

# THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

## XXXI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Agnosco Lucilium meum; incipit, quem promiserat, exhibere. Sequere illum impetum animi, quo ad optima quaeque calcatis popularibus bonis ibas. Non desidero maiorem melioremque te fieri quam moliebaris. Fundamenta tua multum loci occupaverunt; tantum effice, quantum conatus es, et illa quae
- 2 tecum in animo tulisti, tracta. Ad summam sapiens eris, si cluseris aures, quibus ceram parum est obdere; firmiore spissamento opus est quam in sociis usum Vlixem ferunt. Illa vox, quae timebatur, erat blanda, non tamen publica, at haec, quae timenda est, non ex uno scopulo, sed ex omni terrarum parte circumsonat. Praetervehere itaque non unum locum insidiosa voluptate suspectum, sed omnes urbes. Surdum te amantissimis tuis praesta; bono animo mala precantur. Et si esse vis felix, deos ora, ne quid tibi
- 3 ex his, quae optantur, eveniat. Non sunt ista bona, quae in te isti volunt congeri; unum bonum est, quod beatae vitae causa et firmamentum est, sibi fidere. Hoc autem contingere non potest, nisi contemptus est labor et in eorum numero habitus, quae neque bona sunt neque mala. Fieri enim non potest, ut una ulla res modo mala sit, modo bona, modo
- 4 levis et perferenda, modo expavescenda. Labor bonum non est. Quid ergo est bonum? Laboris

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<sup>a</sup> The argument is that work is not, in itself, a good; if it were, it would not be praiseworthy at one time and to be deprecated at another. It belongs, therefore, to the class of thing which the Stoics called *ἀδιάφορα*, *indifferentia*, *res mediae*; cf. Cicero, *de Fin.* iii. 16.

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### XXXI. ON SIREN SONGS

Now I recognize my Lucilius! He is beginning to reveal the character of which he gave promise. Follow up the impulse which prompted you to make for all that is best, treading under your feet that which is approved by the crowd. I would not have you greater or better than you planned; for in your case the mere foundations have covered a large extent of ground; only finish all that you have laid out, and take in hand the plans which you have had in mind. In short, you will be a wise man, if you stop up your ears; nor is it enough to close them with wax; you need a denser stopple than that which they say Ulysses used for his comrades. The song which he feared was alluring, but came not from every side; the song, however, which you have to fear, echoes round you not from a single headland, but from every quarter of the world. Sail, therefore, not past one region which you mistrust because of its treacherous delights, but past every city. Be deaf to those who love you most of all; they pray for bad things with good intentions. And, if you would be happy, entreat the gods that none of their fond desires for you may be brought to pass. What they wish to have heaped upon you are not really good things; there is only one good, the cause and the support of a happy life,—trust in oneself. But this cannot be attained, unless one has learned to despise toil and to reckon it among the things which are neither good nor bad. For it is not possible that a single thing should be bad at one time and good at another, at times light and to be endured, and at times a cause of dread. Work is not a good.<sup>a</sup> Then what is

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contemptio. Itaque in vanum operosos culpaverim. Rursus ad honesta nitentes, quanto magis incubuerint minusque sibi vinci ac strigare permiserint, adprobabo<sup>1</sup> et clamabo: "Tanto melior, surge et inspira et clivum istum uno, si potes, spiritu exsupera."

5 Generosos animos labor nutrit. Non est ergo, quod ex illo voto vetere<sup>2</sup> parentum tuorum eligas, quid contingere tibi velis, quid optes; et in totum iam per maxima acto viro turpe est etiamnunc deos fatigare. Quid votis opus est? Fac te ipse felicem. Facies autem, si intellexeris bona esse, quibus admixta virtus est, turpia, quibus malitia coniuncta est. Quemadmodum sine mixtura lucis nihil splendidum est, nihil atrum, nisi quod tenebras habet aut aliquid in se traxit obscuri, quemadmodum sine adiutorio ignis nihil calidum est, nihil sine aëre frigidum; ita honesta et turpia virtutis ac malitiae societas efficit.

6 Quid ergo est bonum? Rerum scientia. Quid malum est? Rerum imperitia. Ille prudens atque artifex pro tempore quaeque repellit aut eliget. Sed nec quae repellit timet, nec miratur quae elegit, si modo magnus illi et invictus animus est. Summitti te ac deprimi veto. Laborem si non recuses, parum

<sup>1</sup> *adprobabo* Haase; *adprobator* p; *admirabor* LPb.

<sup>2</sup> *ex illo voto vetere* Hense; *ex illo vetere* pLPb.

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<sup>4</sup> Literally, "come to the end of his furrow."

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a good? I say, the scorning of work. That is why I should rebuke men who toil to no purpose. But when, on the other hand, a man is struggling towards honourable things, in proportion as he applies himself more and more, and allows himself less and less to be beaten or to halt,<sup>a</sup> I shall recommend his conduct and shout my encouragement, saying: "By so much you are better! Rise, draw a fresh breath, and surmount that hill, if possible, at a single spurt!"

Work is the sustenance of noble minds. There is, then, no reason why, in accordance with that old vow of your parents, you should pick and choose what fortune you wish should fall to your lot, or what you should pray for; besides, it is base for a man who has already travelled the whole round of highest honours to be still importuning the gods. What need is there of vows? Make yourself happy through your own efforts; you can do this, if once you comprehend that whatever is blended with virtue is good, and that whatever is joined to vice is bad. Just as nothing gleams if it has no light blended with it, and nothing is black unless it contains darkness or draws to itself something of dimness, and as nothing is hot without the aid of fire, and nothing cold without air; so it is the association of virtue and vice that makes things honourable or base.

What then is good? The knowledge of things. What is evil? The lack of knowledge of things. Your wise man, who is also a craftsman, will reject or choose in each case as it suits the occasion; but he does not fear that which he rejects, nor does he admire that which he chooses, if only he has a stout and unconquerable soul. I forbid you to be cast down or depressed. It is not enough if you do not

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7 est; posce. "Quid ergo?" inquis, "labor frivolus et supervacuus et<sup>1</sup> quem humiles causae evocaverunt,<sup>2</sup> non est malus?" Non magis quam ille, qui pulchris rebus inpenditur, quoniam animi est ipsa tolerantia, quae se ad dura et aspera hortatur ac dicit: "Quid  
8 cessas? Non est viri timere sudorem." Huc et illud accedat, ut perfecta virtus sit, aequalitas ac tenor vitae per omnia consonans sibi, quod non potest esse, nisi rerum scientia contingit et ars, per quam humana ac divina noscantur. Hoc est summum bonum. Quod si occupas, incipis deorum socius esse, non supplex.

9 "Quomodo," inquis, "isto pervenitur?" Non per Poeninum Graiumve montem nec per deserta Candaviae, nec Syrtes tibi nec Scylla aut Charybdis adeundae sunt, quae tamen omnia transisti procuratiunculae pretio; tutum iter est, iucundum est, ad quod natura te instruxit. Dedit tibi illa, quae si  
10 non deserueris, par deo surges. Parem autem te deo pecunia non faciet; deus nihil habet. Praetexta non faciet; deus nudus est. Fama non faciet nec ostentatio tui et in populos nominis dimissa notitia; nemo novit deum, multi de illo male existimant, et inpune. Non turba servorum lecticam tuam per itinera urbana

<sup>1</sup> et Hense; est MSS.

<sup>2</sup> evocaverunt Haase; vocaverunt MSS.

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<sup>a</sup> *i.e.*, philosophy.

<sup>b</sup> The Great St. Bernard and the Little St. Bernard routes over the Alps.

<sup>c</sup> A mountain in Illyria, over which the *Via Egnatia* ran.

<sup>d</sup> Dangerous quick-sands along the north coast of Africa.

<sup>e</sup> The *toga praetexta*, badge of the official position of

Lucilius.

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shrink from work ; ask for it. " But," you say, " is not trifling and superfluous work, and work that has been inspired by ignoble causes, a bad sort of work ? " No ; no more than that which is expended upon noble endeavours, since the very quality that endures toil and rouses itself to hard and uphill effort, is of the spirit, which says : " Why do you grow slack ? It is not the part of a man to fear sweat." And besides this, in order that virtue may be perfect, there should be an even temperament and a scheme of life that is consistent with itself throughout ; and this result cannot be attained without knowledge of things, and without the art<sup>a</sup> which enables us to understand things human and things divine. That is the greatest good. If you seize this good, you begin to be the associate of the gods, and not their suppliant.

" But how," you ask, " does one attain that goal ? " You do not need to cross the Pennine or Graian<sup>b</sup> hills, or traverse the Candavian<sup>c</sup> waste, or face the Syrtes,<sup>d</sup> or Scylla, or Charybdis, although you have travelled through all these places for the bribe of a petty governorship ; the journey for which nature has equipped you is safe and pleasant. She has given you such gifts that you may, if you do not prove false to them, rise level with God. Your money, however, will not place you on a level with God ; for God has no property. Your bordered robe<sup>e</sup> will not do this ; for God is not clad in raiment ; nor will your reputation, nor a display of self, nor a knowledge of your name wide-spread throughout the world ; for no one has knowledge of God ; many even hold him in low esteem, and do not suffer for so doing. The throng of slaves which carries your litter along the city streets and in foreign places

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ac peregrina portantium; deus ille maximus potentissimusque ipse vehit omnia. Ne forma quidem et vires beatum te facere possunt; nihil horum patitur vetustatem.

- 11 Quærendum est, quod non fiat in dies eius, qui<sup>1</sup> non possit obstari. Quid hoc est? Animus, sed hic rectus, bonus, magnus. Quid aliud voces hunc quam deum in corpore humano hospitantem? Hic animus tam in equitem Romanum quam in libertinum, quam in servum potest cadere. Quid est enim eques Romanus aut libertinus aut servus? Nomina ex ambitione aut ex iniuria nata. Subsilire in caelum ex angulo licet. Exurge modo

et te quoque dignum  
Finge deo.

Finges autem non auro vel argento; non potest ex hac materia imago deo exprimi similis; cogita illos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse. VALÆ.

### XXXII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Inquiro de te et ab omnibus sciscitor, qui ex ista regione veniunt, quid agas, ubi et cum quibus moreris. Verba dare non potes; tecum sum. Sic vive, tamquam quid facias auditurus sim, immo tamquam visurus. Quæris quid me maxime ex iis, quæ de te

<sup>1</sup> *quoi* Opsopoeus; *quo* pPb; *qui* L.

<sup>a</sup> For example, Time or Chance.

<sup>b</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, viii. 364 f.

<sup>c</sup> In the Golden Age, described in *Ep.* xc., when men were nearest to nature and "fresh from the gods."

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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