THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

quoque, antequam erudias, virtutis materia, non virtus est. VALE.

XCI

SENExCA LVCEILo svO SAlVTEM

1 Liberalis noster nunc tristis est nuntiado incendio, quo Lugdunensis colonia exusta est. Movere hic casus quemlibet posset, nemum hominem patriae suae amantissimum. Quae res efficit, ut firmatatem animi sui quaerat, quam videlicet ad ea, quae timeri posse putabant, exercuit. Hoc vero tam inopinatum malum et paene inaudatum non miror si sine metu fuit, cum esset sine exemplo. Multas enim civitates incendium vexavit, nullam abstulit. Nam etiam ubi hostili manu in tecta 1 ignis inmissus est, multis locis deficit, 2 et quamvis subinde excitetur, raro tamen sic cuncta depascitur, ut nihil ferro reliquat. Terrarum quoque vis umquam tam gravis et perniciosus fuit motus, ut tota oppida evertereat. Namque denique tam infestum uli exarsit incendium, ut nihil alteri

2 superesset incendio. Tot pulcherrima opera, quae singula inlustrare urbes singulas possent, una nox stravit, et in tanta pace quantum ne bello quidem timeri potest accidit. Quis hoc credat? Ubique

1 in tecta Erasmus; iniecta MSS.
2 deficit later MSS.; deficit BA.

* In spite of the centesimus annum of § 14 (q.v.), the most probable date of this letter, based on Tac. Ann. xvi. 13 and other general evidence, is July-September 64 A.D. 58 A.D. would be too early for many reasons—among them that "peace all over the world" would not be a true statement until January of 62. (See the monographs of Jonas, O. Binder, Peiper, and Schultess.)

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EPISTLES XC., XCI.

and even in the best of men, before you refine them
by instruction, there is but the stuff of virtue, not
virtue itself. Farewell.

XCI. ON THE LESSON TO BE DRAWN
FROM THE BURNING OF LYONS

Our friend Liberalis is now downcast; for he
has just heard of the fire which has wiped out the
colony of Lyons. Such a calamity might upset any-
one at all, not to speak of a man who dearly loves
his country. But this incident has served to make
him inquire about the strength of his own character,
which he has trained, I suppose, just to meet situations
that he thought might cause him fear. I do not
wonder, however, that he was free from apprehension
touching an evil so unexpected and practically unheard
of as this, since it is without precedent. For fire has
damaged many a city, but has annihilated none.
Even when fire has been hurled against the walls by
the hand of a foe, the flame dies out in many places,
and although continually renewed, rarely devours so
wholly as to leave nothing for the sword. Even
an earthquake has scarcely ever been so violent and
destructive as to overthrow whole cities. Finally,
no conflagration has ever before blazed forth so
savagely in any town that nothing was left for a
second. So many beautiful buildings, any single
one of which would make a single town famous,
were wrecked in one night. In time of such deep
peace an event has taken place worse than men can
possibly fear even in time of war. Who can believe

\[\text{b Probably Aebutius Liberalis, to whom the treatise } \text{De Beneficiis was dedicated.}\]
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armis quiescentibus, cum toto orbe terrarum diffusa
securitas sit, Lugudunum, quod ostendebatur in
Gallia, quae situr.

Omnibus fortuna, quos publice adfluit, quod
passuri erant, timere permisit. Nulla res magna non
aliquod habuit ruinae suae spatium; in hac una nox
interfuit inter urbem maximam et nullam. Denique
diutius illam tibi perisse quam perit narro.

3 Haec omnia Liberalis nostri adfectum inclinant¹
adversus sua firmum et erectum. Nec sine causa
concussus est; inepectata plus adgravant; novitas
adicit calamitatibus pondus, nec quisquam mortalium
non magis quod etiam miratus est, doluit.

4 Ideo nihil nobis improviso esse debet. In omnia
praemittendus² animus cogitandumque non quidquid
solet, sed quicquid potest fieri. Quid enim est, quod
non fortuna, cum voluit, ex florentissimo detrahat?
Quod non eo magis adgrediatur et quattuat, quo
speciosius fulget? Quid illi arduum quidve difficile
est? Non una via semper, ne tota quidem incurrit,
modo nostras in nos manus advocat, modo suis con-
tenta viribus invenit pericula sine auctore. Nullum
tempus exceptum est; in ipsis voluptatibus causae

¹ inclinant cod. Harl.; inclinandum BA.
² praemittendus later MSS.; permittendus BA.

* That Lyons, situated at the junction of the Arar and
the Rhone, was of especial prominence in Gaul, may be also
gathered from the fact that it boasted a government mint
and the Ara Augusti—a shrine established for the annual
worship of all the Gallic states. Moreover, the Emperor
Claudius delivered his famous address in that city (see Tac.
Ann. xi. 23 f.).
EPISTLE XCI.

it? When weapons are everywhere at rest, and when peace prevails throughout the world, Lyons, the pride of Gaul, is missing!

Fortune has usually allowed all men, when she has assailed them collectively, to have a foreboding of that which they were destined to suffer. Every great creation has had granted to it a period of reprieve before its fall; but in this case, only a single night elapsed between the city at its greatest and the city non-existent. In short, it takes me longer to tell you it has perished than it took for the city to perish.

All this has affected our friend Liberalis, bending his will, which is usually so steadfast and erect in the face of his own trials. And not without reason has he been shaken; for it is the unexpected that puts the heaviest load upon us. Strangeness adds to the weight of calamities, and every mortal feels the greater pain as a result of that which also brings surprise.

Therefore, nothing ought to be unexpected by us. Our minds should be sent forward in advance to meet all problems, and we should consider, not what is wont to happen, but what can happen. For what is there in existence that Fortune, when she has so willed, does not drag down from the very height of its prosperity? And what is there that she does not the more violently assail the more brilliantly it shines? What is laborious or difficult for her? She does not always attack in one way, or even with her full strength; at one time she summons our own hands against us; at another time, content with her own powers, she makes use of no agent in devising perils for us. No time is exempt; in the midst of our very pleasures there spring up causes of suffering.
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Eligit aliquid novi casus, per quod velut oblitis 6 vires suas ingerat. Quidquid longa series multis laboribus, multa deum indulgentia struxit, id unus dies spargit ac dissipat. Longam moram dedit malis properantibus, qui diem dixit; hora1 momentumque temporis evertendis imperiis sufficit. Esset aliquod inbecilítatis nostrae solacium rerumque nostrarum, si tam tarde perirent2 cuneta quam funt3; nunc incrementa lente exunct, festinatur in damnum.

7 Nihil privatim, nihil publice stable est; tam hominum quam urbium fata volvuntur. Inter placidissima terror existit nihilque extra tumultuantibus causis mala, unde minime exspectabantur, erumpunt. Quae domesticis bellis steterunt regna, quae externis, impellente nullo ruunt. Quota quaeque felicitatem civitas pertulit?

Cogitanda ergo sunt omnia et animus adversus ea,

1 hora Gruter; horam BA.
2 tam tarde perirent later MSS.; tumult reperirent BA.
3 funt later MSS.; finiunt BA.

a Cf. Ep. iv. 7, esp. the words noli huic tranquillitati confidere; momento mare evertitur.
EPISTLE XCI.

War arises in the midst of peace, and that which we depended upon for protection is transformed into a cause of fear; friend becomes enemy, ally becomes foe. The summer calm is stirred into sudden storms, wilder than the storms of winter. With no foe in sight we are victims of such fates as foes inflict, and if other causes of disaster fail, excessive good fortune finds them for itself. The most temperate are assailed by illness, the strongest by wasting disease, the most innocent by chastisement, the most secluded by the noisy mob.

Chance chooses some new weapon by which to bring her strength to bear against us, thinking we have forgotten her. Whatever structure has been reared by a long sequence of years, at the cost of great toil and through the great kindness of the gods, is scattered and dispersed by a single day. Nay, he who has said “a day” has granted too long a postponement to swift-coming misfortune; an hour, an instant of time, suffices for the overthrow of empires! It would be some consolation for the feebleness of our selves and our works, if all things should perish as slowly as they come into being; but as it is, increases are of sluggish growth, but the way to ruin is rapid. Nothing, whether public or private, is stable; the destinies of men, no less than those of cities, are in a whirl. Amid the greatest calm terror arises, and though no external agencies stir up commotion, yet evils burst forth from sources whence they were least expected. Thrones which have stood the shock of civil and foreign wars crash to the ground though no one sets them tottering. How few the states which have carried their good fortune through to the end!

We should therefore reflect upon all contingencies,
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8 quae possunt evenire, firmandus. Exilia, tormenta morbi, bella, naufragia meditare. Potest te patriae, potest patriam tibi casus eripere, potest te in solitudines abigere, potest hoc ipsum, in quo turba suffocatur, fieri solitudo. Tota ante oculos sortis humanae condicio ponatur, nec quantum frequenter evenit, sed quantum plurimum potest evenire, praecumamus animo, si nolumus opprimit nee illis insitatis velut novis obstupefieri; in plenum cogitanda fortuna est.


Consurgamus itaque adversus fortuita et quicquid inciderit, sciamus non esse tam magnum quam rumore iactetur. Civitas arsit opulenta ornamentatique provinciarum, quibus et inserta erat et excepta, uni tamen imposita et huic non latissimo

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1 morbi BA; morbos later MSS.
2 meditare later MSS.; meditari BA.
3 abigere Matthiae; abicere BA.
4 latissimo Buecheler; altissimo BA.

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a The passage bears a striking resemblance to the words of Theseus in an unknown play of Euripides (Nauck, Frag. 964) quoted by Cicero, Tuscul. iii. 14. 29, and by Plutarch, Consolation to Apollonius, 112 d.

b Seneca (N. Q. vi. 26) speaks of Paphos (on the island of Cyprus) as having been more than once devastated. We know of two such accidents—one under Augustus and another under Vespasian. See the same passage for other earthquake shocks in various places.

c Lyons held an exceptional position in relation to the
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