THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

nam circa id effugit, quo urgetur; quemadmodum aer
verbere atque ictu non laeditur, ne scinditur quidem,
sed circa id, cui cessit, refunditur; sic animus, qui ex
tenuissimo constat, deprehendi non potest nec intra
corpus effigi, sed beneficio subtilitatis suae per ipsa,
quibus premitur, erumpit. Quomodo fulmini, etiam
cum latissime percussit ac fulsit, per exiguum fora-
men est reditus, sic animo, qui adhuc tenuior est
igne, per omne corpus fuga est. Itaque de illo
querendum est, an possit immortalis esse. Hoc
quidem certum habe: si superstes est corpori,
praeteri illum nullo genere posse, propter quod non
perit, quoniam nulla immortalitas cum exceptione est
nec quicquam noxium aeterno est. Vale.

LVIII.

SENeca LVCilio SVO SALVTEM

1 Quanta perborum nobis paupertas, imo egestas sit,
numquam magis quam hodierno die intellexi. Mille
res inciderunt, cum forte de Platone loquemur, quae
nomina desiderarent nec haberent, quaedam vero,
quae2 cum habuissent, fastidio nostro perdidissent.

2 Quis autem ferat in egestate fastidium? Hunc quem

praetori Buecheler; preter p; propter VLPb; proteri
Haupt.

For this belief compare Xenophon, Mem. iv. 3. 14.

“"No one sees the bolt either on its way down or on its way
back," Seneca himself was much interested in lightning,
cf. N. Q. ii. 40. 2.

This theme was emphasized by Lucretius, i. 136 and
832, and iii. 260. Munro thinks, however, that "Lucretius
had too much instead of too little technical language for a
poet." Seneca knew Lucretius; cf. Epp. lvii. 12, xc. 11, etc.
EPISTLES LVII, LVIII.

will escape round the edges of the body which overwhelms it; just as the air cannot be damaged by lashes and blows, or even cut into, but flows back about the object to which it gives place; similarly the soul, which consists of the subllest particles, cannot be arrested or destroyed inside the body, but, by virtue of its delicate substance, it will rather escape through the very object by which it is being crushed. Just as lightning, no matter how widely it strikes and flashes, makes its return through a narrow opening, so the soul, which is still subtler than fire, has a way of escape through any part of the body. We therefore come to this question,—whether the soul can be immortal. But be sure of this: if the soul survives the body after the body is crushed, the soul can in no wise be crushed out, precisely because it does not perish; for the rule of immortality never admits of exceptions, and nothing can harm that which is everlasting. Farewell.

LVIII. ON BEING

How scant of words our language is, nay, how poverty-stricken, I have not fully understood until to-day. We happened to be speaking of Plato, and a thousand subjects came up for discussion, which needed names and yet possessed none; and there were certain others which once possessed, but have since lost, their words because we were too nice about their use. But who can endure to be nice in the midst of poverty? There is an insect, called
THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

Graeci oestron vocant pecora peragentem et totis
saltibus dissipantem, asilum nostri vocabant. Hoc
Vergilio licet credas:

Est lucum Silari iuxta 1 ilicibusque virentem
Plurimus Alburnum volitans, cui nomen asilo
Romanum est, oestrum Grai vertere vocantes,
Asper, acerba sonans, quo tota exterrita silvis
Diffugiunt armenta.

3 Puto intellegi istud verbum interisse. Ne te longe
differam, quaedam simplicia in usu erant, sicut
"cernere ferro inter se" dicebant. 2 Idem Vergilius
hoc probabit tibi:

Ingentis genitos diversis partibus orbis
Inter se colisse viros et cernere ferro.

Quod nunc decernere dicimus. Simplicis illius verbi
4 usus amissus est. Dicebant antiqui "si iusso,"
id est iussero. Hoc nolo mihi credas, sed eidem 3
Vergilio:

Cetera, qua iusso, mecum manus inferat arma.

5 Non id ago nunc hac diligentia, ut ostendam, quantum
tempus apud grammaticum perdiderim, sed ut ex
hoc intellegas, quantum apud Ennium et Accium
verborum situs occupaverit, cum apud hunc quoque,
qui cotidie excutitur, aliquo nobis subducta sint.

6 "Quid sibi," inquis, "ista praeparatio vult? Quo
spectat?" Non celabo te; cupio, si fieri potest,

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1 for lucum and iuxta Vergil MSS. give lucos and circa.
2 dicebant Mentel; dicebantur MSS.
3 eidem Haase; fidem MSS.

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· The gad-fly.
· Georgics, iii. 146 ff.
· Aeneid, xii. 708 f.
· Aeneid, xi. 467.
by the Greeks oestrus, which drives cattle wild and scatters them all over their pasturing grounds; it used to be called asilus in our language, as you may believe on the authority of Vergil:

Near Silenus' groves, and eke Alburnus' shades
Of green-clad oak-trees flits an insect, named
Asilus by the Romans; in the Greek
The word is rendered oestrus. With a rough
And strident sound it buzzes and drives wild
The terror-stricken herds throughout the woods.  

By which I infer that the word has gone out of use.
And, not to keep you waiting too long, there were certain uncompound words current, like cernere fero inter se, as will be proved again by Vergil:

Great heroes, born in various lands, had come
To settle matters mutually with the sword.

This "settling matters" we now express by decernere.
The plain word has become obsolete. The ancients used to say inso, instead of iussero, in conditional clauses. You need not take my word, but you may turn again to Vergil:

The other soldiers shall conduct the fight
With me, where I shall bid.

It is not my purpose to show, by this array of examples, how much time I have wasted on the study of language; I merely wish you to understand how many words, that were current in the works of Ennius and Accius, have become mouldy with age; while even in the case of Vergil, whose works are explored daily, some of his words have been filched away from us.

You will say, I suppose: "What is the purpose and meaning of this preamble?" I shall not keep
THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

propitiis auribus tuis "essentiam" 1 dicere; si minus, dicam et iratis. Ciceronem auctorem huius verbi habeo, puto locupletem. Si recentiorem quaeris, Fabianum, disertum et elegantem, orationis etiam ad nostrum fastidium nitidae. Quid enim fiet, mi Lucili? Quomodo dicetur ovìria res necessaria, natura continens fundamentum omnium? Rogo itaque permittas mihi hoc verbo uti. Nihilominus dabo operam, ut ius a te datum parcissime exerceam;

7 fortasse contentus ero mihi licere. Quid proderit facilitas tua, cum ecce id nullo modo Latine exprimere possim, propter quod linguæ nostrae convicium feci? Magis damnabis angustias Romanas, si scieris unam syllabam esse, quam mutare non possum. Quae sit haec, quaeris? Tò öv. Duri tibi videor ingenii; in medio positum,2 posse sic transferri, ut dicam "quod est." Sed multum interesse video; cogor verbum 8 pro vocabulo ponere. Sed si ita ncesse est, ponam "quod est." Sex modis hoc a Platone dici amicus noster, homo eruditissimus, hodierno die dicebat. Omnes tibi exponam, si ante indicavero esse aliquid genus, esse et speciem.

1 essentiam Muretus; quid sentiam MSS.
2 positum Muretus; positam MSS.

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a Cicero usually says natura. The word, according to Quintilian, was first used by a certain Sergius Flavus. It is also found in Apuleius, Macrobius, and Sidonius.

b See Ep. c. Papirius Fabianus, who lived in the times of Tiberius and Caligula, was a pupil of the Sextius of Ep. lxxi., and was (Pliny, N. H. xxxvi. 15. 24) naturae rerum peritissimus. He is praised by the elder Seneca (Cont. 2. Praef.) who, however, says of him deor rotur—splendor aderat.

c i.e., I must use other imported words to explain essentia, which is not a native Latin word, but invented as a literal translation of ovìria.

d cf. § 16.
you in the dark; I desire, if possible, to say the word 
*essentia* to you and obtain a favourable hearing. If I 
cannot do this, I shall risk it even though it put 
you out of humour. I have Cicero a as authority for 
the use of this word, and I regard him as a powerful 
authority. If you desire testimony of a later date, 
I shall cite Fabianus b careful of speech, cultivated, 
and so polished in style that he will suit even our 
nice tastes. For what can we do, my dear Lucilius?
How otherwise can we find a word for that which the 
Greeks call *obōōa*, something that is indispensable, 
something that is the natural substratum of every-
thing? I beg you accordingly to allow me to use 
this word *essentia*. I shall nevertheless take pains to 
exercise the privilege, which you have granted me, 
with as sparing a hand as possible; perhaps I shall be content with the mere right. Yet what good will 
your indulgence do me, if, lo and behold, I can in no wise express in Latin c the meaning of the word 
which gave me the opportunity to rail at the poverty of our language? And you will condemn our narrow 
Roman limits even more, when you find out that there 
is a word of one syllable which I cannot translate.
"What is this?" you ask. It is the word *ōv*. You 
think me lacking in facility; you believe that the 
word is ready to hand, that it might be translated by 
*quod est*. I notice, however, a great difference; you 
are forcing me to render a noun by a verb. But if I 
must do so, I shall render it by *quod est*. There are 
six ways d in which Plato expresses this idea, accord-
ing to a friend of ours, a man of great learning, 
who mentioned the fact to-day. And I shall ex-
plain all of them to you, if I may first point out 
that there is something called *genus* and something 
called *species*.
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Hoc ergo est genus primum et antiquissimum et, ut ita dicam, generale. Cetera genera quidem sunt,

1 quaedam later MSS.; quaedam quam p.I.VPb.
2 Hense conjectures et animantibus.

* Categories 3 b 11 and often.
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