

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

### XLI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Facis rem optimam et tibi salutarem, si, ut scribis, perseveras ire ad bonam mentem, quam stultum est optare, cum possis a te impetrare. Non sunt ad caelum elevandae manus nec exorandus aedituus, ut nos ad aurem simulacri, quasi magis exaudiri possimus, admittat; prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est.
- 2 Ita dico, Lucili: sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos. Hic prout a nobis tractatus est, ita nos ipse tractat. Bonus vero vir sine deo nemo est; an potest aliquis supra fortunam nisi ab illo adiutus exurgere? Ille dat consilia magna et erecta. In unoquoque virorum bonorum

Quis deus incertum est, habitat deus.

- 3 Si tibi occurrerit vetustis arboribus et solitam altitudinem egressis frequens lucus et conspectum caeli ramorum aliorum alios protegentium summovens obtentu,<sup>1</sup> illa proceritas silvae et secretum loci et admiratio umbrae in aperto tam densae atque continuae fidem tibi numinis faciet.<sup>2</sup> Si quis specus saxis penitus exesis montem suspenderit, non manu factus,

<sup>1</sup> *summovens obtentu* Hense; *summoventus* p; *summovens* LMP; *sub movens* b.

<sup>2</sup> *faciet* Madvig; *facit et* pLPb; *faciet et later* MSS.

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### XLI. ON THE GOD WITHIN US

You are doing an excellent thing, one which will be wholesome for you, if, as you write me, you are persisting in your effort to attain sound understanding; it is foolish to pray for this when you can acquire it from yourself. We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven, or to beg the keeper of a temple to let us approach his idol's ear, as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us. one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. Can one rise superior to fortune unless God helps him to rise? He it is that gives noble and upright counsel. In each good man

A god doth dwell, but what god know we not.<sup>a</sup>

If ever you have come upon a grove that is full of ancient trees which have grown to an unusual height, shutting out a view of the sky by a veil of pleached and intertwining branches, then the loftiness of the forest, the seclusion of the spot, and your marvel at the thick unbroken shade in the midst of the open spaces, will prove to you the presence of deity. Or if a cave, made by the deep crumbling of the rocks, holds up a mountain on its arch, a place not built

<sup>a</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, viii. 352,

Hoc nemus, hunc, inquit, frondoso vertice collem,  
Quis deus incertum est, habitat deus,

and *cf.* Quintilian, i. 10. 88, where he is speaking of Ennius, whom "sicut sacros vetustate lucos adoremus, in quibus grandia et antiqua robora iam non tantam habent speciem quantam religionem."

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sed naturalibus causis in tantam laxitatem excavatus, animum tuum quadam religionis suspicione percutiet. Magnorum fluminum capita veneramur; subita ex abdito vasti amnis eruptio aras habet; coluntur aquarum calentium fontes, et stagna quaedam vel  
4 opacitas vel immensa altitudo sacravit. Si hominem videris interritum periculis, intactum cupiditatibus, inter adversa felicem, in mediis tempestatibus placidum, ex superiore loco homines videntem, ex aequo deos, non subibit te veneratio eius? Non dices: "Ista res maior est altiorque quam ut credi similis huic, in quo est, corpusculo possit? Vis isto divina  
5 descendit." Animum excellentem, moderatum, omnia tamquam minora transeuntem, quicquid timemus optamusque ridentem, caelestis potentia agitatur. Non potest res tanta sine adminiculo numinis stare. Itaque maiore sui parte illic est, unde descendit. Quemadmodum radii solis contingunt quidem terram, sed ibi sunt, unde mittuntur; sic animus magnus ac sacer et in hoc demissus, ut propius<sup>1</sup> divina nossemus, conversatur quidem nobiscum, sed haeret origini suae; illinc pendet, illuc spectat ac nititur, nostris tamquam melior interest.

6 Quis est ergo hic animus? Qui nullo bono nisi

<sup>1</sup> After *propius* pLPbM add *quidem*. Hense would prefer *quiddam divini*.

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with hands but hollowed out into such spaciousness by natural causes, your soul will be deeply moved by a certain intimation of the existence of God. We worship the sources of mighty rivers; we erect altars at places where great streams burst suddenly from hidden sources; we adore springs of hot water as divine, and consecrate certain pools because of their dark waters or their immeasurable depth. If you see a man who is unterrified in the midst of dangers, untouched by desires, happy in adversity, peaceful amid the storm, who looks down upon men from a higher plane, and views the gods on a footing of equality, will not a feeling of reverence for him steal over you? Will you not say: "This quality is too great and too lofty to be regarded as resembling this petty body in which it dwells? A divine power has descended upon that man." When a soul rises superior to other souls, when it is under control, when it passes through every experience as if it were of small account, when it smiles at our fears and at our prayers, it is stirred by a force from heaven. A thing like this cannot stand upright unless it be propped by the divine. Therefore, a greater part of it abides in that place from whence it came down to earth. Just as the rays of the sun do indeed touch the earth, but still abide at the source from which they are sent; even so the great and hallowed soul, which has come down in order that we may have a nearer knowledge of divinity, does indeed associate with us, but still cleaves to its origin; on that source it depends, thither it turns its gaze and strives to go, and it concerns itself with our doings only as a being superior to ourselves.

What, then, is such a soul? One which is resplendent with no external good, but only with its

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suo nitet; quid enim est stultius quam in homine aliena laudare? Quid eo dementius, qui ea miratur, quae ad alium transferri protinus possunt? Non faciunt meliorem equum aurei freni. Aliter leo aurata iuba mittitur, dum contractatur et ad patientiam recipiendi ornamenti cogitur fatigatus, aliter incultus, integri spiritus; hic scilicet inpetu acer, qualem illum natura esse voluit, speciosus ex horrido, cuius hic decor est, non sine timore aspici, praefertur illi languido et bratteato.

7 Nemo gloriari nisi suo debet. Vitem laudamus, si fructu palmites onerat, si ipsa pondere<sup>1</sup> ad terram eorum, quae tulit, adminicula deducit; num quis huic illam praeferret vitem, cui aureae uvae, aurea folia dependent? Propria virtus est in vite fertilitas, in homine quoque id laudandum est, quod ipsius est. Familiam formosam habet et domum pulchram, multum serit, multum fenerat; nihil horum in ipso est, sed  
8 circa ipsum. Lauda in illo, quod nec eripi potest nec dari, quod proprium hominis est. Quaeris quid sit? Animus et ratio in animo perfecta. Rationale enim animal est homo. Consummatur itaque bonum eius,  
9 si id inplevit, cui nascitur. Quid est autem, quod ab illo ratio haec exigit? Rem facillimam, secundum

<sup>1</sup> *pondere* Erasmus; *pondera* MSS.

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<sup>a</sup> The spectators of the fight, which is to take place between the two lions, applaud the wild lion and bet on him.

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own. For what is more foolish than to praise in a man the qualities which come from without? And what is more insane than to marvel at characteristics which may at the next instant be passed on to someone else? A golden bit does not make a better horse. The lion with gilded mane, in process of being trained and forced by weariness to endure the decoration, is sent into the arena in quite a different way from the wild lion whose spirit is unbroken; the latter, indeed, bold in his attack, as nature wished him to be, impressive because of his wild appearance,—and it is his glory that none can look upon him without fear,—is favoured<sup>a</sup> in preference to the other lion, that languid and gilded brute.

No man ought to glory except in that which is his own. We praise a vine if it makes the shoots teem with increase, if by its weight it bends to the ground the very poles which hold its fruit; would any man prefer to this vine one from which golden grapes and golden leaves hang down? In a vine the virtue peculiarly its own is fertility; in man also we should praise that which is his own. Suppose that he has a retinue of comely slaves and a beautiful house, that his farm is large and large his income; none of these things is in the man himself; they are all on the outside. Praise the quality in him which cannot be given or snatched away, that which is the peculiar property of the man. Do you ask what this is? It is soul, and reason brought to perfection in the soul. For man is a reasoning animal. Therefore, man's highest good is attained, if he has fulfilled the good for which nature designed him at birth. And what is it which this reason demands of him? *The easiest thing in the world,*

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naturam suam vivere. Sed hanc difficilem facit communis insania; in vitia alter alterum trudemus. Quomodo autem revocari ad salutem possunt, quos nemo retinet, populus impellit? VALE.

### XLII.

#### SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Iam tibi iste persuasit virum se bonum esse? Atqui vir bonus tam cito nec fieri potest nec intellegi. Scis quem nunc virum bonum dicam? Huius secundae notae. Nam ille alter fortasse tamquam phoenix semel anno quingentesimo nascitur. Nec est mirum ex intervallo magna generari; mediocria et in turbam nascentia saepe fortuna producit, eximia vero ipsa raritate commendat.
- 2 Sed iste multum adhuc abest ab eo, quod profitetur. Et si sciret, quid esset vir bonus, nondum esse se crederet, fortasse etiam fieri posse desperaret. "At male existimat de malis." Hoc etiam mali faciunt, nec ulla maior poena nequitiae est quam 3 quod sibi ac suis displicet. "At odit eos, qui subita et magna potentia inpotenter utuntur." Idem faciet,

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\* Seneca doubtless has in mind the famous passage of Simonides, ἀνδρ' ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀληθῶς γενέσθαι χαλεπὸν, discussed by Plato, *Protagoras*, 339 A.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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