

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

LXIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Fuisti here nobiscum. Potes¹ queri, si here tantum. Ideo adieci "nobiscum." Mecum enim semper es. Intervenerant quidam amici, propter quos maior fumus fieret, non hic, qui erumpere ex lautorum culinis et terrere vigiles solet, sed hic
2 modicus, qui hospites venisse significet. Varius nobis fuit sermo, ut in convivio, nullam rem usque ad exitum adducens, sed aliunde alio transiliens. Lectus est deinde liber Quinti Sextii patris, magni, si quid mihi credis, viri et, licet neget, Stoici.
3 Quantus in illo, di boni, vigor est, quantum animi! Hoc non in omnibus philosophis invenies; quorundam scripta clarum habentium² nomen exanguia sunt. Instituunt, disputant, cavillantur, non faciunt animum, quia non habent; cum legeris Sextium, dices: "Vivit, viget, liber est, supra hominem est, dimittit me
4 plenum ingentis fiduciae." In qua positione mentis sim, cum hunc lego, fatebor tibi: libet omnis casus provocare, libet exclamare: "Quid cessas, fortuna? Congredere; paratum vides." Illius animum induo, qui quaerit, ubi se experiatur, ubi virtutem suam ostendat,

¹ *potes* later MSS.; *potest* pLVPb.

² *habentium* Bickel; *habent tum* p; *habent tantum* LVPb.

^a See on *Ep.* lix. 7. As the following sentence indicates, he seems to have considered himself an eclectic in philosophy, and to have been half Stoic, half Pythagorean.

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LXIV. ON THE PHILOSOPHER'S TASK

Yesterday you were with us. You might complain if I said "yesterday" merely. This is why I have added "with us." For, so far as I am concerned, you are always with me. Certain friends had happened in, on whose account a somewhat brighter fire was laid,—not the kind that generally bursts from the kitchen chimneys of the rich and scares the watch, but the moderate blaze which means that guests have come. Our talk ran on various themes, as is natural at a dinner; it pursued no chain of thought to the end, but jumped from one topic to another. We then had read to us a book by Quintus Sextius the Elder.^a He is a great man, if you have any confidence in my opinion, and a real Stoic, though he himself denies it. Ye Gods, what strength and spirit one finds in him! This is not the case with all philosophers; there are some men of illustrious name whose writings are sapless. They lay down rules, they argue, and they quibble; they do not infuse spirit simply because they have no spirit. But when you come to read Sextius, you will say: "He is alive; he is strong; he is free; he is more than a man; he fills me with a mighty confidence before I close his book." I shall acknowledge to you the state of mind I am in when I read his works: I want to challenge every hazard; I want to cry: "Why keep me waiting, Fortune? Enter the lists! Behold, I am ready for you!" I assume the spirit of a man who seeks where he may make trial of himself, where he may show his worth:

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Spumantemque dari pecora inter inertia votis
Optat aprum aut fulvum descendere monte leonem.

- 5 Libet aliquid habere quod vincam, cuius patientia
exercear. Nam hoc quoque egregium Sextius habet,
quod et ostendet tibi beatæ vitæ magnitudinem et
desperationem eius non faciet; scies esse illam in
excelso, sed volenti penetrabilem.
- 6 Hoc idem virtus tibi ipsa præstabit, ut illam
admireris et tamen speres. Mihi certe multum
auferre temporis solet contemplatio ipsa sapientiæ;
non aliter illam intueor obstupefactus quam ipsum
interim mundum, quem sæpe tamquam spectator
- 7 novus video. Veneror itaque inventa sapientiæ
inventoresque; adire tamquam multorum hereditatem
iuvat. Mihi ista acquisita, mihi laborata sunt. Sed
agamus bonum patrem familiæ; faciamus ampliora,
quæ accepimus. Maior ista hereditas a me ad
posterios transeat. Multum adhuc restat operis
multumque restabit, nec ulli nato post mille sæcula
- 8 præcludetur occasio aliquid adhuc adiciendi. Sed
etiam si omnia a veteribus inventa sunt, hoc semper
novum erit,¹ usus et inventorum ab aliis scientia ac
dispositio. Puta relicta nobis medicamenta, quibus
sanarentur oculi; non opus est mihi alia quaerere,
- ¹ *erit* the other MSS. ; *ille erit* L, for which Haase pro-
poses *illi*.

^a Vergil, *Aeneid*, iv. 158 f. The boy Ascanius, at Dido's
hunt, longs for wilder game than the deer and the goats.

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And fretting 'mid the unwarlike flocks he prays
Some foam-flecked boar may cross his path, or else
A tawny lion stalking down the hills.^a

I want something to overcome, something on which I may test my endurance. For this is another remarkable quality that Sextius possesses: he will show you the grandeur of the happy life and yet will not make you despair of attaining it; you will understand that it is on high, but that it is accessible to him who has the will to seek it.

And virtue herself will have the same effect upon you, of making you admire her and yet hope to attain her. In my own case, at any rate, the very contemplation of wisdom takes much of my time; I gaze upon her with bewilderment, just as I sometimes gaze upon the firmament itself, which I often behold as if I saw it for the first time. Hence I worship the discoveries of wisdom and their discoverers; to enter, as it were, into the inheritance of many predecessors is a delight. It was for me that they laid up this treasure; it was for me that they toiled. But we should play the part of a careful householder; we should increase what we have inherited. This inheritance shall pass from me to my descendants larger than before. Much still remains to do, and much will always remain, and he who shall be born a thousand ages hence will not be barred from his opportunity of adding something further. But even if the old masters have discovered everything, one thing will be always new,—the application and the scientific study and classification of the discoveries made by others. Assume that prescriptions have been handed down to us for the healing of the eyes; there is no need of my searching for others in addition; but

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sed haec tamen morbis et temporibus aptanda sunt. Hoc asperitas oculorum conlevatur; hoc palpebrarum crassitudo tenuatur; hoc vis subita et umor¹ avertitur; hoc acuetur visus; teras ista oportet et eligas tempus, adhibeas singulis modum.

Animi remedia inventa sunt ab antiquis; quomodo autem admoveantur aut quando, nostri operis est 9 quaerere. Multum egerunt, qui ante nos fuerunt, sed non peregerunt. Suspiciendi tamen sunt et ritu deorum colendi. Quidni ego magnorum virorum et imagines habeam incitamenta animi et natales celebrem? Quidni ego illos honoris causa semper appellem? Quam venerationem praeceptoribus meis debeo, eandem illis praeceptoribus generis humani, 10 a quibus tanti boni initia fluxerunt. Si consulem videro aut praetorem, omnia, quibus honor haberi honori solet, faciam; equo desiliam, caput adaperiam, semita cedam. Quid ergo? Marcum Catonem utrumque et Laelium Sapientem et Socraten cum Platone et Zenonem Cleanthenque in animum meum sine dignatione summa recipiam? Ego vero illos veneror et tantis nominibus semper adsurgo. VALE.

¹ *subita et umor* LVPb; *subite timor* p; *subita et timor* Cornelissen.

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for all that, these prescriptions must be adapted to the particular disease and to the particular stage of the disease. Use this prescription to relieve granulation of the eyelids, that to reduce the swelling of the lids, this to prevent sudden pain or a rush of tears, that to sharpen the vision. Then compound these several prescriptions, watch for the right time of their application, and apply the proper treatment in each case.

The cures for the spirit also have been discovered by the ancients; but it is our task to learn the method and the time of treatment. Our predecessors have worked much improvement, but have not worked out the problem. They deserve respect, however, and should be worshipped with a divine ritual. Why should I not keep statues of great men to kindle my enthusiasm, and celebrate their birthdays? Why should I not continually greet them with respect and honour? The reverence which I owe to my own teachers I owe in like measure to those teachers of the human race, the source from which the beginnings of such great blessings have flowed. If I meet a consul or a praetor, I shall pay him all the honour which his post of honour is wont to receive: I shall dismount, uncover, and yield the road. What, then? Shall I admit into my soul with less than the highest marks of respect Marcus Cato, the Elder and the Younger, Laelius the Wise, Socrates and Plato, Zeno and Cleanthes? I worship them in very truth, and always rise to do honour to such noble names. Farewell.

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