THE EPISTLES OF SENExA


LXVII.

SENECA LVCLIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Vt a communibus initium faciam, ver aperire se coepit, sed iam inclinatum in aestatem, quo tempore calere debeat, intuuit nec adhuc illi fides est. Saepe enim in hiemem revolvetur. Vis seire, quam dubium adhuc sit? Nondum me committio frigidae verae, adhuc rigorem eius infringio. “Hoc est,” inquis, “nec calidum nec frigidum pati.” Ita est, mi Lucili; iam aetas mea contenta est suo frigore. Vix

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* A rare word—sometimes spelled *malaciss.*—used by Plautus (*Bacch.* 73) and Laberius, but not in a technical sense.

* Porcenna and Tarquin.

* See Introduction (Vol. I. p. x), and the opening sentences of *Epp.* lxxvii., lxxxvii., and others.
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those other goods which are unattended by danger and have made no trial of fortune, as it is a rarer thing to have overcome a foe with a hand lost than with a hand armed? "What then?" you say; "shall you desire this good for yourself?" Of course I shall. For this is a thing that a man cannot achieve unless he can also desire it. Should I desire, instead, to be allowed to stretch out my limbs for my slaves to massage, or to have a woman, or a man changed into the likeness of a woman, pull my finger-joints? I cannot help believing that Mucius was all the more lucky because he manipulated the flames as calmly as if he were holding out his hand to the manipulator. He had wiped out all his previous mistakes; he finished the war unarmed and maimed; and with that stump of a hand he conquered two kings. Farewell.

LXVII. ON ILL-HEALTH AND ENDURANCE OF SUFFERING

If I may begin with a commonplace remark, spring is gradually disclosing itself; but though it is rounding into summer, when you would expect hot weather, it has kept rather cool, and one cannot yet be sure of it. For it often slides back into winter weather. Do you wish to know how uncertain it still is? I do not yet trust myself to a bath which is absolutely cold; even at this time I break its chill. You may say that this is no way to show the endurance either of heat or of cold; very true, dear Lucilius, but at my time of life one is at length contented with the natural chill of the body. I can scarcely thaw out in
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2 media regelatur aestate. Itaque maior pars in vestimentis degitur. Agno gratias senectuti, quod me lectulo adfixit. Quidni gratias illi hoc nomine agam? Quicquid deebam nolle, non possum. Cum libellis mihi plurimus sermo est. Si quando intervenerunt epistulae tuae, tecum esse mihi videor et sic adficior animo, tamquam tibi non rescribam, sed respondeam. Itaque et de hoc, quod quaeris, quasi conloquar tecum, quale sit, una scrutabimur.


a Seneca had a delicate constitution (see Introduction). In the Letters he speaks of suffering from asthma (liv.), catarrh (lxxviii.), and fever (civ.).

b Cf. lxxv. 1 quales sermo meus esset, si ubera remus aut ambularemus.
the middle of summer. Accordingly, I spend most of the time bundled up; and I thank old age for keeping me fastened to my bed. Why should I not thank old age on this account? That which I ought not to wish to do, I lack the ability to do. Most of my converse is with books. Whenever your letters arrive, I imagine that I am with you, and I have the feeling that I am about to speak my answer, instead of writing it. Therefore let us together investigate the nature of this problem of yours, just as if we were conversing with one another.

You ask me whether every good is desirable. You say: "If it is a good to be brave under torture, to go to the stake with a stout heart, to endure illness with resignation, it follows that these things are desirable. But I do not see that any of them is worth praying for. At any rate I have as yet known of no man who has paid a vow by reason of having been cut to pieces by the rod, or twisted out of shape by the gout, or made taller by the rack." My dear Lucilius, you must distinguish between these cases; you will then comprehend that there is something in them that is to be desired. I should prefer to be free from torture; but if the time comes when it must be endured, I shall desire that I may conduct myself therein with bravery, honour, and courage. Of course I prefer that war should not occur; but if war does occur, I shall desire that I may nobly endure the wounds, the starvation, and all that the exigency of war brings. Nor am I so mad as to crave illness; but if I must suffer illness, I shall desire that I may do nothing which shows lack of restraint, and nothing that is unmanly. The conclusion is, not that hardships are desirable, but that virtue is desirable, which enables us patiently to endure hardships.
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5 Quidam ex nostris existimant omnium istorum fortæm tolerantiam non esse optabilem, sed ne abominandam quidem, quia voto purum bonum peti debet et tranquillum et extra molestiam positum. Ego dissentio. Quare? Primum quia fieri non potest, ut aliqua res bona quidem sit, sed optabilis non sit. Deinde si virtus optabilis est, nullum autem sine virtute bonum est, omne bonum optabile est. Deinde etiam tormentorum fortis patientia optabilis est.


7 "Quis tamen unquam hoc sibi optavit?" Quaedam vota aperta et professa sunt, cum particulatim fiunt, quaedam latent, cum uno voto multa comprensae sunt. Tamquam opto mihi vitam honestam. Vita autem honesta actionibus variis constat; in hac est Reguli arca, Catonis scissum manu sua vulnus, Rutili exilium, calix venenatus, qui Socratens transtudit et carceri in caelum. Ita cum optavi mihi vitam honestam, et

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1 etiam si MSS.; Madvig deleted si.
2 nempe Haase; nemo MSS.
3 Buecheler would delete sed.

a i. e., the Stoics.

b Banished from Rome in 92 B.C. Cf. Ep. xxiv. 4.
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Certain of our school think that, of all such qualities, a stout endurance is not desirable,—though not to be deprecated either,—because we ought to seek by prayer only the good which is unalloyed, peaceful, and beyond the reach of trouble. Personally, I do not agree with them. And why? First, because it is impossible for anything to be good without being also desirable. Because, again, if virtue is desirable, and if nothing that is good lacks virtue, then everything good is desirable. And, lastly, because a brave endurance even under torture is desirable. At this point I ask you: Is not bravery desirable? And yet bravery despises and challenges danger. The most beautiful and most admirable part of bravery is that it does not shrink from the stake, advances to meet wounds, and sometimes does not even avoid the spear, but meets it with opposing breast. If bravery is desirable, so is patient endurance of torture; for this is a part of bravery. Only sift these things, as I have suggested; then there will be nothing which can lead you astray. For it is not mere endurance of torture, but brave endurance, that is desirable. I therefore desire that "brave" endurance; and this is virtue.

"But," you say, "who ever desired such a thing for himself?" Some prayers are open and outspoken, when the requests are offered specifically; other prayers are indirectly expressed, when they include many requests under one title. For example, I desire a life of honour. Now a life of honour includes various kinds of conduct; it may include the chest in which Regulus was confined, or the wound of Cato which was torn open by Cato’s own hand, or the exile of Rutilius, or the cup of poison which removed Socrates from gaol to heaven. Accordingly, in praying for a life of
haec optavi, sine quibus interdum honesta non potest esse.

O terque quaterque beati,
Quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub noemibus altis
Contigit oppetere!

Quid interest, optes hoc alicui an optabile fuisset
fatearis? Decius se pro re publica devovit; in medios
hostes concitato equo mortem petens inruit. Alter
post hunc, paternae virtutis aemulus, conceptis
solemnibus ac iam familiaribus verbis in aciem
confertissimam incuerit, de hoc sollicitus tantum,
ut litaret, optabilem rem putans1 bonam mortem.
Dubitas ergo, an optimum sit memorabilem mori et
in aliquo opere virtutis? Cum aliquid tormenta
fortiter patitur, omnibus virtutibus utilit. Fortasse
una in promptu sit et maxime appareat patientia.
Ceterum illic est fortitudo, cuius patientia et perpessio
et tolerantia rami sunt. Illic est prudentia, sine qua
nullum initur consilium, quae suadet, quod effugere
non possis, quam fortissime ferre. Illic est constantia,
quae deici loco non potest et propositum nulla
vi extorquente dimittit. Illic est individuus ille
comitatus virtutum; quicquid honeste fit, una virtus
facit, sed ex consilii sententia. Quod autem ab
 omnibus virtutibus conprobatur, etiam si ab una fieri
videtur, optabile est.

Quid? Tu existimas ea tantum optabilia esse,

1 putans later MSS. ; putas pVPo.

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a Vergil. Aenid, i. 94 ff.
b Cf. Livy, viii. 9. 6 ff., . . . legiones auxiliae hostium
mecum depus munibus Tellurique devosae.
c Ut litaret: i.e., that by his sacrifice he might secure an
Augustus, 96: "At the siege of Perusia, when he found
the sacrifices were not favourable (sacrificio non litavit),
Augustus called for more victims."

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