

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

sed invictus. Quidni hoc optabile putem¹—non quod urit me ignis, sed quod non vincit? Nihil est virtute praestantius, nihil pulchrius. Et bonum est et optabile, quicquid ex huius geritur imperio. VALE.

LXVIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Consilio tuo accedo; absconde te in otio. Sed et ipsum otium absconde. Hoc te facturum Stoicorum etiam si non praecepto, at exemplo licet scias. Sed ex praecepto quoque facies²; et tibi et cui³ voles adprobabis. Nec ad omnem rem publicam mittimus nec semper nec sine ullo fine. Praeterea, cum sapienti rem publicam ipso dignam dedimus, id est mundum, non est extra rem publicam, etiam si recesserit, immo fortasse relicto uno angulo in maiora atque ampliora transit et caelo inpositus intellegit, cum sellam aut tribunal ascenderet, quam humili loco sederit. Depone hoc apud te, numquam plus agere sapientem, quam quom⁴ in conspectum⁵ eius divina atque humana venerunt.
- 3 Nunc ad illud revertor, quod suadere tibi coeperam,

¹ *optabile putem* Hense; *obtabile autem p*; *optabile sit* VPb.

² *facies* Muretus; *facias* MSS.

³ *cui* Buecheler; *cum* MSS.

⁴ *quam quom* Hense; *quam* or *quam cum* MSS.

⁵ *conspectum* later MSS.; *conspectu* pVPb.

^a Stoicism preached "world-citizenship," and this was interpreted in various ways at different periods. The Greek teachers saw in it an opportunity for wider culture; the Romans, a more practical mission. For further discussion

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to the stake, I shall go unbeaten. Why should I not regard this as desirable—not because the fire burns me, but because it does not overcome me? Nothing is more excellent or more beautiful than virtue; whatever we do in obedience to her orders is both good and desirable. Farewell.

LXVIII. ON WISDOM AND RETIREMENT

I fall in with your plan; retire and conceal yourself in repose. But at the same time conceal your retirement also. In doing this, you may be sure that you will be following the example of the Stoics, if not their precept. But you will be acting according to their precept also; you will thus satisfy both yourself and any Stoic you please. We Stoics^a do not urge men to take up public life in every case, or at all times, or without any qualification. Besides, when we have assigned to our wise man that field of public life which is worthy of him,—in other words, the universe,—he is then not apart from public life, even if he withdraws; nay, perhaps he has abandoned only one little corner thereof and has passed over into greater and wider regions; and when he has been set in the heavens, he understands how lowly was the place in which he sat when he mounted the curule chair or the judgment-seat. Lay this to heart,—that the wise man is never more active in affairs than when things divine as well as things human have come within his ken.

I now return to the advice which I set out to give of this topic in Seneca see *Ep.* lxxiii. 1 ff. Seneca's arguments are coloured by the facts of his life at this time.

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ut otium tuum ignotum sit. Non est quod inscribas tibi philosophiam aut quietem.¹ Aliud proposito tuo nomen inpone; valetudinem et inbecillitatem voca et desidiam. Gloriari otio iners ambitio est.

4 Animalia quaedam ne inveniri possint, vestigia sua circa ipsum cubile confundunt; idem tibi faciendum est. Alioqui non deerunt, qui semper sequantur. Multi aperta transeunt, condita et abstrusa rimantur; furem signata sollicitant. Vile videtur, quicquid patet, aperta effractarius praeterit. Hos mores habet populus, hos imperitissimus quisque: in secreta intrumpere cupit. Optimum itaque est non iactare

5 otium suum. Iactandi autem genus est nimis latere et a conspectu hominum secedere. Ille Tarentum se abdidit, ille Neapoli inclusus est, ille multis annis non transit domus suae limen. Convocat turbam,

6 quisquis otio suo aliquam fabulam inposuit. Cum secesseris, non est hoc agendum, ut de te homines loquantur, sed ut ipse tecum loquaris. Quid autem loqueris? Quod homines de aliis libentissime faciunt, de te apud te male existima; adsuesces et dicere verum et audire. Id autem maxime tracta, quod in

7 te esse infirmissimum senties. Nota habet sui quisque corporis vitia. Itaque alius vomitu levat stomachum, alius frequenti² cibo fulcit, alius inter-

¹ *aut quietem* O. Rossbach; *aut qui etiam* p; *atqui etiam* VPb.

² *frequenti* later MSS.; *a frequenti* pVPb.

^a Cf. Ep. lv. §§ 3 ff. for the retirement of Vatia: *ille latere sciebat, non vivere.*

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you,—that you keep your retirement in the background. There is no need to fasten a placard upon yourself with the words: “Philosopher and Quietist.” Give your purpose some other name; call it ill-health and bodily weakness, or mere laziness. To boast of our retirement is but idle self-seeking. Certain animals hide themselves from discovery by confusing the marks of their foot-prints in the neighbourhood of their lairs. You should do the same. Otherwise, there will always be someone dogging your footsteps. Many men pass by that which is visible, and peer after things hidden and concealed; a locked room invites the thief. Things which lie in the open appear cheap; the house-breaker passes by that which is exposed to view. This is the way of the world, and the way of all ignorant men: they crave to burst in upon hidden things. It is therefore best not to vaunt one’s retirement. It is, however, a sort of vaunting to make too much of one’s concealment and of one’s withdrawal from the sight of men. So-and-so^a has gone into his retreat at Tarentum; that other man has shut himself up at Naples; this third person for many years has not crossed the threshold of his own house. To advertise one’s retirement is to collect a crowd. When you withdraw from the world, your business is to talk with yourself, not to have men talk about you. But what shall you talk about? Do just what people are fond of doing when they talk about their neighbours,—speak ill of yourself when by yourself; then you will become accustomed both to speak and to hear the truth. Above all, however, ponder that which you come to feel is your greatest weakness. Each man knows best the defects of his own body. And so one relieves his stomach by vomiting, another props it up by frequent eating,

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posito ieiunio corpus exhaurit et purgat. Ii, quorum pedes dolor repetit, aut vino aut balineo abstinent. In cetera negligentibus huic, a quo saepe infestantur, occurrunt; sic in animo nostro sunt quaedam quasi causariae partes, quibus adhibenda curatio est.

- 8 Quid in otio facio? Ulcus meum curo. Si ostenderem tibi pedem turgidum, lividam manum aut contracti cruris aridos nervos, permetteres mihi uno loco iacere et fovere morbum meum. Maius malum est hoc, quod non possum tibi ostendere; in pectore ipso collectio et vomica est. Nolo nola laudes, nolo dicas: "o magnum virum! contempsit omnia et damnatis humanae vitae furoribus fugit."
- 9 Nihil damnavi nisi me. Non est quod proficiendi causa venire ad me velis. Erras, qui hinc aliquid auxilii speras; non medicus, sed aeger hic habitat. Malo, cum discesseris, dicas: "ego istum beatum hominem putabam et eruditum. Erexeram aures; destitutus sum. Nihil vidi, nihil audii,¹ quod concupiscerem, ad quod reverterer." Si hoc sentis, si hoc loqueris, aliquid profectum est. Malo ignoscas otio meo quam invidias.
- 10 "Otium," inquis, "Seneca, commendas mihi?"

¹ *audii* Rossbach; *audivi* VP^b; *laudi* p.

^a *Causarii* (Livy, vi. 6) were soldiers on sick leave.

^b For an argument of the same sort see Horace, *Epist.* i. 1. 93-104:

Si curatus inaequali tonsore capillos
Occurri, rides . . .
. . . quid, mea cum pugnat sententia secum?

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another drains and purges his body by periodic fasting. Those whose feet are visited by pain abstain either from wine or from the bath. In general, men who are careless in other respects go out of their way to relieve the disease which frequently afflicts them. So it is with our souls; there are in them certain parts which are, so to speak, on the sick-list,^a and to these parts the cure must be applied.

What, then, am I myself doing with my leisure? I am trying to cure my own sores. If I were to show you a swollen foot, or an inflamed hand, or some shrivelled sinews in a withered leg, you would permit me to lie quiet in one place and to apply lotions to the diseased member.^b But my trouble is greater than any of these, and I cannot show it to you. The abscess, or ulcer, is deep within my breast. Pray, pray, do not commend me, do not say: "What a great man! He has learned to despise all things; condemning the madnesses of man's life, he has made his escape!" I have condemned nothing except myself. There is no reason why you should desire to come to me for the sake of making progress. You are mistaken if you think that you will get any assistance from this quarter; it is not a physician that dwells here, but a sick man. I would rather have you say, on leaving my presence: "I used to think him a happy man and a learned one, and I had pricked up my ears to hear him; but I have been defrauded. I have seen nothing, heard nothing which I craved and which I came back to hear." If you feel thus, and speak thus, some progress has been made. I prefer you to pardon rather than envy my retirement.

Then you say: "Is it retirement, Seneca, that you are recommending to me? You will soon be

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- Ad Epicureas voces delaberis." Otium tibi com-
 mendo, in quo maiora agas et pulchriora quam quae
 reliquisti; pulsare superbas potentiorum fores,
 digerere in litteram senes orbos, plurimum in foro
 posse invidiosa potentia ac brevis est et, si verum
 11 aestimes, sordida. Ille me gratia forensi longe
 antecedit, ille stipendiis militaribus et quaesita per
 hoc dignitate, ille clientium turba; est tanti ab
 omnibus vinci, dum a me fortuna vincatur, cui in
 turba par esse non possum; ¹ plus habet gratiae.
 12 Utinam quidem hoc propositum sequi olim fuisset
 animus tibi! Utinam de vita beata non in conspectu
 mortis ageremus! Sed nunc quoque non moremur.²
 Multa enim, quae supervacua esse et inimica credituri
 13 fuimus rationi, nunc experientiae credimus. Quod
 facere solent, qui serius exierunt³ et volunt tempus
 celeritate reparare, calcar addamus; haec aetas
 optime facit ad haec studia; iam despumavit.⁴ Iam
 vitia primo fervore adulescentiae indomita lassavit,
 non multum superest ut extinguat.
 14 "Et quando," inquis, "tibi proderit istud, quod in
 exitu discis,⁵ aut in quam rem?" In hanc, ut exeam
 melior. Non est tamen quod existimes ullam aetatem

¹ Haase's punctuation. Hense regards *cui in turba . . . gratiae* as an interpolation.

² *moremur* Erasmus; *moramur* MSS.

³ *exierunt* later MSS.; *exerunt* pVPb.

⁴ *despumavit* cod. Vat. reg.; *disputavit* pVPb.

⁵ *discis* later MSS.; *dicis* pVPb.

^a This is a reference to the saying of Epicurus, λαθὲ βιώσας, "live in retirement."

^b Cf. Horace, *Sat.* ii. 5. 23 ff.: *captes astutus ubique testa-
 menta senum and vivet uter locuples sine gnatis . . . illius esto
 defensor.* The *captator* was a well-known figure at Rome; cf. also Pliny's notorious enemy Regulus, and Juvenal's many words of scorn for those who practised the art.

^c *i. e.*, Fortune's support comes from crowds.

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