

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

naturam suam vivere. Sed hanc difficilem facit communis insania; in vitia alter alterum trudemus. Quomodo autem revocari ad salutem possunt, quos nemo retinet, populus impellit? VALE.

XLII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Iam tibi iste persuasit virum se bonum esse? Atqui vir bonus tam cito nec fieri potest nec intellegi. Scis quem nunc virum bonum dicam? Huius secundae notae. Nam ille alter fortasse tamquam phoenix semel anno quingentesimo nascitur. Nec est mirum ex intervallo magna generari; mediocria et in turbam nascentia saepe fortuna producit, eximia vero ipsa raritate commendat.
- 2 Sed iste multum adhuc abest ab eo, quod profitetur. Et si sciret, quid esset vir bonus, nondum esse se crederet, fortasse etiam fieri posse desperaret. "At male existimat de malis." Hoc etiam mali faciunt, nec ulla maior poena nequitiae est quam 3 quod sibi ac suis displicet. "At odit eos, qui subita et magna potentia inpotenter utuntur." Idem faciet,

* Seneca doubtless has in mind the famous passage of Simonides, ἀνδρ' ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀληθῶς γενέσθαι χαλεπὸν, discussed by Plato, *Protagoras*, 339 A.

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—to live in accordance with his own nature. But this is turned into a hard task by the general madness of mankind; we push one another into vice. And how can a man be recalled to salvation, when he has none to restrain him, and all mankind to urge him on? Farewell.

XLII. ON VALUES

Has that friend of yours already made you believe that he is a good man? And yet it is impossible in so short a time for one either to become good or be known as such.^a Do you know what kind of man I now mean when I speak of "a good man"? I mean one of the second grade, like your friend. For one of the first class perhaps springs into existence, like the phoenix, only once in five hundred years. And it is not surprising, either, that greatness develops only at long intervals; Fortune often brings into being commonplace powers, which are born to please the mob; but she holds up for our approval that which is extraordinary by the very fact that she makes it rare.

This man, however, of whom you spoke, is still far from the state which he professes to have reached. And if he knew what it meant to be "a good man," he would not yet believe himself such; perhaps he would even despair of his ability to become good. "But," you say, "he thinks ill of evil men." Well, so do evil men themselves; and there is no worse penalty for vice than the fact that it is dissatisfied with itself and all its fellows. "But he hates those who make an ungoverned use of great power suddenly acquired." I retort that he will do the

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cum idem potuerit. Multorum, quia inbecilla sunt, latent vitia, non minus ausura, cum illis vires suae placuerint, quam illa, quae iam felicitas aperuit.

4 Instrumenta illis explicandae nequitiae desunt. Sic tuto serpens etiam pestifera tractatur, dum riget frigore; non desunt tunc illi venena, sed torpent. Multorum crudelitas et ambitio et luxuria, ut paria pessimis audeat, fortunae favore deficitur. Eadem velle sic subinde cognosces¹: da posse, quantum volunt.

5 Meministi, cum quendam adfirmares esse in tua potestate, dixisse me volaticum esse ac levem et te non pedem eius tenere, sed pennam. Mentitus sum? Pluma tenebatur, quam remisit et fugit. Scis, quos postea tibi exhibuerit ludos, quam multa in caput suum casura temptaverit. Non videbat se per aliorum pericula in suum ruere. Non cogitabat, quam onerosa essent, quae petebat, etiam si supervacua non essent.

6 Hoc itaque in his, quae adfectamus, ad quae labore magno contendimus, inspicere debemus, aut nihil in illis commodi esse aut plus incommodi. Quaedam supervacua sunt, quaedam tanti non sunt.

¹ *sic subinde cognosces* Capps; *subaudis cognosces* pPb; *si sub auditis cognoscis* L; *si avebis cognoscere* J. Mueller; *si iuvat audentis, cognosces* Buecheler.

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same thing as soon as he acquires the same powers. In the case of many men, their vices, being powerless, escape notice ; although, as soon as the persons in question have become satisfied with their own strength, the vices will be no less daring than those which prosperity has already disclosed. These men simply lack the means whereby they may unfold their wickedness. Similarly, one can handle even a poisonous snake while it is stiff with cold ; the poison is not lacking ; it is merely numbed into inaction. In the case of many men, their cruelty, ambition, and indulgence only lack the favour of Fortune to make them dare crimes that would match the worst. That their wishes are the same you will in a moment discover, in this way : give them the power equal to their wishes.

Do you remember how, when you declared that a certain person was under your influence, I pronounced him fickle and a bird of passage, and said that you held him not by the foot but merely by a wing ? Was I mistaken ? You grasped him only by a feather ; he left it in your hands and escaped. You know what an exhibition he afterwards made of himself before you, how many of the things he attempted were to recoil upon his own head. He did not see that in endangering others he was tottering to his own downfall. He did not reflect how burdensome were the objects which he was bent upon attaining, even if they were not superfluous.

Therefore, with regard to the objects which we pursue, and for which we strive with great effort, we should note this truth ; either there is nothing desirable in them, or the undesirable is preponderant. Some objects are superfluous ; others are not worth

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- Sed hoc non pervidemus, et gratuita nobis videntur,
7 quae carissime constant. Ex eo licet stupor noster
appareat, quod ea sola putamus emi, pro quibus
pecuniam solvimus, ea gratuita vocamus, pro quibus
nos ipsos inpendimus. Quae emere nollemus, si
domus nobis nostra pro illis esset danda, si amoenum
aliquod fructuosumve praedium, ad ea paratissimi
sumus pervenire cum sollicitudine, cum periculo,
cum iactura pudoris et libertatis et temporis; adeo
nihil est cuique se vilius.
- 8 Idem itaque in omnibus consiliis rebusque faciamus,
quod solemus facere, quotiens ad institorem alicuius
mercis accessimus; videamus, hoc quod concupiscimus,
quanti deferatur. Saepe maximum pretium est, pro
quo nullum datur. Multa possum tibi ostendere,
quae acquisita acceptaque libertatem nobis extor-
serint; nostri essemus, si ista nostra non essent.
- 9 Haec ergo tecum ipse versa, non solum ubi de
incremento agetur, sed etiam ubi de iactura. "Hoc
perituum est." Nempe adventicium fuit; tam facile
sine isto vives quam vixisti. Si diu illud habuisti,
perdis postquam satiatu es; si non diu, perdis ante-
quam adsuescas. "Pecuniam minorem habebis."
- 10 Nempe et molestiam. "Gratiam minorem." Nempe
et invidiam. Circumspice ista, quae nos agunt in
insaniam, quae cum plurimis lacrimis amittimus;
scies non damnum in is¹ molestum esse, sed opinionem

¹ *damnum in is* Hense; *damnum in his* or *dam numinis*
MSS.

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the price we pay for them. But we do not see this clearly, and we regard things as free gifts when they really cost us very dear. Our stupidity may be clearly proved by the fact that we hold that "buying" refers only to the objects for which we pay cash, and we regard as free gifts the things for which we spend our very selves. These we should refuse to buy, if we were compelled to give in payment for them our houses or some attractive and profitable estate; but we are eager to attain them at the cost of anxiety, of danger, and of lost honour, personal freedom, and time; so true it is that each man regards nothing as cheaper than himself.

Let us therefore act, in all our plans and conduct, just as we are accustomed to act whenever we approach a huckster who has certain wares for sale; let us see how much we must pay for that which we crave. Very often the things that cost nothing cost us the most heavily; I can show you many objects the quest and acquisition of which have wrested freedom from our hands. We should belong to ourselves, if only these things did not belong to us.

I would therefore have you reflect thus, not only when it is a question of gain, but also when it is a question of loss. "This object is bound to perish." Yes, it was a mere extra; you will live without it just as easily as you have lived before. If you have possessed it for a long time, you lose it after you have had your fill of it; if you have not possessed it long, then you lose it before you have become wedded to it. "You will have less money." Yes, and less trouble. "Less influence." Yes, and less envy. Look about you and note the things that drive us mad, which we lose with a flood of tears; you will perceive that it is not the loss that troubles us with

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damni. Nemo illa perisse sentit, sed cogitat. Qui se habet, nihil perdidit. Sed quoto cuique habere se contigit? VALE.

XLIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quomodo hoc ad me pervenerit quaeris, quis mihi id te cogitare narraverit, quod tu nulli narraveras? Is qui scit plurimum, rumor. "Quid ergo?" inquis, "Tantus sum, ut possim excitare rumorem?" Non est quod te ad hunc locum respiciens metiaris; ad
2 istum respice, in quo moraris. Quicquid inter vicina eminent, magnum est illic, ubi eminent. Nam magnitudo non habet¹ modum certum; comparatio illam aut tollit² aut deprimit. Navis, quae in flumine magna est, in mari parvula est. Gubernaculum, quod alteri navi magnum, alteri exiguum est.
- 3 Tu nunc in provincia, licet contempnas ipse te, magnus es. Quid agas, quemadmodum cenes, quemadmodum dormias, quaeritur, scitur; eo tibi diligentius vivendum est. Tunc autem felicem esse te iudica, cum poteris in publico vivere, cum te parietes tui tegent, non abscondent, quos plerumque circumdatos nobis iudicamus non ut tutius vivamus, sed ut
4 peccemus occultius. Rem dicam, ex qua mores aestimes nostros: vix quemquam invenies, qui possit

¹ non habet later MSS. ; habet pLg.

² tollit L; attollit L second hand and codd. Wirz. and Erlang.

^a i. e., Rome.

^b Lucilius was at this time imperial procurator in Sicily.

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