

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

XXXVI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Amicum tuum hortare, ut istos magno animo contemnat, qui illum obiurgant, quod umbram et otium petierit, quod dignitatem suam destituerit, et cum plus consequi posset, praetulerit quietem omnibus; quam utiliter suum negotium gesserit, cotidie illis ostendet.¹ Hi, quibus invidetur, non desinent transire; alii elidentur, alii cadent. Res est inquieta felicitas; ipsa se exagitat. Movet cerebrum non uno genere; alios in aliud irritat, hos in potentiam, illos in luxuriam. Hos inflat, illos mollit et totos resolvit.
- 2 "At bene aliquis illam fert." Sic, quomodo vinum. Itaque non est quod tibi isti persuadeant eum esse felicem, qui a² multis obsidetur; sic ad illum, quemadmodum ad lacum concurritur, quem exhauriunt et turbant. "Nugatorium et inertem vocant." Scis quosdam perverse loqui et significare
- 3 contraria. Felicem vocabant; quid ergo? Erat? Ne illud quidem curo, quod quibusdam nimis horridi animi videtur et tetrici. Ariston aiebat malle se adulescentem tristem quam hilarem et amabilem turbae. Vinum enim bonum fieri, quod recens durum et asperum visum est; non pati aetatem, quod in

¹ *ostendet* P; *ostendet* pb; *ostendit* L. Hense suggests *ostendat*.

² *qui a* Pb; *quia* L; *qui* p (defended by Gertz).

^a *i.e.*, they are no more correct now, when they call him a trifler, than they were before, when they called him happy.

^b Aristo of Chios, Frag. 388 von Arnim.

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XXXVI. ON THE VALUE OF RETIREMENT

Encourage your friend to despise stout-heartedly those who upbraid him because he has sought the shade of retirement and has abdicated his career of honours, and, though he might have attained more, has preferred tranquillity to them all. Let him prove daily to these detractors how wisely he has looked out for his own interests. Those whom men envy will continue to march past him; some will be pushed out of the ranks, and others will fall. Prosperity is a turbulent thing; it torments itself. It stirs the brain in more ways than one, goading men on to various aims,—some to power, and others to high living. Some it puffs up; others it slackens and wholly enervates.

“But,” the retort comes, “so-and-so carries his prosperity well.” Yes; just as he carries his liquor. So you need not let this class of men persuade you that one who is besieged by the crowd is happy; they run to him as crowds rush for a pool of water, rendering it muddy while they drain it. But you say: “Men call our friend a trifier and a sluggard.” There are men, you know, whose speech is awry, who use the contrary^a terms. They called him happy; what of it? Was he happy? Even the fact that to certain persons he seems a man of a very rough and gloomy cast of mind, does not trouble me. Aristo^b used to say that he preferred a youth of stern disposition to one who was a jolly fellow and agreeable to the crowd. “For,” he added, “wine which, when new, seemed harsh and sour, becomes good wine; but that which tasted well at the vintage

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dolio placuit. Sine eum tristem appellent et inimicum processibus suis; bene se dabit in vetustate ipsa¹ tristitia, perseveret modo colere virtutem, perbibere liberalia studia, non illa, quibus perfundi satis
4 est, sed haec, quibus tingendus est animus. Hoc est discendi tempus. "Quid ergo? Aliquod est, quo non sit discendum?" Minime. Sed quemadmodum omnibus annis studere honestum est, ita non omnibus institui. Turpis et ridicula res est elementarius senex; iuveni parandum, seni utendum est. Facies ergo rem utilissimam tibi, si illum quam optimum feceris; haec aiunt beneficia esse expetenda tribuendaque, non dubie primae sortis, quae tam dare prodest quam accipere.

5 Denique nihil illi iam liberi est; spondit. Minus autem turpe est creditori quam spei bonae decoquere. Ad illud aes alienum solvendum opus est negotianti navigatione prospera, agrum colenti ubertate eius, quam colit, terrae, caeli favore; ille
6 quod debet, sola potest voluntate persolvi. In mores fortuna ius non habet. Hos disponat, ut quam tranquillissimus ille animus ad perfectum veniat, qui nec ablatum sibi quicquam sentit nec adiectum, sed in eodem habitu est, quomodocumque res cedunt. Cui sive adgeruntur vulgaria bona, supra res suas

¹ *ipsa* MSS. ; *ista* Jugis, perhaps rightly.

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cannot stand age." So let them call him stern and a foe to his own advancement. It is just this sternness that will go well when it is aged, provided only that he continues to cherish virtue and to absorb thoroughly the studies which make for culture,—not those with which it is sufficient for a man to sprinkle himself, but those in which the mind should be steeped. Now is the time to learn. "What? Is there any time when a man should not learn?" By no means; but just as it is creditable for every age to study, so it is not creditable for every age to be instructed. An old man learning his A B C is a disgraceful and absurd object; the young man must store up, the old man must use. You will therefore be doing a thing most helpful to yourself if you make this friend of yours as good a man as possible; those kindnesses, they tell us, are to be both sought for and bestowed, which benefit the giver no less than the receiver; and they are unquestionably the best kind.

Finally, he has no longer any freedom in the matter; he has pledged his word. And it is less disgraceful to compound with a creditor than to compound with a promising future. To pay his debt of money, the business man must have a prosperous voyage, the farmer must have fruitful fields and kindly weather; but the debt which your friend owes can be completely paid by mere goodwill. Fortune has no jurisdiction over character. Let him so regulate his character that in perfect peace he may bring to perfection that spirit within him which feels neither loss nor gain, but remains in the same attitude, no matter how things fall out. A spirit like this, if it is heaped with worldly goods, rises superior to its wealth; if, on the other hand, chance

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eminet, sive aliquid ex istis vel omnia casus excussit, minor non fit.

- 7 Si in Parthia natus esset, arcum infans statim tenderet; si in Germania, protinus puer tenerum hastile vibraret; si avorum nostrorum temporibus fuisset, equitare et hostem comminus percutere didicisset. Haec singulis disciplina gentis suae suadet
8 atque imperat. Quid ergo huic meditandum est? Quod adversus omnia tela, quod adversus omne hostium genus bene facit, mortem contemnere, quae quin habeat aliquid in se terribile, ut et animos nostros, quos in amorem sui natura formavit, offendant, nemo dubitat; nec enim opus esset in id comparari et acui, in quod instinctu quodam voluntario iremus,
9 sicut feruntur omnes ad conservationem sui. Nemo discit, ut si necesse fuerit, aequo animo in rosa iaceat, sed in hoc duratur, ut tormentis non summittat fidem, ut si necesse fuerit, stans etiam aliquando saucius pro vallo pervigilet et ne pilo quidem incumbat, quia solet obrepere interim somnus in aliquod adminiculum reclinatis.

Mors nullum habet incommodum; esse enim
10 debet aliquid,¹ cuius sit incommodum. Quod si tanta cupiditas te longioris aevi tenet, cogita nihil eorum, quae ab oculis abeunt et in rerum naturam,

¹ *aliquid* editors; *aliquis* MSS.

^a As a Roman, living in an age when philosophy was recommended and prescribed.

^b *i. e.*, if death inspired no terror.

^c And since after death we do not exist, death cannot be harmful to us. Seneca has in mind the argument of Epicurus (Diogenes Laërtius, x. 124-5): "Therefore the most dread-inspiring of all evils, death, is nothing to us; for when we exist, death is not present to us, and when death is present, then we do not exist. Therefore it does

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has stripped him of a part of his wealth, or even all, it is not impaired.

If your friend had been born in Parthia, he would have begun, when a child, to bend the bow; if in Germany, he would forthwith have been brandishing his slender spear; if he had been born in the days of our forefathers, he would have learned to ride a horse and smite his enemy hand to hand. These are the occupations which the system of each race recommends to the individual,—yes, prescribes for him. To what, then, shall this friend ^a of yours devote his attention? I say, let him learn that which is helpful against all weapons, against every kind of foe, —contempt of death; because no one doubts that death has in it something that inspires terror, so that it shocks even our souls, which nature has so moulded that they love their own existence; for otherwise ^b there would be no need to prepare ourselves, and to whet our courage, to face that towards which we should move with a sort of voluntary instinct, precisely as all men tend to preserve their existence. No man learns a thing in order that, if necessity arises, he may lie down with composure upon a bed of roses; but he steels his courage to this end,—that he may not surrender his plighted faith to torture, and that, if need be, he may some day stay out his watch in the trenches, even though wounded, without even leaning on his spear; because sleep is likely to creep over men who support themselves by any prop whatsoever.

In death there is nothing harmful; for there must exist something to which it is harmful.^c And yet, if you are possessed by so great a craving for a longer life, reflect that none of the objects which vanish from our gaze and are re-absorbed into the

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ex qua prodierunt ac mox processura sunt, recon-
duntur, consumi; desinunt ista, non pereunt. Et
mors, quam pertimescimus ac recusamus, intermittit
vitam, non eripit; veniet iterum, qui nos in lucem
reponat dies, quem multi recusarent, nisi oblitos
reduceret.

- 11 Sed postea diligentius docebo omnia, quae videntur
perire, mutari. Aequo animo debet rediturus exire.
Observa orbem rerum in se remeantium; videbis
nihil in hoc mundo extinguui, sed vicibus descendere
ac surgere. Aestas abít, sed alter illam annus
adducet; hiemps cecidit,¹ referent illam sui menses;
solem nox obruit, sed ipsam statim dies abiget.
Stellarum iste discursus quicquid praeterít repetit;
- 12 pars caeli levatur assidue, pars mergitur. Denique
finem faciam, si hoc unum adiecero, nec infantes nec²
pueros nec mente lapsos timere mortem et esse
turpissimum, si eam securitatem nobis ratio non
praestat, ad quam stultitia perducit. VALE.

XXXVII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quod maximum vinculum est ad bonam mentem,
promisisti virum bonum, sacramento rogatus es.
Deridebit te, si quis tibi dixerit mollem esse militiam

¹ *cecidit* MSS. ; Hense would read *cecidit, sed.*

² Hense, following Madvig, would delete *nec.*

not concern either the living or the dead; for to the living
it has no existence, and the dead do not themselves exist.”
Lucretius uses this argument, concluding it with (iii. 830):
Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum.

^a For example, in *Ep.* lxxvii.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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