of thee for me to be a prince in Israel." You will be more surprised still at the difference in words and order between Matthew and the Septuagint if you look at the Hebrew which runs thus: - "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Consider one by one the words of the evangelist: - "And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah." For "the land of Judah" the Hebrew has "Ephratah" while the Septuagint gives "the house of Ephratah." The evangelist writes, "art not the least among the princes of Judah." In the Septuagint this is, "art small to be among the thousands of Judah," while the Hebrew gives, "though thou be little among the thousands of Judah." There is a contradiction here - and that not merely verbal - between the evangelist and the prophet; for in this place at any rate both Septuagint and Hebrew agree. The evangelist says that he is not little among the princes of Judah, while the passage from which he queries says exactly the opposite of this, "Thou art small indeed and little; but yet out of thee, small and little as thou art, there shall come forth for me a leader in Israel," a sentiment in harmony with that of the apostle, "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." Moreover the last clause "to rule" or "to feed my people Israel" clearly runs differently in the original.

9. I refer to these passages, not to convict the evangelists of falsification - a charge worthy only of impious men like Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian - but to bring home to my critics their own want of knowledge, and to gain from them such consideration that they may concede to me in the case of a simple letter what, whether they like it or not, they will have to concede to the Apostles in the Holy Scriptures. Mark, the disciple of Peter, begins his gospel thus: - "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in the prophet Isaiah: Behold I send my messenger before thy face which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." This quotation is made up from two prophets, Malachi that is to say and Isaiah. For the first part: "Behold I send my messenger before thy face which shall prepare thy way before thee," occurs at the close of Malachi. But the second part: "The voice of one crying, etc.," we read in Isaiah. On what grounds then has Mark in the very beginning of his book set the words: "As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, Behold I send my messenger," when, as we have said, it is not written in Isaiah at all, but in Malachi the last of the twelve prophets? Let ignorant presumption solve this nice question if it can, and I will ask pardon for being in the wrong. The same Mark brings before us the Saviour thus addressing the Pharisees: "Have ye never read what David did when he had need and was an hungred, he and they that were with him, how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shew-bread which is not lawful to eat but for the priests?" Now let us turn to the books of Samuel, or, as they are commonly called, of Kings, and we shall find there that the high-priest's name was not Abiathar but Ahimelech, the same that was afterwards put to death with the rest of the priests by Doeg at the command of Saul. Let us pass on now to the apostle Paul who writes thus to the Corinthians: "For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Some writers on this passage betake themselves to the ravings of the apocryphal books and assert that the quotation comes from the

Revelation of Elijah; whereas the truth is that it is found in Isaiah according to the Hebrew text: "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee what thou hast prepared for them that wait for thee." The Septuagint has rendered the words quite differently: "Since the beginning of the world we have not heard, neither have our eyes seen any God beside thee and thy true works, and thou wilt shew mercy to them that wait for thee." We see then from what place the quotation is taken and yet the apostle has not rendered his original word for word, but, using a paraphrase, he has given the sense in different terms. In his epistle to the Romans the same apostle quotes these words from Isaiah: "Behold I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence," a rendering which is at variance with the Greek version yet agrees with the original Hebrew. The Septuagint gives an opposite meaning, "that you fall not on a stumbling stone nor on a rock of offence." The apostle Peter agrees with Paul and the Hebrew, writing: "but to them that do not believe, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." From all these passages it is clear that the apostles and evangelists in translating the old testament scriptures have sought to give the meaning rather than the words, and that they have not greatly cared to preserve forms or constructions, so long as they could make clear the subject to the understanding.

10. Luke the evangelist and companion of apostles describes Christ's first martyr Stephen as relating what follows in a Jewish assembly. "With threescore and fifteen souls Jacob went down into Egypt, and died himself, and our fathers were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem." In Genesis this passage is quite differently given, for it is Abraham that buys of Ephron the Hittite, the son of Zohar, near Hebron, for four hundred shekels of silver, a double cave, and the field that is about it, and that buries in it Sarah his wife. And in the same book we read that, after his return from Mesopotamia with his wives and his sons, Jacob pitched his tent before Salem, a city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan, and that he dwelt there and "bought a parcel of a field where he had spread his tent at the band of Hamor, the father of Sychem, for an hundred lambs," and that "he erected there an altar and called there upon the God of Israel." Abraham does not buy the cave from Hamor the father of Sychem, but from Ephron the son of Zohar, and he is not buried in Sychem but in Hebron which is corruptly called Arboch. Whereas the twelve patriarchs are not buried in Arboch but in Sychem, in the field purchased not by Abraham but by Jacob. I postpone the solution of this delicate problem to enable those who cavil at me to search and see that in dealing with the scriptures it is the sense we have to look to and not the words. In the Hebrew the twenty-second psalm begins with the exact words which the Lord uttered on the cross: Eli, Eli lama azabthani, which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let my critics tell me why the Septuagint introduces here the words "look thou upon me." For its rendering is as follows: "My God, my God, look thou upon me, why hast thou forsaken me?" They will answer no doubt that no harm is done to the sense by the addition of a couple of words. Let them acknowledge then that, if in the haste of dictation I have omitted a few, I have not by so doing endangered the position of the churches.

11. It would be tedious now to enumerate, what great additions and omissions the Septuagint has made, and all the passages which in church-copies are marked with daggers and asterisks. The Jews generally laugh when they hear our version of this passage of Isaiah, "Blessed is he that hath seed in Zion and servants in Jerusalem." In Amos also after a description of self-indulgence there come these words: "They have thought of these things as halting and not likely to fly, "a very rhetorical sentence quite worthy of Tully. But how shall we deal with the Hebrew originals in which these passages and others like them are omitted, passages so numerous that to reproduce them all would require books without number? The number of the omissions. is shown alike by the asterisks mentioned above and by my own version when compared by a careful reader with the old translation. Yet the Septuagint has rightly kept its place in the churches, either because it is the first of all the versions in time, made before the coming of Christ, or else because it has been used by the apostles (only, however, in places where it does not disagree with the Hebrews). On the other hand we do right to reject Aquila, the proselyte and controversial translator, who has striven to translate not words only but their etymologies as well. Who could accept as renderings of "corn and wine and oil" such words as keima opwrismos stilpnoths, or, as we might say, 'pouring' and

'fruit gathering,' and 'shining'? or, because Hebrew has in addition to the article other prefixes as well, he must with an unhappy pedantry translate syllable by, syllable and letter, by letter thus: sun ton ouranon kai thn ghn, a construction which neither Greek nor Latin admits lion which neither Greek nor Latin admits of, as many passages in our own writers shew. How many are the phrases charming in Greek which, if rendered word for word, do not sound well in Latin, and again how many there are that are pleasing to us in Latin, but which - assuming the order of the words not to be altered - would not please in Greek.

12. But to pass by this limitless field of discussion and to shew you, most Christian of nobles, and most noble of Christians, what is the kind of falsification which is censured in my translation, I will set before you the opening words of the letter in the Greek original and as rendered by me, that from one count in the indictment you may form an opinion of all. The letter begins "Edei hmas, agaphte, mh oihsai tpn klhrwn feresqai which I remember to have rendered as follows: "Dearly beloved, we ought not to misuse our position as ministers to gratify our pride." See there, they cry, what a number of falsehoods in a single line! In the first place agaphtos means 'loved,' not 'dearly beloved.' Then oihsis means 'estimate,' not 'pride,' for this and not oidhma is the word used. Oidhma signifies 'a swelling' but oihsis means 'judgment.' All the rest, say they: "not to misuse our position to gratify our pride" is your own. What is this you are saying, O pillar of learning and latter day Aristarchus, who are so ready to pass judgment upon all writers? It is all for nothing then that I have studied so long; that, as Juvenal says, "I have so often withdrawn my hand from the ferule." The moment I leave the harbour I run aground. Well, to err is human and to confess one's error wise. Do you therefore, who are so ready to criticise and to instruct me, set me right and give me a word for word rendering of the passage. You tell me I should have said: "Beloved, we ought not to be carried away by the estimation of the clergy." Here, indeed we have eloquence worthy of Plautus, here we have Attic grace, the true style of the Muses. The common proverb is true of me: "He who trains an ox for athletics loses both oil and money." Still he is not to blame who merely puts on the mask and plays the tragedy for another: his teachers are the real culprits; since they for a great price have taught him - to know nothing. I do not think the worse of any Christian because he lacks skill to express himself; and I heartily wish that we could all say with Socrates "I know that I know nothing; "and carry out the precept of another wise man, "Know thyself." I have always held in esteem a holy simplicity but not a wordy rudeness. He who declares that he imitates the style of apostles should first imitate the virtue of their lives; the great holiness of which made up for much plainness of speech. They confuted the syllogisms of Aristotle and the perverse ingenuities of Chrysippus by raising the dead. Still it would be absurd for one of us - living as we do amid the riches of Croesus and the luxuries of Sardanapalus - to make his boast of mere ignorance. We might as well say that all robbers and criminals would be men of culture if they were to hide their blood-stained swords in books of philosophy and not ill trunks of trees.
13. I have exceeded the limits of a letter, but I have not exceeded in the expression of my chagrin. For, though I am called a falsifier, and have my reputation torn to shreds, wherever there are shuttles and looms and women to work them; I am content to repudiate the charge without retaliating in kind. I leave everything to your discretion. You can read the letter of Epiphanius both in Greek and in Latin; and, if you do so, you will see at once the value of my accusers' lamentations and insulting complaints. For the rest, I am satisfied to have instructed one of my dearest friends and am content simply to stay quiet in my cell and to wait for the day of judgment. If it may be so, and if my enemies allow it, I hope to write for you, not philippics like those of Demosthenes or Tully, but commentaries upon the scriptures.

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