

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

ut dum scribis, legas, omnia ad mores et ad sedandam rabiem adfectuum referens. Stude, non ut plus aliquid scias, sed ut melius. VALE.

XC

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Quis dubitare, mi Lucili, potest, quin deorum immortalium munus sit quod vivimus, philosophiae quod bene vivimus? Itaque tanto plus huic nos debere quam dis, quanto maius beneficium est bona vita quam vita, pro certo haberetur, nisi ipsam philosophiam di tribuissent. Cuius scientiam nulli¹ de-
2 derunt, facultatem omnibus. Nam si hanc quoque bonum vulgare fecissent² et prudentes nasceremur, sapientia quod in se optimum habet, perdidisset: inter fortuita non esse.³ Nunc enim hoc in illa pretiosum atque magnificum est, quod non obvenit, quod illam sibi quisque debet, quod non ab alio petitur.

3 Quid haberes quod in philosophia suspiceres, si beneficiaria res esset? Huius opus unum est de divinis humanisque verum invenire.⁴ Ab hac numquam recedit religio, pietas, iustitia et omnis alius comitatus virtutum consertarum et inter se cohaeren-

¹ *nulli* later MSS. ; *ulli* B.

² *fecissent* later MSS. ; *fecisset* B.

³ *non esse* Gloeckner ; *non esset* MSS.

⁴ *invenire* later MSS. ; *inveniri* B.

^a Cf. § 18.

^b Cf. Plato, *Crito* 48, "not life itself, but a good life, is chiefly to be desired."

EPISTLES LXXXIX., XC.

provided that while you write you read, remembering that everything^a you hear or read, is to be applied to conduct, and to the alleviation of passion's fury. Study, not in order to add anything to your knowledge, but to make your knowledge better. Farewell.

XC. ON THE PART PLAYED BY PHILOSOPHY IN THE PROGRESS OF MAN

Who can doubt, my dear Lucilius, that life is the gift of the immortal gods, but that living well^b is the gift of philosophy? Hence the idea that our debt to philosophy is greater than our debt to the gods, in proportion as a good life is more of a benefit than mere life, would be regarded as correct, were not philosophy itself a boon which the gods have bestowed upon us. They have given the knowledge thereof to none, but the faculty of acquiring it they have given to all. For if they had made philosophy also a general good, and if we were gifted with understanding at our birth, wisdom would have lost her best attribute—that she is not one of the gifts of fortune. For as it is, the precious and noble characteristic of wisdom is that she does not advance to meet us, that each man is indebted to himself for her, and that we do not seek her at the hands of others.

What would there be in philosophy worthy of your respect, if she were a thing that came by bounty? Her sole function is to discover the truth about things divine and things human. From her side religion never departs, nor duty, nor justice, nor any of the whole company of virtues which cling

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

tium. Haec docuit colere divina, humana diligere, et penes deos imperium esse, inter homines consortium. Quod aliquandiu inviolatum mansit, antequam societatem avaritia distraxit et paupertatis causa etiam is, quos fecit locupletissimos, fuit. Desierunt¹ enim omnia possidere, dum volunt propria.

4 Sed primi mortalium quique ex his geniti naturam incorrupti sequebantur, eundem habebant et ducem et legem, commissi melioris arbitrio. Naturae est enim potioribus deteriora summittere. Mutis quidem gregibus aut maxima corpora praesunt aut vehementissima. Non praecedit armenta degener taurus, sed qui magnitudine ac toris ceteros mares vicit. Elephantorum gregem excelsissimus ducit; inter homines pro summo² est optimum. Animo itaque rector eligebatur, ideoque summa felicitas erat gentium, in quibus non poterat potentior esse nisi melior. Tuto³ enim quantum vult potest, qui se nisi quod debet non putat posse.⁴

5 Illo ergo saeculo, quod aureum perhibent, penes sapientes fuisse regnum Posidonius iudicat. Hi con-

¹ *desierunt* later MSS.; *desiderium* B.

² *pro summo* ed. Ven. (1492); *proximo* or *pro maximo* MSS.

³ *tuto* Buecheler; *toto* B; *tantum* others.

⁴ *putat posse* some later MSS.; *putat esse* B.

^a Compare the "knowledge of things divine and things human" of lxxxix. 5.

^b The "Golden Age" motif was a frequent one in Latin literature. Compare, e.g., Tibullus, i. 3. 35 ff., the passage beginning:

Quam bene Saturno vivebant rege, priusquam
Tellus in longas est patefacta vias!

Cf. § 46, summing up the message of Seneca's letter.

^c While modern philosophy would probably side with Seneca rather than with Posidonius, it is interesting to know the opinion of Macaulay, who holds (*Essay on Bacon*) that

EPISTLE XC.

together in close-unioned fellowship. Philosophy has taught us to worship that which is divine, to love that which is human^a; she has told us that with the gods lies dominion, and among men, fellowship. This fellowship remained unspoiled for a long time, until avarice tore the community asunder and became the cause of poverty, even in the case of those whom she herself had most enriched. For men cease to possess all things the moment they desire all things for their own.

But the first men and those who sprang from them, still unspoiled, followed nature, having one man as both their leader and their law, entrusting themselves to the control of one better than themselves. For nature has the habit of subjecting the weaker to the stronger. Even among the dumb animals those which are either biggest or fiercest hold sway. It is no weakling bull that leads the herd; it is one that has beaten the other males by his might and his muscle. In the case of elephants, the tallest goes first; among men, the best is regarded as the highest. That is why it was to the mind that a ruler was assigned; and for that reason the greatest happiness rested with those peoples among whom a man could not be the more powerful unless he were the better. For that man can safely accomplish what he will who thinks he can do nothing except what he ought to do.

Accordingly, in that age which is maintained to be the golden age,^b Posidonius^c holds that the government was under the jurisdiction of the wise.

there is much in common between Posidonius and the English inductive philosopher, and thinks but little of Seneca's ideas on the subject. Cf. W. C. Summers, *Select Letters of Seneca*, p. 312.

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

tinebant manus et infirmiore a validioribus tuebantur, suadebant dissuadebantque et utilia atque inutilia monstrabant. Horum prudentia ne quid deesset suis providebat, fortitudo pericula arcebat, beneficentia augebat¹ ornabatque subiectos. Officium erat imperare, non regnum. Nemo quantum posset, adversus eos experiebatur, per quos coeperat posse, nec erat cuiquam aut animus in iniuriam aut causa, cum bene imperanti bene pareretur nihilque rex maius minari male parentibus posset, quam ut abirent² e regno.

6 Sed postquam subrepentibus vitiis in tyrannidem regna conversa sunt, opus esse legibus coepit, quas et ipsas inter initia tulere sapientes. Solon qui Athenas aequo iure fundavit, inter septem fuit³ sapientia notos. Lycurgum si eadem aetas tulisset, sacro illi numero accessisset octavus. Zaleuci leges Charondaeque laudantur. Hi non in foro nec in consultorum atrio, sed in Pythagorae tacito illo sanctoque secessu didicerunt iura, quae florenti tunc Siciliae et per Italiam Graeciae ponent.

7 Haectenus Posidonio adsentior; artes⁴ quidem a philosophia inventas, quibus in cotidiano vita utitur, non concesserim nec illi fabricae adseram gloriam. "Illa," inquit, "sparsos et aut cavis tectos⁵ aut aliqua

¹ *augebat* later MSS.; *agebat* B.

² *abirent* later MSS.; *abiret* B; *quam abire se regno* Gronovius.

³ *fuit* Madvig; *cui* B.

⁴ *adsentior*; *artes* Erasmus; *adsentio partes (artes)* MSS.

⁵ *sparsos . . . tectos* Lipsius; *sparsose caucasis lectos* B.

^a Cleobulus of Rhodes, Periander of Corinth, Pittacus of Mitylene, Bias of Priene, Thales of Miletus, Chilon of Sparta, and Solon of Athens. For some of these substitutions are made in certain lists.

^b Cf. *l.p.* lxxxviii. 20 *ad alia multum, ad virtutem nihil*.

EPISTLE XC.

They kept their hands under control, and protected the weaker from the stronger. They gave advice, both to do and not to do; they showed what was useful and what was useless. Their forethought provided that their subjects should lack nothing; their bravery warded off dangers; their kindness enriched and adorned their subjects. For them ruling was a service, not an exercise of royalty. No ruler tried his power against those to whom he owed the beginnings of his power; and no one had the inclination, or the excuse, to do wrong, since the ruler ruled well and the subject obeyed well, and the king could utter no greater threat against disobedient subjects than that they should depart from the kingdom.

But when once vice stole in and kingdoms were transformed into tyrannies, a need arose for laws; and these very laws were in turn framed by the wise. Solon, who established Athens upon a firm basis by just laws, was one of the seven men renowned for their wisdom.^a Had Lycurgus lived in the same period, an eighth would have been added to that hallowed number seven. The laws of Zaleucus and Charondas are praised; it was not in the forum or in the offices of skilled counsellors, but in the silent and holy retreat of Pythagoras, that these two men learned the principles of justice which they were to establish in Sicily (which at that time was prosperous) and throughout Grecian Italy.

Up to this point I agree with Posidonius; but that philosophy discovered the arts of which life makes use in its daily round^b I refuse to admit, nor will I ascribe to it an artisan's glory. Posidonius says: "When men were scattered over the earth, protected by caves or by the dug-out shelter of a

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

rupe suffossa aut exesae arboris trunco docuit tecta moliri." Ego vero philosophiam iudico non magis excogitasse has machinationes tectorum supra tecta surgentium et urbium urbes prementium quam vivaria
 8 piscium in hoc clausa, ut tempestatum periculum non adiret gula et quamvis acerrime pelago saeviente haberet luxuria portus suos, in quibus distinctos piscium greges saginaret. Quid ais? Philosophia homines docuit habere clavem et seram? Quid¹ aliud erat avaritiae signum dare? Philosophia haec cum tanto habitantium periculo imminetia tecta suspendit? Parum enim erat fortuitis tegi et sine arte et sine difficultate naturale invenire sibi aliquod receptaculum. Mihi crede, felix illud saeculum ante
 9 architectos fuit, ante tectores.² Ista nata sunt iam nascente luxuria, in quadratum tigna decidere et serra per designata currente certa manu trabem scindere,

Nam primi cuneis scindebant fissile lignum.

Non enim tecta cenationi epulum recepturae parabantur, nec in hunc usum pinus aut abies deferebatur longo vehiculorum ordine vicis intrementibus, ut ex illa lacunaria auro gravia penderent. Furcae
 10 utrimque suspensae fulciebant casam. Spissatis ramalibus ac fronde congesta et in proclive disposita

¹ *quid later MSS. ; quidquid B.*

² *ante architectos . . . ista Hense ; antea architektos fuit. antetacteres. ista B.*

^a Vergil, *Georg.* i. 144.

^b Cf. Juvenal, iii. 254 ff. :

Longa cornuscat
 Serraco veniente abies, atque altera pinum
 Plaustra vehunt, nutant alte populoque minantur.

Compare also the "towering tenements" of § 8.

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