

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

Idem facit ratio; non late patet, si aspicias; in opere crescit. Pauca sunt, quae dicuntur, sed si illa animus bene exceptit, conualescunt et exurgunt. Eadem est, inquam, praeceptorum condicio quae seminum; multum efficiunt, et angusta sunt. Tantum, ut dixi, idonea mens capiat¹ illa et in se trahat. Multa invicem et ipsa generabit et plus reddet quam acceperit. VALE.

XXXIX.

SENECA LUCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Commentarios, quos desideras, diligenter ordinatos et in angustum coactos ego vero componam. Sed vide, ne plus profutura sit ratio ordinaria quam haec, quae nunc vulgo breviarium dicitur, olim cum latine loqueremur, summarium vocabatur. Illa res discenti magis necessaria est, haec scienti. Illa enim docet, haec admonet. Sed utriusque rei tibi copiam faciam. Tu a me non est quod illum aut illum exigas; qui
2 notorem dat, ignotus est. Scribam ergo quod vis,

¹ *capiat* later MSS.; *rapiat* pLPb.

“ The regular method of studying philosophy was, as we infer from this letter, a course of reading in the philosophers. Seneca deprecates the use of the “cram,” which is only a memory-help, as a substitute for reading, on the ground that by its use one does not, in the first place, learn the subject, and, in the second place and chiefly, that one loses the inspiration to be derived by direct contact with great thinkers. The request of Lucilius for a cram thus suggests the main topic of the letter, which is taken up in the second paragraph.

EPISTLES XXXVIII., XXXIX.

Reason grows in the same way; it is not large to the outward view, but increases as it does its work. Few words are spoken; but if the mind has truly caught them, they come into their strength and spring up. Yes, precepts and seeds have the same quality; they produce much, and yet they are slight things. Only, as I said, let a favourable mind receive and assimilate them. Then of itself the mind also will produce bounteously in its turn, giving back more than it has received. Farewell.

XXXIX. ON NOBLE ASPIRATIONS

I shall indeed arrange for you, in careful order and narrow compass, the notes which you request. But consider whether you may not get more help from the customary method^a than from that which is now commonly called a "breviary," though in the good old days, when real Latin was spoken, it was called a "summary."^b The former is more necessary to one who is learning a subject, the latter to one who knows it. For the one teaches, the other stirs the memory. But I shall give you abundant opportunity for both.^c A man like you should not ask me for this authority or that; he who furnishes a voucher for his statements argues himself unknown. I shall therefore write exactly what you wish, but I shall

^b *i.e.*, the word *breviarium*, "abridgment," "abstract," has displaced the better word *summarium*, "outline of chief points."

^c *i.e.*, to do the reading and to review it by means of the summary. The reading will enable Lucilius to identify for himself the authors of the several passages or doctrines.

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

sed meo more ; interim multos habes, quorum scripta nescio an satis ordinent. Sume in manus indicem philosophorum ; haec ipsa res expergisci te coget, si videris, quam multi tibi laboraverint. Concupisces et ipse ex illis unus esse. Habet enim hoc optimum in se generosus animus, quod concitatur ad honesta.

Neminem excelsi ingenii virum humilia delectant et sordida ; magnarum rerum species ad se vocat et
3 extollit. Quemadmodum flamma surgit in rectum, iacere ac deprimi non potest, non magis quam quiescere ; ita noster animus in motu est, eo mobilior et actuosior, quo vehementior fuerit. Sed felix, qui ad meliora hunc inpetum dedit ! Ponet se extra ius dicionemque fortunae. Secunda temperabit, adversa comminuet et aliis admiranda despiciet.
4 Magni animi est magna contemnere ac mediocria malle quam nimia. Illa enim utilia vitaliaque sunt ; at haec eo, quod superfluunt, nocent. Sic segetem nimia sternit ubertas, sic rami nimio¹ onere franguntur, sic ad maturitatem non pervenit nimia fecunditas. Idem animis quoque evenit, quos
5 inmoderata felicitas rumpit, qua non tantum in aliorum iniuriam, sed etiam in suam utuntur. Qui hostis in quemquam tam contumeliosus fuit quam in quosdam voluptates suae sunt ? Quorum inpotentiae atque insanae libidini ob hoc unum possis

¹ *nimio* added by Gertz.

EPISTLE XXXIX.

do it in my own way; until then, you have many authors whose works will presumably keep your ideas sufficiently in order. Pick up the list of the philosophers; that very act will compel you to wake up, when you see how many men have been working for your benefit. You will desire eagerly to be one of them yourself. For this is the most excellent quality that the noble soul has within itself, that it can be roused to honourable things.

No man of exalted gifts is pleased with that which is low and mean; the vision of great achievement summons him and uplifts him. Just as the flame springs straight into the air and cannot be cabined or kept down any more than it can repose in quiet, so our soul is always in motion, and the more ardent it is, the greater its motion and activity. But happy is the man who has given it this impulse toward better things! He will place himself beyond the jurisdiction of chance; he will wisely control prosperity; he will lessen adversity, and will despise what others hold in admiration. It is the quality of a great soul to scorn great things and to prefer that which is ordinary rather than that which is too great. For the one condition is useful and life-giving; but the other does harm just because it is excessive. Similarly, too rich a soil makes the grain fall flat, branches break down under too heavy a load, excessive productiveness does not bring fruit to ripeness. This is the case with the soul also; for it is ruined by uncontrolled prosperity, which is used not only to the detriment of others, but also to the detriment of itself. What enemy was ever so insolent to any opponent as are their pleasures to certain men? The only excuse that we can allow for the incontinence and mad lust of these men is

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

ignoscere, quod quae fecere patiuntur. Nec inmerito hic illos furor vexat; necesse est enim in inensum exeat cupiditas, quae naturalem modum transilit. Ille enim habet suum finem, inania et ex libidine orta sine termino sunt. 6
Necessaria metitur utilitas; supervacua quo redigis? Voluptatibus itaque se mergunt, quibus in consuetudinem adductis carere non possunt, et ob hoc miserrimi sunt, quod eo pervenerunt, ut illis quae supervacua fuerant, facta sint necessaria. Serviunt itaque voluptatibus, non fruuntur, et mala sua, quod malorum ultimum est, et¹ amant. Tunc autem est consummata infelicitas, ubi turpia non solum delectant, sed etiam placent, et desinit esse remedio locus, ubi quae fuerant vitia, mores sunt. VALE.

XL

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Quod frequenter mihi scribis, gratias ago. Nam quo uno modo potes, te mihi ostendis. Numquam epistulam tuam accipio, ut non protinus una simus. Si imagines nobis amicorum absentium iucundae sunt, quae memoriam renovant et desiderium² falso atque inani solacio levant, quanto iucundiores sunt litterae, quae vera amici absentis vestigia, veras notas

¹ *et LPb*; omitted by p.

² *absentiae*, after *desiderium*, is bracketed by Hense, following Gemoll.

^a *i.e.*, their pleasures. These ills, by being cultivated, become vices.

EPISTLES XXXIX., XL.

the fact that they suffer the evils which they have inflicted upon others. And they are rightly harassed by this madness, because desire must have unbounded space for its excursions, if it transgresses nature's mean. For this has its bounds, but waywardness and the acts that spring from wilful lust are without boundaries. Utility measures our needs; but by what standard can you check the superfluous? It is for this reason that men sink themselves in pleasures, and they cannot do without them when once they have become accustomed to them, and for this reason they are most wretched, because they have reached such a pass that what was once superfluous to them has become indispensable. And so they are the slaves of their pleasures instead of enjoying them; they even love their own ills,^a—and that is the worst ill of all! Then it is that the height of unhappiness is reached, when men are not only attracted, but even pleased, by shameful things, and when there is no longer any room for a cure, now that those things which once were vices have become habits. Farewell.

XL. ON THE PROPER STYLE FOR A PHILOSOPHER'S DISCOURSE

I thank you for writing to me so often; for you are revealing your real self to me in the only way you can. I never receive a letter from you without being in your company forthwith. If the pictures of our absent friends are pleasing to us, though they only refresh the memory and lighten our longing by a solace that is unreal and unsubstantial, how much more pleasant is a letter, which brings us real traces,

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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