

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

maius putem quam illa secura et intemptata fortunae, quanto rarius est hostem amissa manu vicisse quam armata? "Quid ergo?" inquis, "hoc bonum tibi optabis?" Quidni? Hoc enim nisi qui potest et  
53 optare, non potest facere. An potius optem, ut malaxandos articulos exoletis meis porrigam? Ut muliercula aut aliquis in mulierculam ex viro versus digitulos meos ducat? Quidni ego feliciorem putem Mucium, quod sic tractavit ignem, quasi illam manum tractatori praestitisset? In integrum restituit quidquid erraverat; confecit bellum inermis ac mancus et illa manu trunca reges duos vicit. VALE.

### LXVII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Vt a communibus initium faciam, ver aperire se coepit, sed iam inclinatum in aetatem, quo tempore calere debebat, intepuit nec adhuc illi fides est. Saepe enim in hiemem revolvitur. Vis scire, quam dubium adhuc sit? Nondum me committo frigidae verae, adhuc rigorem eius infringo. "Hoc est," inquis, "nec calidum nec frigidum pati." Ita est, mi Lucili; iam aetas mea contenta est suo frigore. Vix

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<sup>a</sup> A rare word—sometimes spelled *malacisso*,—used by Plautus (*Bacch.* 73) and Laberius, but not in a technical sense.

<sup>b</sup> Porsenna and Tarquin.

<sup>c</sup> See Introduction (Vol. I. p. x), and the opening sentences of *Epp.* lxxvii., lxxxvii., and others.

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those other goods which are unattended by danger and have made no trial of fortune, as it is a rarer thing to have overcome a foe with a hand lost than with a hand armed? "What then?" you say; "shall you desire this good for yourself?" Of course I shall. For this is a thing that a man cannot achieve unless he can also desire it. Should I desire, instead, to be allowed to stretch out my limbs for my slaves to massage,<sup>a</sup> or to have a woman, or a man changed into the likeness of a woman, pull my finger-joints? I cannot help believing that Mucius was all the more lucky because he manipulated the flames as calmly as if he were holding out his hand to the manipulator. He had wiped out all his previous mistakes; he finished the war unarmed and maimed; and with that stump of a hand he conquered two kings.<sup>b</sup> Farewell.

### LXVII. ON ILL-HEALTH AND ENDURANCE OF SUFFERING

If I may begin with a commonplace remark,<sup>c</sup> spring is gradually disclosing itself; but though it is rounding into summer, when you would expect hot weather, it has kept rather cool, and one cannot yet be sure of it. For it often slides back into winter weather. Do you wish to know how uncertain it still is? I do not yet trust myself to a bath which is absolutely cold; even at this time I break its chill. You may say that this is no way to show the endurance either of heat or of cold; very true, dear Lucilius, but at my time of life one is at length contented with the natural chill of the body. I can scarcely thaw out in

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2 media regelatur aestate. Itaque maior pars in vestimentis degitur. Ago gratias senectuti, quod me lectulo adfixit. Quidni gratias illi hoc nomine agam? Quicquid debebam nolle, non possum. Cum libellis mihi plurimus sermo est. Si quando intervenerunt epistulae tuae, tecum esse mihi videor et sic adficior animo, tamquam tibi non rescribam, sed respondeam. Itaque et de hoc, quod quaeris, quasi conloquar tecum, quale sit, una scrutabimur.

3 Quaeris, an omne bonum optabile sit. "Si bonum est," inquis, "fortiter torqueri et magno animo uri et patienter aegrotare, sequitur, ut ista optabilia sint. Nihil autem video ex istis voto dignum. Neminem certe adhuc scio eo nomine votum solvisse, quod flagellis caesus esset aut podagra distortus aut eculo 4 longior factus." Distingue, mi Lucili, ista, et intelleges esse in iis aliquid optandum. Tormenta abesse a me velim; sed si sustinenda fuerint, ut me in illis fortiter, honeste, animose geram, optabo. Quidni ego malim non incidere bellum? Sed si inciderit, ut vulnera, ut famem et omnia, quae bellorum necessitas adfert, generose feram, optabo. Non sum tam demens, ut aegrotare cupiam; sed si aegrotandum fuerit, ut nihil intemperanter, nihil effeminate faciam, optabo. Ita non incommoda optabilia sunt, sed virtus, qua perferuntur incommoda.

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<sup>a</sup> Seneca had a delicate constitution (see Introduction). In the Letters he speaks of suffering from asthma (liv.), catarrh (lxxviii.), and fever (civ.).

<sup>b</sup> Cf. lxxv. 1 *qualis sermo meus esset, si una sederemus aut ambularem.*

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the middle of summer. Accordingly, I spend most of the time bundled up; and I thank old age for keeping me fastened to my bed.<sup>a</sup> Why should I not thank old age on this account? That which I ought not to wish to do, I lack the ability to do. Most of my converse is with books. Whenever your letters arrive, I imagine that I am with you, and I have the feeling that I am about to speak my answer, instead of writing it. Therefore let us together investigate the nature of this problem of yours, just as if we were conversing with one another.<sup>b</sup>

You ask me whether every good is desirable. You say: "If it is a good to be brave under torture, to go to the stake with a stout heart, to endure illness with resignation, it follows that these things are desirable. But I do not see that any of them is worth praying for. At any rate I have as yet known of no man who has paid a vow by reason of having been cut to pieces by the rod, or twisted out of shape by the gout, or made taller by the rack." My dear Lucilius, you must distinguish between these cases; you will then comprehend that there is something in them that is to be desired. I should prefer to be free from torture; but if the time comes when it must be endured, I shall desire that I may conduct myself therein with bravery, honour, and courage. Of course I prefer that war should not occur; but if war does occur, I shall desire that I may nobly endure the wounds, the starvation, and all that the exigency of war brings. Nor am I so mad as to crave illness; but if I must suffer illness, I shall desire that I may do nothing which shows lack of restraint, and nothing that is unmanly. The conclusion is, not that hardships are desirable, but that virtue is desirable, which enables us patiently to endure hardships.

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- 5 Quidam ex nostris existimant omnium istorum fortem tolerantiam non esse optabilem, sed ne abominandam quidem, quia voto purum bonum peti debet et tranquillum et extra molestiam positum. Ego dissentio. Quare? Primum quia fieri non potest, ut aliqua res bona quidem sit, sed optabilis non sit. Deinde si virtus optabilis est, nullum autem sine virtute bonum est, omne bonum optabile est. Deinde etiam<sup>1</sup> tormentorum fortis patientia optabilis est.
- 6 Etiamnunc interrogo: nempe<sup>2</sup> fortitudo optabilis est? Atqui pericula contemnit et provocat. Pulcherrima pars eius maximeque mirabilis illa est, non cedere ignibus, obviam ire vulneribus, interdum tela ne vitare quidem, sed pectore excipere. Si fortitudo optabilis est, et tormenta patienter ferre optabile est; hoc enim fortitudinis pars est. Sed<sup>3</sup> separa ista, ut dixi; nihil erit quod tibi faciat errorem. Non enim pati tormenta optabile est, sed pati fortiter. Illud opto "fortiter," quod est virtus.
- 7 "Quis tamen unquam hoc sibi optavit?" Quaedam vota aperta et professa sunt, cum particulatim fiunt, quaedam latent, cum uno voto multa comprehensa sunt. Tamquam opto mihi vitam honestam. Vita autem honesta actionibus variis constat; in hac est Reguli arca, Catonis scissum manu sua vulnus, Rutili exilium, calix venenatus, qui Socraten transtulit e carcere in caelum. Ita cum optavi mihi vitam honestam, et

<sup>1</sup> *etiam si* MSS.; Madvig deleted *si*.

<sup>2</sup> *nempe* Haase; *neme* MSS.

<sup>3</sup> Buecheler would delete *sed*.

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<sup>a</sup> *i. e.*, the Stoics.

<sup>b</sup> Banished from Rome in 92 B.C. Cf. *Ep.* xxiv. 4.

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Certain of our school<sup>a</sup> think that, of all such qualities, a stout endurance is not desirable,—though not to be deprecated either,—because we ought to seek by prayer only the good which is unalloyed, peaceful, and beyond the reach of trouble. Personally, I do not agree with them. And why? First, because it is impossible for anything to be good without being also desirable. Because, again, if virtue is desirable, and if nothing that is good lacks virtue, then everything good is desirable. And, lastly, because a brave endurance even under torture is desirable. At this point I ask you: Is not bravery desirable? And yet bravery despises and challenges danger. The most beautiful and most admirable part of bravery is that it does not shrink from the stake, advances to meet wounds, and sometimes does not even avoid the spear, but meets it with opposing breast. If bravery is desirable, so is patient endurance of torture; for this is a part of bravery. Only sift these things, as I have suggested; then there will be nothing which can lead you astray. For it is not mere endurance of torture, but brave endurance, that is desirable. I therefore desire that “brave” endurance; and this is virtue.

“But,” you say, “who ever desired such a thing for himself?” Some prayers are open and outspoken, when the requests are offered specifically; other prayers are indirectly expressed, when they include many requests under one title. For example, I desire a life of honour. Now a life of honour includes various kinds of conduct; it may include the chest in which Regulus was confined, or the wound of Cato which was torn open by Cato’s own hand, or the exile of Rutilius,<sup>b</sup> or the cup of poison which removed Socrates from gaol to heaven. Accordingly, in praying for a life of

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haec optavi, sine quibus interdum honesta non potest esse.

8

O terque quaterque beati,  
Quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis  
Contigit oppetere!

Quid interest, optes hoc alicui an optabile fuisse  
9 fatearis? Decius se pro re publica devovit; in medios  
hostes concitato equo mortem petens inruit. Alter  
post hunc, paternae virtutis aemulus, conceptis  
sollemnibus ac iam familiaribus verbis in aciem  
confertissiman incucurrit, de hoc sollicitus tantum,  
ut litaret, optabilem rem putans<sup>1</sup> bonam mortem.  
Dubitas ergo, an optimum sit memorabilem mori et  
10 in aliquo opere virtutis? Cum aliquis tormenta  
fortiter patitur, omnibus virtutibus utitur. Fortasse  
una in promptu sit et maxime appareat patientia.  
Ceterum illic est fortitudo, cuius patientia et perpessio  
et tolerantia rami sunt. Illic est prudentia, sine qua  
nullum initur consilium, quae suadet, quod effugere  
non possis, quam fortissime ferre. Illic est constantia,  
quae deici loco non potest et propositum nulla  
vi extorquente dimittit. Illic est individuus ille  
comitatus virtutum; quicquid honeste fit, una virtus  
facit, sed ex consilii sententia. Quod autem ab  
omnibus virtutibus conprobatur, etiam si ab una fieri  
videtur, optabile est.

11 Quid? Tu existimas ea tantum optabilia esse,

<sup>1</sup> *putans* later MSS. ; *putas* pVPb.

<sup>a</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, i. 94 ff.

<sup>b</sup> Cf. Livy, viii. 9. 6 ff. . . . *legiones auxiliaque hostium  
mecum deis manibus Tellurique devoveo.*

<sup>c</sup> *Ut litaret*: i.e., that by his sacrifice he might secure an omen of success. Cf. Pliny, *N.H.* viii. 45, and Suetonius, *Augustus*, 96: "At the siege of Perugia, when he found the sacrifices were not favourable (*sacrificio non litanti*), Augustus called for more victims."

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