

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

magis pertinet, qualis tibi videaris quam qualis aliis. Conciliari nisi turpi ratione amor turpium non potest.

12 Quid ergo illa laudata et omnibus praeferenda artibus rebusque philosophia praestabit? Scilicet ut malis tibi placere quam populo, ut aestimes iudicia, non numeres, ut sine metu deorum hominumque vivas, ut aut vincas mala aut finias. Ceterum, si te videro celebrem secundis vocibus vulgi, si intrante te clamor et plausus, pantomimica ornamenta, obstrepuerint, si tota civitate te feminae puerique laudaverint, quidni ego tui miserear, cum sciam, quae via ad istum favorem ferat? VALE.

### XXX.

#### SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Bassum Aufidium, virum optimum, vidi quassum, aetati<sup>1</sup> obluctantem. Sed iam plus illum degravat quam quod possit attolli; magno senectus et univ-  
erso pondere incubuit. Scis illum semper infirmi corporis et exsucti fuisse. Diu illud continuit et, ut  
2 verius dicam, continuavit<sup>2</sup>; subito defecit. Quemad-  
modum in nave, quae sentinam trahit, uni rimae aut alteri obsistitur, ubi plurimis locis laxari coepit et  
cedere, succurri non potest navigio dehiscenti; ita

<sup>1</sup> *vidi quassum, aetati* Hense; *vidiquassum aetatu aetati* p; *vidi quassum aetate, aetati* Chatelain.

<sup>2</sup> *continuavit* Buecheler; *continnavit* p; *concinnavit* LPb,

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themselves. However, what you think of yourself is much more to the point than what others think of you. The favour of ignoble men can be won only by ignoble means. What benefit, then, will that vaunted philosophy confer, whose praises we sing, and which, we are told, is to be preferred to every art and every possession? Assuredly, it will make you prefer to please yourself rather than the populace, it will make you weigh, and not merely count, men's judgments, it will make you live without fear of gods or men, it will make you either overcome evils or end them. Otherwise, if I see you applauded by popular acclamation, if your entrance upon the scene is greeted by a roar of cheering and clapping,—marks of distinction meet only for actors,—if the whole state, even the women and children, sing your praises, how can I help pitying you? For I know what pathway leads to such popularity. Farewell.

### XXX. ON CONQUERING THE CONQUEROR

I have beheld Aufidius Bassus, that noble man, shattered in health and wrestling with his years. But they already bear upon him so heavily that he cannot be raised up; old age has settled down upon him with great,—yes, with its entire, weight. You know that his body was always delicate and sapless. For a long time he has kept it in hand, or, to speak more correctly, has kept it together; of a sudden it has collapsed. Just as in a ship that springs a leak, you can always stop the first or the second fissure, but when many holes begin to open and let in water, the gapping hull cannot be saved; similarly,

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in senili corpore aliquatenus inbecillitas sustineri et fulciri potest. Ubi tamquam in putri aedificio omnis unctura diducitur, et dum alia excipitur, alia disceinditur, circumspiciendum est, quomodo exeas.

3 Bassus tamen noster alacer animo est. Hoc philosophia praestat, in conspectu mortis hilarem et in quocumque corporis habitu fortem laetumque nec deficientem, quamvis deficiatur. Magnus gubernator et scisso navigat velo, et, si exarmavit, tamen reliquias navigii aptat ad cursum. Hoc facit Bassus noster et eo animo vultuque finem suum spectat, quo alienum spectare nimis securi putares.

4 Magna res est, Lucili, haec et diu discenda, cum adventat hora illa inevitabilis, aequo animo abire. Alia genera mortis spei mixta sunt: desinit morbus, incendium extinguitur, ruina quos videbatur oppressura deposuit; mare quos hauserat, eadem vi, qua sorbebat, eiecit incolumes; gladium miles ab ipsa perituri cervice revocavit. Nil habet quod speret, quem senectus ducit ad mortem. Huic uni intercedi non potest. Nullo genere homines mollius moriuntur sed nec diutius.

5 Bassus noster videbatur mihi prosequi se et con-

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<sup>a</sup> *i. e.*, *exeas e vita*, "depart from life."

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in an old man's body, there is a certain limit up to which you can sustain and prop its weakness. But when it comes to resemble a decrepit building,—when every joint begins to spread and while one is being repaired another falls apart,—then it is time for a man to look about him and consider how he may get out.\*

But the mind of our friend Bassus is active. Philosophy bestows this boon upon us; it makes us joyful in the very sight of death, strong and brave no matter in what state the body may be, cheerful and never failing though the body fail us. A great pilot can sail even when his canvas is rent; if his ship be dismantled, he can yet put in trim what remains of her hull and hold her to her course. This is what our friend Bassus is doing; and he contemplates his own end with the courage and countenance which you would regard as undue indifference in a man who so contemplated another's.

This is a great accomplishment, Lucilius, and one which needs long practice to learn,—to depart calmly when the inevitable hour arrives. Other kinds of death contain an ingredient of hope: a disease comes to an end; a fire is quenched; falling houses have set down in safety those whom they seemed certain to crush; the sea has cast ashore unharmed those whom it had engulfed, by the same force through which it drew them down; the soldier has drawn back his sword from the very neck of his doomed foe. But those whom old age is leading away to death have nothing to hope for; old age alone grants no reprieve. No ending, to be sure, is more painless; but there is none more lingering.

Our friend Bassus seemed to me to be attending his own funeral, and laying out his own body for

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ponere et vivere tamquam superstes sibi et sapienter ferre desiderium sui. Nam de morte multa loquitur et id agit sedulo, ut nobis persuadeat, si quid incommodi aut metus in hoc negotio est, morientis vitium esse, non mortis; non magis in ipsa quicquam esse 6 molestiae quam post ipsam. Tam demens autem est, qui timet, quod non est passurus, quam qui timet, quod non est sensurus. An quisquam hoc futurum credit, ut per quam nihil sentiat, ea sentiat? "Ergo," inquit, "mors adeo extra omne malum est, ut sit extra omnem malorum metum."

7 Haec ego scio et saepe dicta et saepe dicenda, sed neque cum legerem, aequae mihi profuerunt, neque cum audirem iis<sup>1</sup> dicentibus, qui negabant timenda, a quorum metu aberant; hic vero plurimum apud me auctoritatis habuit, cum loqueretur de 8 morte vicina. Dicam enim<sup>2</sup> quid sentiam: puto fortio-rem esse eum, qui in ipsa morte est quam qui circa mortem. Mors enim admota etiam inperitis animum dedit non vitandi inevitabilia. Sic gladiator tota pugna timidissimus iugulum adversario praestat et errantem gladium sibi adtemperat. At illa, quae in propinquo est utique ventura, desiderat lentam animi firmitatem, quae est rarior nec potest nisi a sapiente praestari.

9 Libentissime itaque illum audiebam quasi ferentem

<sup>1</sup> *iis* Gertz; *his* P; *diis* pLb.

<sup>2</sup> *enim* Mentel; *etiam* pLPb.

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<sup>a</sup> The defeated gladiator is supposed to be on his back, his opponent standing over him and about to deliver the final blow. As the blade wavers at the throat, searching for the jugular vein, the victim directs the point.

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burial, and living almost as if he had survived his own death, and bearing with wise resignation his grief at his own departure. For he talks freely about death, trying hard to persuade us that if this process contains any element of discomfort or of fear, it is the fault of the dying person, and not of death itself; also, that there is no more inconvenience at the actual moment than there is after it is over. "And it is just as insane," he adds, "for a man to fear what will not happen to him, as to fear what he will not feel if it does happen." Or does anyone imagine it to be possible that the agency by which feeling is removed can be itself felt? "Therefore," says Bassus, "death stands so far beyond all evil that it is beyond all fear of evils."

I know that all this has often been said and should be often repeated; but neither when I read them were such precepts so effective with me, nor when I heard them from the lips of those who were at a safe distance from the fear of the things which they declared were not to be feared. But this old man had the greatest weight with me when he discussed death and death was near. For I must tell you what I myself think: I hold that one is braver at the very moment of death than when one is approaching death. For death, when it stands near us, gives even to inexperienced men the courage not to seek to avoid the inevitable. So the gladiator, who throughout the fight has been no matter how fainthearted, offers his throat to his opponent and directs the wavering blade to the vital spot." But an end that is near at hand, and is bound to come, calls for tenacious courage of soul; this is a rarer thing, and none but the wise man can manifest it.

Accordingly, I listened to Bassus with the deepest

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de morte sententiam et qualis esset eius natura velut propius inspectae indicantem. Plus, ut puto, fidei haberet apud te, plus ponderis, si quis revixisset et in morte nihil mali esse narraret expertus; accessus mortis quam perturbationem adferat, optime tibi hi dicent, qui secundum illam steterunt, qui venientem  
10 et viderunt et receperunt. Inter hos Bassum licet numeres, qui nos decipi noluit. Is ait tam stultum esse, qui mortem timeat, quam qui senectutem. Nam quemadmodum senectus adulescentiam sequitur, ita mors senectutem. Vivere noluit, qui mori non vult. Vita enim cum exceptione mortis data est; ad hanc itur. Quam ideo timere dementis est, quia  
11 certa expectantur, dubia metuuntur! Mors necessitatem habet aequam et invictam. Quis queri potest in ea condicione se esse, in qua nemo non est? Prima autem pars est aequitatis aequalitas.

Sed nunc supervacuum est naturae causam agere, quae non aliam voluit legem nostram esse quam suam; quicquid composuit, resolvit, et quicquid re-  
12 solvit, conponit iterum. Iam vero si cui contigit, ut illum senectus leniter emitteret non repente avolsam vitae, sed minutatim subductum; o ne illum agere gratias dis omnibus decet, quod satiatum ad requiem homini necessariam, lasso gratam perductus est.

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