

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

V.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quod pertinaciter studes et omnibus omissis hoc unum agis, ut te meliorem cotidie facias, et probo et gaudeo, nec tantum hortor, ut perseveres, sed etiam rogo. Illud autem te admoneo, ne eorum more, qui non proficere sed conspici cupiunt, facias aliqua, quae in habitu tuo aut genere vitae notabilia sint.
- 2 Asperum cultum et intonsum caput et negligentiore[m] barbam et indictum argento odium et cubile humi positum, et quicquid aliud ambitio nempe perversa¹ via sequitur, evita. Satis ipsum nomen philosophiae, etiam si modeste tractetur, invidiosum est; quid si nos hominum consuetudini coeperimus excerpere? Intus omnia dissimilia sint, frons populo nostra
- 3 conveniat. Non splendeat toga, ne sordeat quidem. Non habeamus argentum, in quod solidi auri caelatura descenderit, sed non putemus frugalitatis indicium auro argentoque caruisse. Id agamus, ut meliorem vitam sequamur quam vulgus, non ut contrariam; alioquin quos emendari volumus, fugamus a nobis et avertimus. Illud quoque efficimus, ut nihil imitari velint nostri, dum timent, ne imitanda sint omnia.
- 4 Hoc primum philosophia promittit, sensum communem, humanitatem et congregationem. A qua professione dissimilitudo nos separabit. Videamus,

¹ *ambitio nempe perversa* Gertz; *ambitionem perversa* MSS.

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V. THE PHILOSOPHER'S MEAN

I commend you and rejoice in the fact that you are persistent in your studies, and that, putting all else aside, you make it each day your endeavour to become a better man. I do not merely exhort you to keep at it; I actually beg you to do so. I warn you, however, not to act after the fashion of those who desire to be conspicuous rather than to improve, by doing things which will rouse comment as regards your dress or general way of living. Repellent attire, unkempt hair, slovenly beard, open scorn of silver dishes, a couch on the bare earth, and any other perverted forms of self-display, are to be avoided. The mere name of philosophy, however quietly pursued, is an object of sufficient scorn; and what would happen if we should begin to separate ourselves from the customs of our fellow-men? Inwardly, we ought to be different in all respects, but our exterior should conform to society. Do not wear too fine, nor yet too frowzy, a toga. One needs no silver plate, encrusted and embossed in solid gold; but we should not believe the lack of silver and gold to be proof of the simple life. Let us try to maintain a higher standard of life than that of the multitude, but not a contrary standard; otherwise, we shall frighten away and repel the very persons whom we are trying to improve. We also bring it about that they are unwilling to imitate us in anything, because they are afraid lest they might be compelled to imitate us in everything.

The first thing which philosophy undertakes to give is fellow-feeling with all men; in other words, sympathy and sociability. We part company with our promise if we are unlike other men. We must

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- ne ista, per quae admirationem parare volumus, ridicula et odiosa sint. Nempe propositum nostrum est secundum naturam vivere; hoc contra naturam est, torquere corpus suum et faciles odisse munditias et squalorem adpetere et cibis non tantum vilibus uti
5 sed taetris et horridis. Quemadmodum desiderare delicatas res luxuriae est, ita usitatas et non magno parabiles fugere dementiae. Frugalitatem exigit philosophia, non poenam, potest autem esse non incompta frugalitas. Hic mihi modus placet: temperetur vita inter bonos mores et publicos; suspiciant omnes vitam nostram, sed agnoscant.
- 6 “Quid ergo? Eadem faciemus, quae ceteri? Nihil inter nos et illos intererit?” Plurimum. Dissimiles esse nos vulgo sciat, qui inspexerit propius. Qui domum intraverit, nos potius miretur quam suppellectilem nostram. Magnus ille est, qui fictilibus sic utitur quemadmodum argento. Nec ille minor est, qui sic argento utitur quemadmodum fictilibus. Infirmi animi est pati non posse divitias.
- 7 Sed ut huius quoque diei lucellum tecum comunicem, apud Hecatonem nostrum inveni cupiditatum finem etiam ad timoris remedia proficere. “Desines,” inquit, “timere, si sperare desieris.” Dices: “Quomodo ista tam diversa pariter eunt¹?” Ita est, mi Lucili: cum videantur dissidere, coniuncta sunt. Quemadmodum eadem catena et custodiam et militem copulat, sic ista, quae tam dissimilia sunt,
¹ *eunt* Volkmann; *sunt* MSS.

^a *i. e.*, of the Stoic school.

^b Frag. 25 Fowler.

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see to it that the means by which we wish to draw admiration be not absurd and odious. Our motto, as you know, is "Live according to Nature"; but it is quite contrary to nature to torture the body, to hate unlaboured elegance, to be dirty on purpose, to eat food that is not only plain, but disgusting and forbidding. Just as it is a sign of luxury to seek out dainties, so it is madness to avoid that which is customary and can be purchased at no great price. Philosophy calls for plain living, but not for penance; and we may perfectly well be plain and neat at the same time. This is the mean of which I approve; our life should observe a happy medium between the ways of a sage and the ways of the world at large; all men should admire it, but they should understand it also.

"Well then, shall we act like other men? Shall there be no distinction between ourselves and the world?" Yes, a very great one; let men find that we are unlike the common herd, if they look closely. If they visit us at home, they should admire us, rather than our household appointments. He is a great man who uses earthenware dishes as if they were silver; but he is equally great who uses silver as if it were earthenware. It is the sign of an unstable mind not to be able to endure riches.

But I wish to share with you to-day's profit also. I find in the writings of our ^b Hecato that the limiting of desires helps also to cure fears: "Cease to hope," he says, "and you will cease to fear." "But how," you will reply, "can things so different go side by side?" In this way, my dear Lucilius: though they do seem at variance, yet they are really united. Just as the same chain fastens the prisoner and the soldier who guards him, so hope and fear, dissimilar as they

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8 pariter incedunt ; spem metus sequitur. Nec miror ista sic ire ; utrumque pendentis animi est, utrumque futuri exspectatione solliciti. Maxima autem utriusque causa est, quod non ad praesentia aptamur, sed cogitationes in longinqua praemittimus. Itaque providentia, maximum bonum condicionis humanae, 9 in malum versa est. Ferae pericula, quae vident, fugiunt ; cum effugere, securae sunt ; nos et venturo torquemur et praeterito. Multa bona nostra nobis nocent, timoris enim tormentum memoria reducit, providentia anticipat. Nemo tantum praesentibus miser est. VALE.

VI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Intellego, Lucili, non emendari me tantum sed transfigurari. Nec hoc promitto iam aut spero, nihil in me superesse, quod mutandum sit. Quidni multa habeam, quae debeant colligi, quae extenuari, quae attolli? Et hoc ipsum argumentum est in melius translati animi, quod vitia sua, quae adhuc ignorabat, videt. Quibusdam aegris gratulatio fit, cum ipsi aegros se esse senserunt.
- 2 Cuperem itaque tecum communicare tam subitam mutationem mei ; tunc amicitiae nostrae certio rem fiduciam habere coepissem, illius verae, quam non

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are, keep step together; fear follows hope. I am not surprised that they proceed in this way; each alike belongs to a mind that is in suspense, a mind that is fretted by looking forward to the future. But the chief cause of both these ills is that we do not adapt ourselves to the present, but send our thoughts a long way ahead. And so foresight, the noblest blessing of the human race, becomes perverted. Beasts avoid the dangers which they see, and when they have escaped them are free from care; but we men torment ourselves over that which is to come as well as over that which is past. Many of our blessings bring bane to us; for memory recalls the tortures of fear, while foresight anticipates them. The present alone can make no man wretched. Farewell.

VI. ON SHARING KNOWLEDGE

I feel, my dear Lucilius, that I am being not only reformed, but transformed. I do not yet, however, assure myself, or indulge the hope, that there are no elements left in me which need to be changed. Of course there are many that should be made more compact, or made thinner, or be brought into greater prominence. And indeed this very fact is proof that my spirit is altered into something better,—that it can see its own faults, of which it was previously ignorant. In certain cases sick men are congratulated because they themselves have perceived that they are sick.

I therefore wish to impart to you this sudden change in myself; I should then begin to place a surer trust in our friendship,—*the true friendship,*

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