

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

satius est suadere¹ et expugnare adfectus, non circumscribere. Si possumus, fortius loquamur; si minus, apertius. VALE.

LXXXVIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 De liberalibus studiis quid sentiam, scire desideras: nullum suspicio, nullum in bonis numero, quod ad aes exit. Meritoria artificia sunt, hactenus utilia, si prae-
parant ingenium, non detinent. Tamdiu enim istis
2 inmorandum est, quamdiu nihil animus agere maius
potest; rudimenta sunt nostra, non opera. Quare
liberalia studia dicta sint, vides; quia homine libero
digna sunt. Ceterum unum studium vere liberale
est, quod liberum facit. Hoc est sapientiae, sublime,
forte, magnanimum. Cetera pusilla et puerilia sunt;
an tu quicquam in istis esse credis boni, quorum pro-
fessores turpissimos omnium ac flagitiosissimos cernis?
Non discere debemus ista, sed didicisse.

Quidam illud de liberalibus studiis quaerendum
iudicaverunt, an virum bonum facerent; ne promit-
tunt quidem nec huius rei scientiam adfectant.

¹ After *suadere* Hense added *re*.

^a The regular round of education, ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, including grammar, music, geometry, arithmetic, astrology, and certain phases of rhetoric and dialectic, are in this letter contrasted with liberal studies—those which have for their object the pursuit of virtue. Seneca is thus interpreting *studia liberalia* in a higher sense than his contemporaries would expect. Compare J. R. Lowell's definition of a university, "a place where nothing useful is taught."

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were better to support this law by our conduct and to subdue our desires by direct assault rather than to circumvent them by logic. If we can, let us speak more boldly ; if not, let us speak more frankly.

LXXXVIII. ON LIBERAL AND VOCATIONAL STUDIES

You have been wishing to know my views with regard to liberal studies.^a My answer is this: I respect no study, and deem no study good, which results in money-making. Such studies are profit-bringing occupations, useful only in so far as they give the mind a preparation and do not engage it permanently. One should linger upon them only so long as the mind can occupy itself with nothing greater ; they are our apprenticeship, not our real work. Hence you see why "liberal studies" are so called ; it is because they are studies worthy of a free-born gentleman. But there is only one really liberal study,—that which gives a man his liberty. It is the study of wisdom, and that is lofty, brave, and great-souled. All other studies are puny and puerile. You surely do not believe that there is good in any of the subjects whose teachers are, as you see, men of the most ignoble and base stamp? We ought not to be learning such things ; we should have done with learning them.

Certain persons have made up their minds that the point at issue with regard to the liberal studies is whether they make men good ; but they do not even profess or aim at a knowledge of this particular

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- 3 Grammaticus circa curam sermonis versatur et, si
 latius evagari vult, circa historias, iam ut longissime
 fines suos proferat, circa carmina. Quid horum ad
 virtutem viam sternit? Syllabarum enarratio et
 verborum diligentia et fabularum memoria et versuum
 lex ac modificatio? Quid ex his metum demit,
 4 cupiditatem eximit, libidinem frenat? . . . Quaeritur¹
 utrum doceant isti virtutem an non; si non docent,
 ne tradunt quidem. Si docent, philosophi sunt.
 Vis scire, quam non ad docendam virtutem con-
 siderint? Aspice, quam dissimilia inter se omnium
 studia sint; atqui similitudo esset idem docentium.
- 5 Nisi forte tibi Homerum philosophum fuisse
 persuadent, cum his ipsis, quibus colligunt, negent.
 Nam modo Stoicum illum faciant, virtutem solam
 probantem et voluptates refugientem et ab honesto
 ne immortalitatis quidem pretio recedentem, modo
 Epicureum, laudantem statum quietae civitatis et
 inter convivia cantusque vitam exigentis, modo Peri-
 pateticum, tria bonorum genera inducentem, modo
 Academicum, omnia incerta dicentem. Adparet
 nihil horum esse in illo, quia omnia sunt. Ista enim

¹ After *frenat* MSS. give *ad geometriam transeamus et ad musicen*; *nihil apud illas invenies, quod velet timere, velet cupere. Quisquis ignorat, alia frustra scit*, leaving an impossible syntax before *utrum*. *Videndum utrum* later MSS. *Quaeritur* would be a reasonable conjecture.

^a *Grammaticus* in classical Greek means "one who is familiar with the alphabet"; in the Alexandrian age a "student of literature"; in the Roman age the equivalent of *litteratus*. Seneca means here a "specialist in linguistic science."

^b *i.e.*, philosophy (virtue).

^c This theory was approved by Democritus, Hippias of Elis, and the allegorical interpreters; Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Plato himself condemned Homer for his supposed unphilosophic fabrications.

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subject. The scholar^a busies himself with investigations into language, and if it be his desire to go farther afield, he works on history, or, if he would extend his range to the farthest limits, on poetry. But which of these paves the way to virtue? Pronouncing syllables, investigating words, memorizing plays, or making rules for the scansion of poetry,—what is there in all this that rids one of fear, roots out desire, or bridles the passions? The question is: do such men teach virtue, or not? If they do not teach it, then neither do they transmit it. If they do teach it, they are philosophers. Would you like to know how it happens that they have not taken the chair for the purpose of teaching virtue? See how unlike their subjects are; and yet their subjects would resemble each other if they taught the same thing.^b

It may be, perhaps, that they make you believe that Homer was a philosopher,^c although they disprove this by the very arguments through which they seek to prove it. For sometimes they make of him a Stoic, who approves nothing but virtue, avoids pleasures, and refuses to relinquish honour even at the price of immortality; sometimes they make him an Epicurean, praising the condition of a state in repose, which passes its days in feasting and song; sometimes a Peripatetic, classifying goodness in three ways^d; sometimes an Academic, holding that all things are uncertain. It is clear, however, that no one of these doctrines is to be fathered upon Homer, just because they are all there; for they are

^a The *tria genera honorum* of Cicero's *De Fin.* v. 84. Cf. *ib.* 18, where the three proper objects of man's search are given as the desire for pleasure, the avoidance of pain, and the attainment of such natural goods as health, strength, and soundness of mind. The Stoics held that the good was absolute.

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inter se dissident. Demus illis Homerum philosophum fuisse; nempe sapiens factus est, antequam carmina ulla cognosceret. Ergo illa discamus, quae Homerum fecere sapientem.

- 6 Hoc quidem me quaerere, uter maior aetate fuerit, Homerus an Hesiodus, non magis ad rem pertinet quam scire, cum minor Hecuba fuerit quam Helena, quare tam male tulerit aetatem. Quid? Inquam, annos Patroeli et Achillis inquirere ad rem existimas
- 7 pertinere? Quaeris, Vlixes ubi erraverit, potius quam efficias, ne nos semper erremus? Non vacat audire, utrum inter Italiam et Siciliam iactatus sit an extra notum nobis orbem, neque enim potuit in tam angusto error esse tam longus; tempestates nos animi cotidie iactant et nequitia in omnia Vlixis mala impellit. Non deest forma, quae sollicitet oculos, non hostis; hinc monstra effera et humano cruore gaudentia, hinc insidiosa blandimenta aurium, hinc naufragia et tot varietates malorum. Hoc me doce, quomodo patriam amem, quomodo uxorem, quomodo patrem, quomodo ad haec tam honesta vel naufragus
- 8 navigem. Quid inquiris, an Penelopa pudica¹ fuerit, an verba saeculo suo dederit? An Vlixem illum esse, quem videbat, antequam sciret, suspicata sit?

¹ *pudica* later MSS. ; *impudica* VPb.

^a Summers compares Lucian, *Gall.* 17. Seneca, however, does not take such gossip seriously.

^b This sentence alludes to Calypso, Circe, the Cyclops, and the Sirens.

^c Unfavourable comment by Lycophron, and by Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.* iii. 22 (*Mercurius*) *ex quo et Penelopa Panatum ferunt.*

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irreconcilable with one another. We may admit to these men, indeed, that Homer was a philosopher ; yet surely he became a wise man before he had any knowledge of poetry. So let us learn the particular things that made Homer wise.

It is no more to the point, of course, for me to investigate whether Homer or Hesiod was the older poet, than to know why Hecuba, although younger than Helen,^a showed her years so lamentably. What, in your opinion, I say, would be the point in trying to determine the respective ages of Achilles and Patroclus? Do you raise the question, "Through what regions did Ulysses stray?" instead of trying to prevent ourselves from going astray at all times? We have no leisure to hear lectures on the question whether he was sea-tost between Italy and Sicily, or outside our known world (indeed, so long a wandering could not possibly have taken place within its narrow bounds); we ourselves encounter storms of the spirit, which toss us daily, and our depravity drives us into all the ills which troubled Ulysses. For us there is never lacking the beauty to tempt our eyes, or the enemy to assail us; on this side are savage monsters that delight in human blood, on that side the treacherous allurements of the ear, and yonder is shipwreck and all the varied category of misfortunes.^b Show me rather, by the example of Ulysses, how I am to love my country, my wife, my father, and how, even after suffering shipwreck, I am to sail toward these ends, honourable as they are. Why try to discover whether Penelope was a pattern of purity,^c or whether she had the laugh on her contemporaries? Or whether she suspected that the man in her presence was Ulysses, before she knew it was he? Teach me

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Doce me, quid sit pudicitia et quantum in ea bonum, in corpore an in animo posita sit.

- 9 Ad musicum transeo : doces me, quomodo inter se acutae ac graves consonent, quomodo nervorum disparem reddentium sonum fiat concordia ; fac potius, quomodo animus secum meus consonet nec consilia mea discrepent. Monstras mihi, qui sint modi flebiles ; monstra potius, quomodo inter adversa non
- 10 emittam flebilem vocem. Metiri me geometres docet latifundia potius quam doceat, quomodo metiar, quantum homini satis sit. Numerare docet me et avaritiae commodat digitos potius quam doceat nihil ad rem pertinere istas computationes, non esse feliciorum, cuius patrimonium tabularios lassat, immo quam supervacua possideat, qui infelicissimus futurus est, si quantum habeat per se computare cogetur.
- 11 Quid mihi prodest scire agellum in partes dividere, si nescio cum fratre dividere ? Quid prodest colligere subtiliter pedes iugeri et comprehendere etiam si quid decempedam effugit, si tristem me facit vicinus inpotens et aliquid ex meo abradens ? Docet quomodo nihil perdam ex finibus meis ; at ego discere
- 12 volo, quomodo totos hilaris amittam. " Paterno agro et avito," inquit, " expellor." Quid ? Ante avum

^a With *acutae* and *graves* supply *voces*.

^b Perhaps the equivalent of a "minor."

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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