mentior rapuit, alia proxima ripae cursu languescente depositus, alia torrens impetus in mare eiecit. Ideo constitutendum est, quid velimus, et in eo perseverandum.


10 hoc putat, qui oritur cum maxime vitam. Non est quod existimes paucos esse hos; propemodum omnes sunt. Quidam vero tunc incipiunt, cum desinendum est. Si hoc iudicas mirum, adiciam quod magis admireris: quidam ante vivere desierunt quam inciperent. Vale.

XXIII.

Seneca Lucilio suo salutem

1 Sollicitum esse te scribis de iudicii eventu, quod tibi furor inimici denuntiat, existimas me suasurum, ut meliora tibi ipse proponas et adquiescas spei blandae. Quid enim necessae est mala accersere,

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*a* Frag. 493 Usener.

*Seneca's theme is suggested by the fear which possesses Lucilius as to the issue of a lawsuit. This fear is taken as typical of all fears, and Seneca devotes most of his letter to the greatest fear of all,—fear of death.*

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are transported gently; others are torn along by a more violent current; some, which are nearest the bank, are left there as the current slackens; and others are carried out to sea by the onrush of the stream. Therefore, we should decide what we wish, and abide by the decision.

Now is the time for me to pay my debt. I can give you a saying of your friend Epicurus and thus clear this letter of its obligation: “It is bothersome always to be beginning life.” Or another, which will perhaps express the meaning better: “They live ill who are always beginning to live.” You are right in asking why; the saying certainly stands in need of a commentary. It is because the life of such persons is always incomplete. But a man cannot stand prepared for the approach of death if he has just begun to live. We must make it our aim already to have lived long enough. No one deems that he has done so, if he is just on the point of planning his life. You need not think that there are few of this kind; practically everyone is of such a stamp. Some men, indeed, only begin to live when it is time for them to leave off living. And if this seems surprising to you, I shall add that which will surprise you still more: Some men have left off living before they have begun. Farewell.

XXIV. ON DESPISING DEATH

You write me that you are anxious about the result of a lawsuit, with which an angry opponent is threatening you; and you expect me to advise you to picture to yourself a happier issue, and to rest in the allurements of hope. Why, indeed, is
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satis cito patienda cum venerint, praesumere ac
praesens tempus futuri metu perdere? Est sine
dubio stultum, quia quandoque sis futurus miser,
esse iam miserum. Sed ego alia te ad securitatem
via ducam: si vis omnem sollicitudinem exuere,
quicquid vereris ne eveniat, eventurum utique pro-
pone, et quodcumque est illud malum, tecum ipse
metire ac timorem tuum taxa; intelleges profecto
aut non magnum aut non longum esse, quod metuis.

2 Nec diu exempla, quibus confirmuris, colligenda sunt;
onmis illa aetas tulit. In quacumque paritem rerum
vel civilium vel externarum memoriam miseris, occurr-
rent tibi ingenia aut profectus aut inpetus magni.

Numquid accidere tibi, si damnaris, potest durius
quam ut mittaris in exilium, ut ducaris in carcerem?
Numquid ultra quiequam ulli timendum est quam ut
uratur, quam ut pereat? Singula ista constitue et
contemptores eorum cita, qui non quaerendi, sed

3 eligendi sunt. Damnationem suam Rutilius sic tulit,
tamquam nihil illi molestum aliud esset quam quod
male iudicaretur. Exilium Metellus fortiter tulit,
Rutilius etiam libenter; alter, ut rediret, rei publicae
praestitit, alter deditum suum Sullae negavit, cui
nihil tune negabatur. In carcere Socrates disputavit
et exire, cum essent qui promitterent fugam, noluit
remansitque, ut durarum rerum gravissimarum homini-
it necessary to summon trouble,—which must be
endured soon enough when it has once arrived,—
or to anticipate trouble and ruin the present through
fear of the future? It is indeed foolish to be
unhappy now because you may be unhappy at some
future time. But I shall conduct you to peace of
mind by another route: if you would put off all
worry, assume that what you fear may happen will
certainly happen in any event; whatever the trouble
may be, measure it in your own mind, and estimate
the amount of your fear. You will thus understand
that what you fear is either insignificant or short-
lived. And you need not spend a long time in
gathering illustrations which will strengthen you;
every epoch has produced them. Let your thoughts
travel into any era of Roman or foreign history, and
there will throng before you notable examples of
high achievement or of high endeavour.

If you lose this case, can anything more severe
happen to you than being sent into exile or led to
prison? Is there a worse fate that any man may
fear than being burned or being killed? Name such
penalties one by one, and mention the men who have
scorned them; one does not need to hunt for them,
—it is simply a matter of selection. Sentence of
conviction was borne by Rutilius as if the injustice
of the decision were the only thing which annoyed
him. Exile was endured by Metellus with courage, by
Rutilius even with gladness; for the former consented
to come back only because his country called him;
the latter refused to return when Sulla summoned
him,—and nobody in those days said "No" to Sulla!
Socrates in prison discoursed, and declined to flee
when certain persons gave him the opportunity; he
remained there, in order to free mankind from the
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5 bus metum demeret, mortis et carceris. Mucius ignibus manum imposuit. Aerenum est uri; quanto acerbius, si id te faciente patiaris! Vides hominem non eruditum nec ullis praeceptis contra mortem aut dolorum subornatum, militari tantum robore instructum, poenas a se inriti conatus exigentem; spectator destillantis in hostili foculo dexterae stetit nec ante removit nudis ossibus fluentem manum, quam ignis illi ab hoste subductus est. Facere aliquid in illis castris felicius potuit, nihil fortius. Vide quanto aceror sit ad occupanda pericula virtus quam crudelitas ad inroganda: facilius Porsenna Mucio cognovit, quod voluerat occidere, quam sibi Mucius, quod non occiderat.


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a The *foculus* in this version of the story was evidently a movable fire, a brazier.

b The *Phaedo*, on the immortality of the soul.

c *i.e.*, to save and bring back to Rome as prisoner.

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fear of two most grievous things, death and imprison-
ment. Mucius put his hand into the fire. It is
painful to be burned; but how much more painful
to inflict such suffering upon oneself? Here was a
man of no learning, not primed to face death and
pain by any words of wisdom, and equipped only
with the courage of a soldier, who punished himself
for his fruitless daring; he stood and watched his
own right hand falling away piecemeal on the enemy’s
brazier, nor did he withdraw the dissolving limb,
with its uncovered bones, until his foe removed the
fire. He might have accomplished something more
successful in that camp, but never anything more
brave. See how much keener a brave man is to
lay hold of danger than a cruel man is to inflict it:
Porsenna was more ready to pardon Mucius for wish-
ing to slay him than Mucius to pardon himself for
failing to slay Porsenna!

“Oh,” say you, “those stories have been droned
to death in all the schools; pretty soon, when you
reach the topic ‘On Despising Death,’ you will be
telling me about Cato.” But why should I not tell
you about Cato, how he read Plato’s book on that
last glorious night, with a sword laid at his pillow?
He had provided these two requisites for his last
moments,—the first, that he might have the will to
die, and the second, that he might have the means.
So he put his affairs in order,—as well as one could
put in order which was ruined and near its end,
—and thought that he ought to see to it that no one
should have the power to slay or the good fortune to
save Cato. Drawing the sword,—which he had kept
unstained from all bloodshed against the final day,—
he cried: “Fortune, you have accomplished nothing
by resisting all my endeavours. I have fought, till

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libertate pugnavi, nec agebam tanta pertinacia, ut liber, sed ut inter liberos viverem. Nunc quoniam deploratae sunt res generis humani, Cato deducatur in tutum." Impressit deinde mortiferum corpori vulneris. Quo obligato a mediciis cum minus sanguinis haberet, minus virium, animi idem,iam non tantum Caesari sed sibi iratus nudas in vulneris manus egit et generosum illum contemпорemque omnis potentiae spiritum non emisit, sed eiecit.

9 Non in hoc exempla nunc congero, ut ingenium exerceram, sed ut te adversus id, quod maxime terribile videtur, exhorter. Facilis autem exhortabor, si ostendero non fortes tantum viros hoc momentum efflansae animae contempsisse, sed quosdam ad alia ignavos in hac re aequasse animum fortissimorum, sicut illum Cn. Pompei socerum Scipionem, qui contrario in Africam vento relatus cum teneri navem suam vidisset ab hostibus, ferro se transverberavit et quaeentibus, ubi imperator esset, "Imperator,"

10 inquit, "se bene habet." Vox haece illum parem maioribus fecit et fatalem Scipionibus in Africa gloriam non est interrumpit passa. Multum fuit Carthaginem vincere, sed amplus mortem. "Imperator," inquit, "se bene habet." An aliter debebat imperator, et quidem Catonis, mori? Non revoco te ad historias nec ex omnibus saeculis contempores

* Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal at Zama in 202 B.C. Scipio Africanus, also surnamed Africanus, was by adoption the grandson of Hannibal’s conqueror. He captured Carthage in the Third Punic War, 146 B.C. The Scipio mentioned by Seneca died in 46 B.C.
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