

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

LXXIX.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Expecto epistulas tuas, quibus mihi indices, circumcitus Siciliae totius quid tibi novi ostenderit, et ante¹ omnia de ipsa Charybdi certiora. Nam Scyllam saxum esse et quidem non terribile navigantibus optime scio; Charybdis an respondeat fabulis, perscribi mihi desidero et, si forte observaveris, dignum est autem quod observes, fac nos certiores, utrum uno tantum vento agatur in vertices an omnis tempestas aequè mare illud contorqueat, et an verum sit, quicquid illo freti turbine abreptum est, per multa milia trahi conditum et circa Tauromenitanum litus
- 2 emergere. Si haec mihi perscripseris, tunc tibi audebo mandare, ut in honorem meum Aetnam quoque ascendas, quam consumi et sensim subsidere ex hoc colligunt quidam, quod aliquando longius navigantibus solebat ostendi. Potest hoc accidere, non quia montis altitudo descendit, sed quia ignis evanuit et minus vehemens ac largus effertur, ob eandem causam fumo quoque per diem segniore.² Neutrum autem incredibile est, nec montem, qui

¹ *ante* added by Wolters.

² *segniore* Pincianus; *segnior* MSS.

^a Ellis suggests that the poem *Aetna*, of uncertain authorship, may have been written by Lucilius in response to this letter. His view is plausible, but not universally accepted.

^b See *Ep.* xiv. § 8 and note (Vol. I.).

^c The modern Taormina.

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LXXIX. ON THE REWARDS OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

I have been awaiting a letter from you, that you might inform me what new matter was revealed to you during your trip round Sicily,^a and especially that you might give me further information regarding Charybdis itself.^b I know very well that Scylla is a rock—and indeed a rock not dreaded by mariners; but with regard to Charybdis I should like to have a full description, in order to see whether it agrees with the accounts in mythology; and, if you have by chance investigated it (for it is indeed worthy of your investigation), please enlighten me concerning the following: Is it lashed into a whirlpool by a wind from only one direction, or do all storms alike serve to disturb its depths? Is it true that objects snatched downwards by the whirlpool in that strait are carried for many miles under water, and then come to the surface on the beach near Tauromenium^c? If you will write me a full account of these matters, I shall then have the boldness to ask you to perform another task,—also to climb Aetna at my special request. Certain naturalists have inferred that the mountain is wasting away and gradually settling, because sailors used to be able to see it from a greater distance. The reason for this may be, not that the height of the mountain is decreasing, but because the flames have become dim and the eruptions less strong and less copious, and because for the same reason the smoke also is less active by day. However, either of these two things is possible to believe: that on the one hand the mountain is

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devoretur cotidie, minui, nec manere eundem, quia non ipsum exest,¹ sed in aliqua inferna valle conceptus exaestuatur et aliis pascitur. In ipso monte non
3 alimentum habet, sed viam. In Lycia regio notissima est, Hephæstion incolae vocant, foratum pluribus locis solum, quod sine ullo nascentium damno ignis innoxius circumit. Laeta itaque regio est et herbida nihil flammis adurentibus, sed tantum vi remissa ac languida refulgentibus.

4 Sed reservemus ista tunc quaesituri, cum tu mihi scripseris, quantum ab ipso ore montis nives absint, quas ne aestas quidem solvit; adeo tutae sunt ab igne vicino. Non est autem quod istam curam imputes mihi. Morbo enim tuo daturus eras, etiam si
5 nemo mandaret. Quid tibi do, ne Aetnam describas² in tuo carmine, ne hunc sollemnem omnibus poetis locum adtingas? Quem quo minus Ovidius tractaret, nihil obstitit, quod iam Vergilius impleverat. Ne Severum quidem Cornelium uterque deterruit. Omnibus praeterea feliciter hic locus se dedit et qui praecesserant, non praeripuisse mihi videntur, quae dici poterant, sed aperuisse.

6 Multum³ interest, utrum ad consumptam materiam

¹ *ipsum exest* Haase; *ipsum exesse* or *ipsum ex se est* MSS.

² *nemo . . . describas* Rubenius; *nemo quid mandaret tibi donec aetnam describas* (t) MSS.

³ *sed* before *multum* deleted by Madvig.

^a Another description of this region is given by Pliny, *N.H.* ii. 106, who says that the stones in the rivers were red-hot! The phenomenon is usually explained by supposing springs of burning naphtha.

^b *i. e.*, merely as an episode, instead of devoting a whole poem to the subject.

^c *Metam.* xv. 340 ff.

^d *Aeneid*, iii. 570 ff.

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growing smaller because it is consumed from day to day, and that, on the other hand, it remains the same in size because the mountain is not devouring itself, but instead of this the matter which seethes forth collects in some subterranean valley and is fed by other material, finding in the mountain itself not the food which it requires, but simply a passage-way out. There is a well-known place in Lycia—called by the inhabitants “Hephaestion”^a—where the ground is full of holes in many places and is surrounded by a harmless fire, which does no injury to the plants that grow there. Hence the place is fertile and luxuriant with growth, because the flames do not scorch but merely shine with a force that is mild and feeble.

But let us postpone this discussion, and look into the matter when you have given me a description just how far distant the snow lies from the crater,—I mean the snow which does not melt even in summer, so safe is it from the adjacent fire. But there is no ground for your charging this work to my account; for you were about to gratify your own craze for fine writing, without a commission from anyone at all. Nay, what am I to offer you *not* merely to describe^b Aetna in your poem, and *not* to touch lightly upon a topic which is a matter of ritual for all poets? Ovid^c could not be prevented from using this theme simply because Vergil^d had already fully covered it; nor could either of these writers frighten off Cornelius Severus. Besides, the topic has served them all with happy results, and those who have gone before seem to me not to have forestalled all that could be said, but merely to have opened the way.

It makes a great deal of difference whether you

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an ad subactam accedas ; crescit in dies et inventuris inventa non obstant. Praeterea condicio optima est ultimi ; parata verba invenit, quae aliter instructa novam faciem habent. Nec illis manus inicit tam-
 7 quam alienis. Sunt enim publica.¹ Aut ego te non novi aut Aetna tibi salivam movet. Iam cupis grande aliquid et par prioribus scribere. Plus enim sperare modestia tibi tua non permittit, quae tanta in te est, ut videaris mihi retracturus ingenii tui vires, si vincendi periculum sit ; tanta tibi priorum reverentia
 8 est. Inter cetera hoc habet boni sapientia : nemo ab altero potest vinci, nisi dum ascenditur. Cum ² ad summum perveneris, paria sunt, non est incremento locus, statur. Numquid sol magnitudini suae adicit ? Numquid ultra quam solet, luna procedit ? Maria non crescunt. Mundus eundem habitum ac
 9 modum servat. Extollere se, quae iustam magnitudinem implevere, non possunt. Quicumque fuerint sapientes, pares erunt et aequales. Habebit unusquisque ex iis proprias dotes : alius erit adfabilior, alius expeditior, alius promptior in eloquendo, alius facundior ; illud, de quo agitur, quod beatum facit,
 10 aequalest ³ in omnibus. An Aetna tua possit sublabi

¹ The phrase *iurisconsulti negant quicquam publicum usu capi*, which occurs here in the MSS., is transferred by Wolters to *Ep.* 88. 12, where it suits the context.

² *cum ad Gronovius ; dum ad MSS.*

³ *aequale est* later MSS. ; *aequale* VPb.

^a The usual meaning of *paria esse*, or *paria facere* (a favourite phrase with Seneca—see for example *Ep.* ci. 7), is “to square the account,” “balance even.”

^b “Qualities desirable in themselves, but not *essential* for the possession of wisdom, the *προηγμένα* of the Stoics (Summers).”

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approach a subject that has been exhausted, or one where the ground has merely been broken; in the latter case, the topic grows day by day, and what is already discovered does not hinder new discoveries. Besides, he who writes last has the best of the bargain; he finds already at hand words which, when marshalled in a different way, show a new face. And he is not pilfering them, as if they belonged to someone else, when he uses them, for they are common property. Now if Aetna does not make your mouth water, I am mistaken in you. You have for some time been desirous of writing something in the grand style and on the level of the older school. For your modesty does not allow you to set your hopes any higher; this quality of yours is so pronounced that, it seems to me, you are likely to curb the force of your natural ability, if there should be any danger of outdoing others; so greatly do you reverence the old masters. Wisdom has this advantage, among others,—that no man can be outdone by another, except during the climb. But when you have arrived at the top, it is a draw ^a; there is no room for further ascent, the game is over. Can the sun add to his size? Can the moon advance beyond her usual fulness? The seas do not increase in bulk. The universe keeps the same character, the same limits. Things which have reached their full stature cannot grow higher. Men who have attained wisdom will therefore be equal and on the same footing. Each of them will possess his own peculiar gifts ^b: one will be more affable, another more facile, another more ready of speech, a fourth more eloquent; but as regards the quality under discussion,—the element that produces happiness,—it is equal in them all. I do not know whether this Aetna of

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et in se ruere, an hoc excelsum cacumen et conspicuum per vasti maris spatia detrahat adsidua vis ignium, nescio; virtutem non flamma, non ruina inferius adducet. Haec una maiestas deprimi nescit. Nec proferri ultra nec referri potest. Sic huius, ut caelestium, stata magnitudo est. Ad hanc nos conemur educere.

- 11 Iam multum operis effecti est; immo, si verum fateri volo, non multum. Nec enim bonitas est pessimis esse meliorem. Quis oculis gloriatur, qui suspicetur diem? Cui sol per caliginem splendet, licet contentus interim sit effugisse tenebras, adhuc
- 12 non fruitur bono lucis. Tunc animus noster habebit, quod gratuletur sibi, cum emissus his tenebris, in quibus volutatur, non tenui visu clara prospexerit, sed totum diem admiserit et redditus caelo suo fuerit, cum receperit locum, quem occupavit sorte nascendi. Sursum illum vocant initia sua. Erit autem illic etiam antequam hac custodia exsolvatur, cum vitia disiecerit purusque ac levis in cogitationes divinas emicuerit.
- 13 Hoc nos agere, Lucili carissime, in hoc ire impetu toto, licet pauci sciant, licet nemo, iuvat. Gloria umbra virtutis est; etiam invitam¹ comitabitur. Sed

¹ *invitam* Velz.; *invita* VPb.

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