

LETTER TO THEMISTIUS THE  
PHILOSOPHER

## INTRODUCTION

ON the strength of his Aristotelian "Paraphrases" Themistius may be called a scholar, though hardly a philosopher as he himself claimed. Technically he was a Sophist: that is to say he gave public lectures (*ἐπιδείξεις*), wrote exercises after the Sophistic pattern and went on embassies, which were entrusted to him solely on account of his persuasive charm. But he insisted that he was no Sophist, because he took no fees<sup>1</sup> and styled himself a practical philosopher.<sup>2</sup> He was indifferent to the Neo-Platonic philosophy,<sup>3</sup> and, since Constantius made him a Senator, he cannot have betrayed any zeal for the Pagan religion. From Julian's Pagan restoration he seems to have held aloof, and, though Julian had been his pupil, probably at Nicomedia, he did not appoint him to any office. Under the Christian Emperor Theodosius he held a prefecture. There is no evidence for a positive coolness, such as Zeller<sup>4</sup> assumes, between Themistius and Julian, and we know too little of their relations to assert with some critics that the respectful tone of this letter is ironical.<sup>5</sup> It was probably written after Julian had

<sup>1</sup> Themistius 260 c, 345 c.

<sup>2</sup> 245 D.                   <sup>3</sup> 33, 295 B.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. 5, p. 742.

<sup>5</sup> Libanius *Epistle* 1061 mentions an Oration by Themistius in praise of Julian, but this is not extant.

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become Emperor, though there is nothing in it that would not suit an earlier date; it is sometimes assigned to 355 when Julian was still Caesar. The quotations from Aristotle are appropriately addressed to Themistius as an Aristotelian commentator.

ΘΕΜΙΣΤΙΩΙ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΩΙ

Ἐγὼ σοι βεβαιῶσαι μὲν, ὥσπερ οὖν γράφεις, τὰς ἐλπίδας καὶ σφόδρα εὐχομαι, δέδοικα δὲ μὴ διαμάρτω, μείζονος οὔσης τῆς ὑποσχέσεως, ἣν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τε τοὺς ἄλλους ἅπαντας καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον πρὸς σεαυτὸν ποιῆ· καὶ μοι πάσαι μὲν οἰομένῳ πρὸς τε τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον καὶ τὸν Μάρκον, καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος γέγονεν ἀρετῇ διαφέρων, εἶναι B τὴν ἀμιλλαν φρίκη τις προσῆει καὶ δέος θαυμαστόν, μὴ τοῦ μὲν ἀπολείπεσθαι παντελῶς τῆς ἀνδρείας δόξω, τοῦ δὲ τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς οὐδὲ ἐπ' ὀλίγον ἐφίκωμαι. εἰς ταῦτα ἀφορῶν ἀνεπειθόμην τὴν σχολὴν ἐπαινεῖν, καὶ τῶν Ἀπτικῶν διαιτημάτων<sup>1</sup> αὐτός τε ἠδέως ἐμεμνήμην καὶ τοῖς φίλοις ὑμῖν προσάδειν ἡξιῶν, ὥσπερ οἱ τὰ βαρέα φορτία φέροντες ἐν ταῖς ὥδαῖς ἐπικουφίζουσιν αὐτοῖς τὴν ταλαιπωρίαν. σὺ δέ μοι νῦν μείζον ἐποίησας διὰ τῆς ἔναγχος ἐπιστολῆς τὸ δέος καὶ C τὸν ἀγῶνα τῷ παντὶ χαλεπώτερον ἔδειξας, ἐν ταύτῃ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τετάχθαι με τῇ μερίδι λέγων, ἐν ἣ πρότερον Ἡρακλῆς καὶ Διόνυσος ἐγενέσθην φιλοσοφούντες ὁμοῦ καὶ βασιλεύοντες καὶ πᾶσαν

<sup>1</sup> διαιτημάτων Naber, διηγημάτων Hertlein, MSS.

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I EARNESTLY desire to fulfil your hopes of me even as you express them in your letter, but I am afraid I shall fall short of them, since the expectations you have raised both in the minds of others, and still more in your own, are beyond my powers. There was a time when I believed that I ought to try to rival men who have been most distinguished for excellence, Alexander, for instance, or Marcus;<sup>1</sup> but I shivered at the thought and was seized with terror lest I should fail entirely to come up to the courage of the former, and should not make even the least approach to the latter's perfect virtue. With this in mind I convinced myself that I preferred a life of leisure, and I both gladly recalled the Attic manner of living, and thought myself to be in sweet accord with you who are my friends, just as those who carry heavy burdens lighten their labour by singing.<sup>2</sup> But by your recent letter you have increased my fears, and you point to an enterprise in every way more difficult. You say that God has placed me in the same position as Heracles and Dionysus of old who, being at once philosophers and

<sup>1</sup> The Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

<sup>2</sup> Apparently an echo of Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 1. 9, *Arnim*.

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σχεδὸν τῆς ἐπιπολαζούσης κακίας ἀνακαθαιρό- 254  
 μενοι γῆν τε καὶ θάλατταν. κελεύεις δὲ πᾶσαν  
 ἀποσεισάμενον σχολῆς ἔννοιαν καὶ ῥαστώνης  
 σκοπεῖν, ὅπως τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἀξίως ἀγωνιούμεθα·  
 εἶτα ἐπ' αὐτοῖς τῶν νομοθετῶν μέμνησαι, Σόλωνος,  
 Πιπτακοῦ, Λυκούργου, καὶ τούτων ἀπάντων μεί-  
 ζονα χρῆναι παρ' ἡμῶν λέγεις τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν  
 δίκη νῦν περιμένειν. τούτοις ἐγὼ τοῖς λόγοις  
 ἐντυχὼν ἐξεπλάγην μικροῦ· σοὶ μὲν γὰρ ὑπελάμ- B  
 βανον οὐδαμῶς θεμιτὸν κολακεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι,  
 ἐμαυτῷ δὲ συνειδὼς φύσεως μὲν ἔνεκα διαφέρου  
 οὐδὲν οὔτε ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὔτε νῦν ὑπάρξαν, φιλο-  
 σοφίας δὲ ἐρασθέντι μόνον· τὰς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ σιγῶ  
 τύχας, αἱ μοι τὸν ἔρωτα τοῦτον ἀτελῆ τέως  
 ἐφύλαξαν· οὐκ εἶχον οὖν ὅ,τι χρῆναι περὶ τῶν  
 τοιούτων λόγων συμβαλεῖν, ἕως ἐπὶ νοῦν ἤγαγεν  
 ὁ θεός, μὴ ποτε ἄρα προτρέπειν ἐθέλεις διὰ τῶν C  
 ἐπαίνων καὶ τῶν ἀγῶνων δεῖξαι τὸ μέγεθος, οἷς  
 ἀνάγκη πᾶσα τὸν ἐν πολιτείᾳ ζῶντα παραβεβλη-  
 σθαι τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.

Τοῦτο δὲ ἀποτρέποντός ἐστι πλέον ἢ πρὸς τὸν  
 βίον παρορμῶντος. ὥσπερ γὰρ εἴ τις τὸν πορθμὸν  
 τὸν παρ' ὑμῖν πλέων καὶ οὐδὲ τοῦτον ῥαδίως οὐδὲ  
 εὐκόλως ὑφιστάμενος ἀκούοι παρά του μαντικῆν  
 ἐπαγγελιομένου τέχνην, ὡς χρεῶν αὐτὸν τὸν D  
 Αἰγαῖον ἀναμετρήσαι καὶ τὸν Ἴόνιον καὶ τῆς ἕξω  
 θαλάσσης ἄψασθαι, καὶ “Νῦν μὲν” ὁρᾷς ὁ προ-  
 φήτης λέγοι “τείχη καὶ λιμένας, ἐκεῖ δὲ γενόμενος

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kings, purged almost the whole earth and sea of the evils that infested them. You bid me shake off all thought of leisure and inactivity that I may prove to be a good soldier worthy of so high a destiny. And besides those examples you go on to remind me of law-givers such as Solon, Pittacus, and Lycurgus, and you say that men have the right to expect from me now greater things than from any of these. When I read these words I was almost dumb-founded ; for on the one hand I was sure that it was unlawful for you as a philosopher to flatter or deceive ; on the other hand I am fully conscious that by nature there is nothing remarkable about me—there never was from the first nor has there come to be now,—but as regards philosophy I have only fallen in love with it (I say nothing of the fates that have intervened<sup>1</sup> to make that love so far ineffectual). I could not tell therefore how I ought to interpret such expressions, until God brought it into my mind that perhaps by your very praises you wished to exhort me, and to point out how great are those trials to which a statesman must inevitably be exposed every day of his life.

But your method is more likely to discourage than to make one eager for such an existence. Suppose that a man were navigating your strait,<sup>2</sup> and were finding even that none too easy or safe, and then suppose some professional soothsayer should tell him that he would have to traverse the Aegaeon and then the Ionian Sea, and finally embark on the outer sea. “Here,” that prophet would say, “you see towns and harbours,

<sup>1</sup> Euripides, *Orestes* 16.

<sup>2</sup> The Bosphorus ; Themistius was probably at Constantinople.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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