

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

18 becillum est quod nocet quam cui nocetur, optima  
vi noxia carent. Expectant nos, si<sup>1</sup> ex hac aliquando  
faece in illud evadimus sublime et excelsum, tran-  
quillitas animi et expulsis erroribus absoluta libertas.  
Quaeris quae sit ista? Non homines timere, non  
deos; nec turpia velle nec nimia; in se ipsum  
habere maximam potestatem. Inaestimabile bonum  
est suum fieri. VALE.

### LXXVI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Inimicitias mihi denuntias, si quicquam ex iis,  
quae cotidie facio, ignoraveris. Vide, quam sim-  
pliciter tecum vivam: hoc quoque tibi committam.  
Philosophum audio et quidem quintum iam diem  
habeo, ex quo in scholam eo et ab octava disputantem  
audio. "Bona," inquis, "aetate." Quidni bona?  
2 Quid autem stultius est quam, quia diu non didiceris,  
non discere? "Quid ergo? Idem faciam, quod  
trossuli et iuvenes?" Bene mecum agitur, si hoc  
unum senectutem meam dedecet.<sup>2</sup> Omnis aetatis  
homines haec schola admittit. "In hoc senescamus,  
ut iuvenes sequamur?" In theatrum senex ibo et

<sup>1</sup> *si* added by Pincianus, on the authority of "ancient MSS."

<sup>2</sup> *dedecet* Pincianus; *deceat* VPb.

<sup>a</sup> Therefore death has no power to harm, since man is not harmed thereby, and the gods, who are utterly good, cannot be the source of evil.

<sup>b</sup> A mock-heroic nickname for the knights, derived from the town of Trossulum in Etruria, which they captured by a sensational charge. See Persius, i. 82, and Seneca, *Ep.* lxxxvii. 9.

## EPISTLES LXXV., LXXVI.

no greater power than that which receives harm, and things which are utterly good have no power at all to harm.<sup>a</sup> There await us, if ever we escape from these low dregs to that sublime and lofty height, peace of mind and, when all error has been driven out, perfect liberty. You ask what this freedom is? It means not fearing either men or gods; it means not craving wickedness or excess; it means possessing supreme power over oneself. And it is a priceless good to be master of oneself. Farewell.

### LXXVI. ON LEARNING WISDOM IN OLD AGE

You have been threatening me with your enmity, if I do not keep you informed about all my daily actions. But see, now, upon what frank terms you and I live: for I shall confide even the following fact to your ears. I have been hearing the lectures of a philosopher; four days have already passed since I have been attending his school and listening to the harangue, which begins at two o'clock. "A fine time of life for that!" you say. Yes, fine indeed! Now what is more foolish than refusing to learn, simply because one has not been learning for a long time? "What do you mean? Must I follow the fashion set by the fops<sup>b</sup> and youngsters?" But I am pretty well off if this is the only thing that discredits my declining years. Men of all ages are admitted to this class-room. You retort: "Do we grow old merely in order to tag after the youngsters?" But if I, an old man, go to the theatre, and am carried to

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

in circum deferar et nullum par sine me depugnabit ad philosophum ire erubescam ?

- 3 Tamdiu discendum est, quamdiu nescias ; si proverbio credimus, quamdiu vivas. Nec ulli hoc rei magis convenit quam huic : tamdiu discendum est, quemadmodum vivas, quamdiu vivas. Ego tamen illic aliquid et doceo. Quaeris, quid doceam ? Etiam
- 4 seni esse discendum. Pudet autem me generis humani, quotiens scholam intravi. Praeter ipsum theatrum Neapolitanorum, ut scis, transeundum est Metronactis petenti<sup>1</sup> domum. Illud quidem fartum est et ingenti studio, quis sit pythaulus bonus, iudicatur ; habet tubicen quoque Graecus et praeco concursum. At in illo loco, in quo vir bonus quaeritur, in quo vir bonus discitur, paucissimi sedent, et hi plerisque videntur nihil boni negotii habere quod agant ; inepti et inertes vocantur. Mihi contingat iste derisus ; aequo animo audienda sunt imperitorum convicia et ad honesta vadenti contemendus est ipse contemptus.
- 5 Perge, Lucili, et propera, tibi ne et ipsi<sup>2</sup> accidat, quod mihi, ut senex discas ; immo ideo magis propera, quoniam diu<sup>3</sup> non adgressus es, quod perdiscere vix senex possis. “ Quantum,” inquis, “ proficiam ? ”

<sup>1</sup> *petenti* Erasmus ; *petentes* VPb ; *petentibus* later MSS.

<sup>2</sup> *tibi ne et ipsi* Hense ; *tibi nec (ne Vb) tibi* VPb ; *ne tibi* later MSS.

<sup>3</sup> *diu* Buecheler ; *id* VPb.

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\* See also *Ep.* xciii.

## EPISTLE LXXVI.

the races, and allow no duel in the arena to be fought to a finish without my presence, shall I blush to attend a philosopher's lecture?

You should keep learning as long as you are ignorant,—even to the end of your life, if there is anything in the proverb. And the proverb suits the present case as well as any: “As long as you live, keep learning how to live.” For all that, there is also something which I can teach in that school. You ask, do you, what I can teach? That even an old man should keep learning. But I am ashamed of mankind, as often as I enter the lecture-hall. On my way to the house of Metronax<sup>a</sup> I am compelled to go, as you know, right past the Neapolitan Theatre. The building is jammed; men are deciding, with tremendous zeal, who is entitled to be called a good flute-player; even the Greek piper and the herald draw their crowds. But in the other place, where the question discussed is: “What is a good man?” and the lesson which we learn is. “How to be a good man,” very few are in attendance, and the majority think that even these few are engaged in no good business; they have the name of being empty-headed idlers. I hope I may be blessed with that kind of mockery; for one should listen in an unruffled spirit to the railings of the ignorant; when one is marching toward the goal of honour, one should scorn scorn itself.

Proceed, then, Lucilius, and hasten, lest you yourself be compelled to learn in your old age, as is the case with me. Nay, you must hasten all the more, because for a long time you have not approached the subject, which is one that you can scarcely learn thoroughly when you are old. “How much progress shall I make?” you ask. Just as much as you try

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

- 6 Quantum temptaveris. Quid expectas? Nulli sapere casu obtigit. Pecunia veniet ultro, honor offeretur, gratia ac dignitas fortasse ingerentur tibi; virtus in te non incidet. Ne levi quidem opera aut parvo labore cognoscitur; sed est tanti laborare omnia bona semel occupaturo. Unum est enim bonum, quod honestum; in illis nihil invenies veri, nihil certi,
- 7 quaecumque famae placent. Quare autem unum sit bonum, quod honestum, dicam, quoniam parum me exsecutum priore epistula iudicas magisque hanc rem tibi laudatam quam probatam putas, et in artum, quae dicta sunt, contraham.
- 8 Omnia suo bono constant. Vitem fertilitas commendat et sapor vini, velocitas cervum. Quam fortia dorso iumenta sint quaeris, quorum hic unus est usus, sarcinam ferre. In cane sagacitas prima est, si investigare debet feras, cursus, si consequi, audacia, si mordere et invadere. Id in quoque optimum
- 9 esse debet, cui nascitur, quo censetur. In homine optimum quid est? Ratio; hac antecedit animalia, deos sequitur. Ratio ergo perfecta proprium bonum est, cetera illi cum animalibus satisque communia sunt. Valet; et leones. Formosus est; et pavones.

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<sup>a</sup> *Ep.* lxxiv.

## EPISTLE LXXVI.

to make. Why do you wait? Wisdom comes haphazard to no man. Money will come of its own accord; titles will be given to you; influence and authority will perhaps be thrust upon you; but virtue will not fall upon you by chance. Neither is knowledge thereof to be won by light effort or small toil; but toiling is worth while when one is about to win all goods at a single stroke. For there is but a single good,—namely, that which is honourable; in all those other things of which the general opinion approves, you will find no truth or certainty. Why it is, however, that there is but one good, namely, that which is honourable, I shall now tell you, inasmuch as you judge that in my earlier letter<sup>a</sup> I did not carry the discussion far enough, and think that this theory was commended to you rather than proved. I shall also compress the remarks of other authors into narrow compass.

Everything is estimated by the standard of its own good. The vine is valued for its productiveness and the flavour of its wine, the stag for his speed. We ask, with regard to beasts of burden, how sturdy of back they are; for their only use is to bear burdens. If a dog is to find the trail of a wild beast, keenness of scent is of first importance; if to catch his quarry, swiftness of foot; if to attack and harry it, courage. In each thing that quality should be best for which the thing is brought into being and by which it is judged. And what quality is best in man? It is reason; by virtue of reason he surpasses the animals, and is surpassed only by the gods. Perfect reason is therefore the good peculiar to man; all other qualities he shares in some degree with animals and plants. Man is strong; so is the lion. Man is comely; so is the peacock. Man is

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

Velox est; et equi. Non dico, in his omnibus vincitur. Non quaero, quid in se maximum habeat, sed quid suum. Corpus habet; et arbores. Habet impetum ac motum voluntarium; et bestiae et vermes. Habet vocem; sed quanto clariorem canes, acutiorem aquilae, graviorem tauri, dulciorem mobilioremque  
10 luscinii? Quid in homine proprium? Ratio. Haec recta et consummata felicitatem hominis implevit.<sup>1</sup> Ergo si omnis res, cum bonum suum perfecit, laudabilis est et ad finem naturae suae pervenit; homini autem suum bonum ratio est; si hanc perfecit, laudabilis est et finem naturae suae tetigit. Haec ratio perfecta virtus vocatur eademque honestum est.

11 Id itaque unum bonum est in homine, quod unum hominis est. Nunc enim non quaerimus, quid sit bonum, sed quid sit hominis bonum. Si nullum aliud est hominis quam ratio, haec erit unum eius bonum, sed pensandum cum omnibus. Si sit aliquis malus, puto improbabitur; si bonus, puto probabitur. Id ergo in homine primum solumque est, quo et probatur  
12 et improbatur. Non dubitas, an hoc sit bonum; dubitas an solum bonum sit. Si quis omnia alia habeat, valetudinem, divitias, imagines multas, frequens atrium, sed malus ex confesso sit, improbabis

<sup>1</sup> The words *quid in homine . . . implevit* are suspected by Hilgenfeld.

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<sup>a</sup> Literally "many masks" of his ancestors. These were placed in the *atrium*.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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