

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

viae multae breves, faciles. Agamus deo gratias, quod nemo in vita teneri potest. Calcare ipsas
11 necessitates licet. "Epicurus," inquis, "dixit. Quid tibi cum alieno?" Quod verum est, meum est. Perseverabo Epicurum tibi ingerere, ut isti, qui in verba iurant, nec quid dicatur aestimant, sed a quo, sciant, quae optima sunt, esse communia.
VALE.

XIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Multum tibi esse animi scio. Nam etiam antequam instrueres te praeceptis salutaribus et dura vincentibus, satis adversus fortunam placebas tibi, et multo magis, postquam cum illa manum conseruisti viresque expertus es tuas, quae numquam certam dare fiduciam sui possunt, nisi cum multae difficultates hinc et illinc apparuerunt, aliquando vero et propius accesserunt; sic verus ille animus et in alienum non venturus arbitrium probatur.
- 2 Haec eius obrussa est: non potest athleta magnos spiritus ad certamen adferre, qui numquam suggillatus est; ille, qui sanguinem suum vidit, cuius dentes crepuere sub pugno, ille, qui subplantatus
- 72

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many short and simple paths to freedom; and let us thank God that no man can be kept in life. We may spurn the very constraints that hold us. "Epicurus," you reply, "uttered these words; what are you doing with another's property?" Any truth, I maintain, is my own property. And I shall continue to heap quotations from Epicurus upon you, so that all persons who swear by the words of another, and put a value upon the speaker and not upon the thing spoken, may understand that the best ideas are common property. Farewell.

XIII. ON GROUNDLESS FEARS

I know that you have plenty of spirit; for even before you began to equip yourself with maxims which were wholesome and potent to overcome obstacles, you were taking pride in your contest with Fortune; and this is all the more true, now that you have grappled with Fortune and tested your powers. For our powers can never inspire in us implicit faith in ourselves except when many difficulties have confronted us on this side and on that, and have occasionally even come to close quarters with us. It is only in this way that the true spirit can be tested,—the spirit that will never consent to come under the jurisdiction of things external to ourselves. This is the touchstone of such a spirit; no prize-fighter can go with high spirits into the strife if he has never been beaten black and blue; the only contestant who can confidently enter the lists is the man who has seen his own blood, who has felt his teeth rattle beneath his opponent's fist, who has

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adversarium toto tulit corpore nec proiecit animum
proiectus, qui quotiens cecidit, contumacior resurrexit,
3 cum magna spe descendit ad pugnam. Ergo, ut
similitudinem istam prosequar, saepe iam fortuna
supra te fuit, nec tamen tradidisti te, sed subsiluisti
et acrior constitisti. Multum enim adicit sibi virtus
laccessita; tamen si tibi videtur, accipe a me auxilia,
quibus munire te possis.

4 Plura sunt, Lucili, quae nos terrent, quam quae
premunt, et saepius opinione quam re laboramus.
Non loquor tecum Stoica lingua, sed hac submissiore.
Nos enim dicimus omnia ista, quae gemitus mugitus-
que exprimunt, levia esse et contemnenda; omitta-
mus haec magna verba, sed, di boni, vera. Illud
tibi praecipio, ne sis miser ante tempus, cum illa,
quae velut imminetia expavisti, fortasse numquam
5 ventura sint, certe non venerint. Quaedam ergo nos
magis torquent quam debent; quaedam ante tor-
quent quam debent; quaedam torquent, cum omnino
non debeant. Aut augemus dolorem aut fingimus
aut praecipimus.

Primum illud, quia res in controversia est et litem
contestatam habemus, in praesentia differatur. Quod
ego leve dixero, tu gravissimum esse contendes; scio
alios inter flagella ridere, alios gemere sub colapho.

“ Seneca dismisses the topic of “exaggerated ills,” be-
cause judgments will differ regarding present troubles; the
Stoics, for example, would not admit that torture was an
evil at all. He then passes on to the topic of “imaginary ills,”
§§ 6-7, and afterwards to “anticipated ills,” §§ 8-11. From
§ 12 on, he deals with both imaginary and anticipated ills.

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been tripped and felt the full force of his adversary's charge, who has been downed in body but not in spirit, one who, as often as he falls, rises again with greater defiance than ever. So then, to keep up my figure, Fortune has often in the past got the upper hand of you, and yet you have not surrendered, but have leaped up and stood your ground still more eagerly. For manliness gains much strength by being challenged; nevertheless, if you approve, allow me to offer some additional safeguards by which you may fortify yourself.

There are more things, Lucilius, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. I am not speaking with you in the Stoic strain but in my milder style. For it is our Stoic fashion to speak of all those things, which provoke cries and groans, as unimportant and beneath notice; but you and I must drop such great-sounding words, although, Heaven knows, they are true enough. What I advise you to do is, not to be unhappy before the crisis comes; since it may be that the dangers before which you paled as if they were threatening you, will never come upon you; they certainly have not yet come. Accordingly, some things torment us more than they ought; some torment us before they ought; and some torment us when they ought not to torment us at all. We are in the habit of exaggerating, or imagining, or anticipating, sorrow.

The first of these three faults^a may be postponed for the present, because the subject is under discussion and the case is still in court, so to speak. That which I should call trifling, you will maintain to be most serious; for of course I know that some men laugh while being flogged, and that others wince at

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Postea videbimus, utrum ista suis viribus valeant an inbecillitate nostra.

6 Illud praesta mihi, ut, quotiens circumsteterint, qui tibi te miserum esse persuadeant, non quid audias, sed quid sentias, cogites et cum patientia tua deliberes ac te ipse interrogas, qui tua optime nosti: Quid est, quare isti me conplorent? Quid est, quod trepident, quod contagium quoque mei timeant, quasi transilire calamitas possit? Est aliquid istic mali, an res ista magis infamis est quam mala? Ipse te interroga: Numquid sine causa crucior et maereo et
7 quod non est malum, facio? “Quomodo,” inquis, “intellegam, vana sint an vera, quibus angor?” Accipe huius rei regulam: aut praesentibus torquemur aut futuris aut utrisque. De praesentibus facile iudicium est; si corpus tuum liberum et ¹ sanum est, nec ullus ex iniuria dolor est. Videbimus quid
8 futurum sit. Hodie nihil negotii habet. “At enim futurum est.” Primum dispice, an certa argumenta sint venturi mali. Plerumque enim suspicionibus laboramus, et inludit nobis illa, quae conficere bellum solet, fama, multo autem magis singulos conficit. Ita est, mi Lucili; cito accedimus opinioni. Non

¹ *est* Madvig; et MSS.

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a box on the ear. We shall consider later whether these evils derive their power from their own strength, or from our own weakness.

Do me the favour, when men surround you and try to talk you into believing that you are unhappy, to consider not what you hear but what you yourself feel, and to take counsel with your feelings and question yourself independently, because you know your own affairs better than anyone else does. Ask: "Is there any reason why these persons should con-
dole with me? Why should they be worried or even fear some infection from me, as if troubles could be transmitted? Is there any evil involved, or is it a matter merely of ill report, rather than an evil?" Put the question voluntarily to yourself: "Am I tormented without sufficient reason, am I morose, and do I convert what is not an evil into what is an evil?" You may retort with the question: "How am I to know whether my sufferings are real or imaginary?" Here is the rule for such matters: We are tormented either by things present, or by things to come, or by both. As to things present, the decision is easy. Suppose that your person enjoys freedom and health, and that you do not suffer from any external injury. As to what may happen to it in the future, we shall see later on. To-day there is nothing wrong with it. "But," you say, "something will happen to it." First of all, consider whether your proofs of future trouble are sure. For it is more often the case that we are troubled by our apprehensions, and that we are mocked by that mocker, rumour, which is wont to settle wars, but much more often settles individuals. Yes, my dear Lucilius; we agree too quickly with what people say. We do not put to the test those

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- coarguimus illa, quae nos in metum adducunt, nec excutimus, sed trepidamus et sic vertimus terga, quemadmodum illi, quos pulvis motus fuga pecorum exiit castris, aut quos aliqua fabula sine auctore
- 9 sparsa conterruit. Nescio quomodo magis vana perturbant. Vera enim modum suum habent; quicquid ex incerto venit, coniecturae et paventis animi licentiae traditur. Nulli itaque tam perniciosi, tam inrevocabiles quam lymphatici metus sunt. Ceteri enim sine ratione, hi sine mente sunt.
- 10 Inquiramus itaque in rem diligenter. Verisimile est aliquid futurum mali; non statim verum est. Quam multa non expectata venerunt! Quam multa expectata nusquam comparuerunt! Etiam si futurum est, quid iuvat dolori suo occurrere? Satis cito dolebis, cum venerit; interim tibi meliora promitte.
- 11 Quid facies lucri? Tempus. Multa intervenient, quibus vicinum periculum vel prope admotum aut subsistat aut desinat aut in alienum caput transeat. Incendium ad fugam patuit; quosdam molliter ruina deposuit; aliquando gladius ab ipsa cervice revocatus est; aliquis carnifici suo superstes fuit. Habet etiam mala fortuna levitatem. Fortasse erit, fortasse non erit; interim non est. Meliora propone.
- 12 Nonnumquam nullis apparentibus signis, quae mali aliquid praenuntient, animus sibi falsas imagines fingit; aut verbum aliquod dubiae significationis

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