

CONCERNING THE CURE OF ANGER.

A DIALOGUE.

SYLLA, FUNDANUS.

1. SYLLA. Those painters, O Fundanus, in my opinion do very wisely, who never finish any piece at the first sitting, but take a review of it at some convenient distance of time; because the eye, being relieved for a time, renews its power by making frequent and fresh judgments, and becomes able to observe many small and critical differences which continual poring and familiarity would prevent it from noticing. Now, because it cannot be that a man should stand off from himself and interrupt his consciousness, and then after some interval return to accost himself again (which is one principal reason why a man is a worse judge of himself than of other men), the next best course that a man can take will be to inspect his friends after some time of absence, and also to offer himself to their examination, not to see whether he be grown old on the sudden, or whether the habit of his body be become better or worse than it was before, but that they may take notice of his manner and behavior, whether in that time he hath made any advance in goodness, or gained ground of his vices. Wherefore, being after two years' absence returned to Rome, and having since conversed with thee here again for these five months, I think it no great matter of wonder that those good qualities which, by the advantage of a good natural disposition, you were formerly possessed of,

have in this time received so considerable an increase. But truly, when I behold how that vehement and fiery disposition which you had to anger is now through the conduct of reason become so gentle and tractable, my mind prompts me to say, with Homer, —

O wonder! how much gentler is he grown!*

Nor hath this gentleness produced in thee any laziness or irresolution; but, like cultivation in the earth, it hath caused an evenness and a profundity very effectual unto fruitful action, instead of thy former vehemency and over-eagerness. And therefore it is evident that thy former proneness to anger hath not been withered in thee by any decay of vigor which age might have effected, or spontaneously; but that it hath been cured by making use of some mollifying precepts.

And indeed, to tell you the truth, when I heard our friend Eros say the same thing, I had a suspicion that he did not report the thing as it was, but that out of mere good-will he testified those things of you which ought to be found in every good and virtuous man. And yet you know he cannot be easily induced to depart from what he judges to be true, in order to favor any man. But now, truly, as I acquit him of having therein made any false report of thee, so I desire thee, being now at leisure from thy journey, to declare unto us the means and (as it were) the medicine, by use whereof thou hast brought thy mind to be thus manageable and natural, thus gentle and obedient unto reason.

FUNDANUS. But in the mean while, O most kind Sylla, you had best beware, lest you also through affection and friendship may be somewhat careless in making an estimate of my affairs. For Eros, having himself also a mind oft-times unable to keep its ground and to contain itself

* II. XXII. 373.

within that obedience which Homer mentions, but subject to be exasperated through an hatred of men's wickedness, may perhaps think I am grown more mild ; just as in music, when the key is changed, that note which before was the base becomes a higher note with respect to others which are now below it.

SYLLA. Neither of these is so, Fundanus ; but, I pray you, gratify us all by granting the request I made.

2. FUNDANUS. This then, O Sylla, is one of those excellent rules given by Musonius which I bear in memory,—that those who would be in sound health must physic themselves all their lives. Now I do not think that reason cures, like hellebore, by purging out itself together with the disease it cures, but by keeping possession of the soul, and so governing and guarding its judgments. For the power of reason is not like drugs, but like wholesome food ; and, with the assistance of a good natural disposition, it produceth a healthful constitution in all with whom it hath become familiar.

And as for those good exhortations and admonitions which are applied to passions while they swell and are at their height, they work but slowly and with small success ; and they differ in nothing from those strong-smelling things, which indeed do serve to put those that have the falling sickness upon their legs again after they are fallen, but are not able to remove the disease. For whereas other passions, even when they are in their ruff and acme, do in some sort yield and admit reason into the soul, which comes to help it from without ; anger does not, as Melanthius says, —

Displace the mind, and then act dismal things ;

but it absolutely turns the mind out of doors, and bolts the door against it ; and, like those who burn their houses and themselves within them, it makes all things within full

of confusion, smoke, and noise, so that the soul can neither see nor hear any thing that might relieve it. Wherefore sooner will an empty ship in a storm at sea admit of a pilot from without, than a man tossed with anger and rage listen to the advice of another, unless he have his own reason first prepared to entertain it.

But as those who expect to be besieged are wont to gather together and lay in provisions of such things as they are like to need, not trusting to hopes of relief from without, so ought it to be our special concern to fetch in from philosophy such foreign helps as it affords against anger, and to store them up in the soul beforehand, seeing that it will not be so easy a matter to provide ourselves when the time is come for using them. For either the soul cannot hear what is spoken without, by reason of the tumult, unless it have its own reason (like the director of the rowers in a ship) ready to entertain and understand whatsoever precept shall be given; or, if it do chance to hear, yet will it be ready to despise what is patiently and mildly offered, and to be exasperated by what shall be pressed upon it with more vehemency. For, since wrath is proud and self-conceited, and utterly averse from compliance with others, like a fortified and guarded tyranny, that which is to overthrow it must be bred within it and be of its own household.

3. Now the continuance of anger and frequent fits of it produce an evil habit in the soul called wrathfulness, or a propensity to be angry, which oft-times ends in choleric temper, bitterness, and moroseness. Then the mind becomes ulcerated, peevish, and querulous, and like a thin, weak plate of iron, receives impression and is wounded by even the least occurrence; but when the judgment presently seizes upon wrathful ebullitions and suppresses them, it not only works a cure for the present, but renders the soul firm and not so liable to such impressions for the fu-

ture. And truly, when I myself had twice or thrice made a resolute resistance unto anger, the like befell me that did the Thebans; who, having once foiled the Lacedaemonians, that before that time had held themselves invincible, never after lost so much as one battle which they fought against them. For I became fully assured in my mind, that anger might be overcome by the use of reason. And I perceived that it might not only be quieted by the sprinkling of cold water, as Aristotle relates, but also be extinguished by putting one into a fright. Yea, according to Homer, many men have had their anger melted and dissipated by sudden surprise of joy. So that I came to this firm resolution, that this passion is not altogether incurable to such as are but willing to be cured; since the beginnings and occasions of it are not always great or forcible; but a scoff, or a jest, or the laughing at one, or a nod only, or some other matter of no great importance, will put many men into a passion. Thus Helen, by addressing her niece in the words beginning, —

O my Electra, now a virgin stale,

provoked her to make this nipping return: —

Thou'rt wise too late, thou shouldst have kept at home.*

And so did Callisthenes provoke Alexander by saying, when the great bowl was going round, I will not drink so deep in honor of Alexander, as to make work for Aesculapius.

4. As therefore it is an easy matter to stop the fire that is kindled only in hare's wool, candle-wick, or a little chaff, but if it have once taken hold of matter that hath solidity and thickness, it soon inflames and consumes, as Aeschylus says, —

With youthful vigor the carpenter's lofty work;

so he that observes anger while it is in its beginning, and

* Eurip. Orestes, 72 and 99.

sees it by degrees smoking and taking fire from some speech or chaff-like scurrility, need take no great pains to extinguish it, but oftentimes can put an end to it only by silence or neglect. For as he that adds no fuel to the fire hath already as good as put it out, so he that doth not feed anger at the first, nor blow the fire in himself, hath prevented and destroyed it. Wherefore Hieronymus, although he taught many other useful things, yet hath given me no satisfaction in saying that anger is not perceptible in its birth, by reason of its suddenness, but only after its birth and while it lives; for there is no other passion, while it is gathering and stirring up, which hath its rise and increase so conspicuous and observable. This is very skilfully taught by Homer, by making Achilles suddenly surprised with grief as soon as ever the word fell on his ear, saying of him, —

This said, a sable cloud of grief covered him o'er; *

but making Agamemnon grow angry slowly and need many words to inflame him, so that, if these had been stopped and forbidden when they began, the contest had never grown to that degree and greatness which it did. Wherefore Socrates, as oft as he perceived any fierceness of spirit to rise within him towards any of his friends, setting himself like a promontory to break the waves, would speak with a lower voice, bear a smiling countenance, and look with a more gentle eye; and thus, by bending the other way and moving contrary to the passion, he kept himself from falling or being worsted.

5. For the first way, my friend, to suppress anger, as you would a tyrant, is not to obey or yield to it when it commands us to speak high, to look fiercely, and to beat ourselves; but to be quiet, and not increase the passion, as we do a disease, by impatient tossing and crying out. It is

* II. XVII. 591.

true that lovers' practices, such as revelling, singing, crowning the door with garlands, have a kind of alleviation in them which is neither rude nor displeasing: —

Coming, I asked not who or whose she was,
But kissed her door full sweetly, — that I wot ;
If this be sin, to sin I can but choose.

So the weeping and lamentation which we permit in mourners doubtless carry forth much of the grief together with the tears. But anger, quite on the contrary, is more inflamed by what the angry persons say or do.

The best course then is for a man to compose himself, or else to run away and hide himself and retreat into quiet, as into an haven, as if he perceived a fit of epilepsy coming on, lest he fall, or rather fall upon others; and truly we do most and most frequently fall upon our friends. For we neither love all, nor envy all, nor fear all men; but there is nothing untouched and unset upon by anger. We are angry with our foes and with our friends; with our own children and our parents; nay, with the Gods above, and the very beasts below us, and instruments that have no life, as Thamyras was, —

His horn, though bound with gold, he brake in's ire,
He brake his melodious and well-strung lyre ;*

and Pandarus, wishing a curse upon himself if he did not burn his bow,

First broken by his hands.†

But Xerxes dealt blows and marks of his displeasure to the sea itself, and sent his letters to the mountain in the style ensuing: "O thou wretched Athos, whose top now reaches to the skies, I charge thee, put not in the way of my works stones too big and difficult to be wrought. If thou do, I will cut thee into pieces, and cast thee into the sea."

For anger hath many terrible effects, and many also that

* From the Thamyras of Sophocles, Frag. 224.

† Il. V. 216.

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