

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

mentior rapuit, alia proxima ripae cursu languescente deposuit, alia torrens impetus in mare eiecit. Ideo constituendum est, quid velimus, et in eo perseverandum.

- 9 Hic est locus solvendi aeris alieni. Possum enim tibi vocem Epicuri tui reddere et hanc epistulam liberare: "Molestum est semper vitam incohare." Aut si hoc modo magis sensus potest exprimi: "Male
- 10 vivunt, qui semper vivere incipiunt." "Quare?" inquis, desiderat enim explanationem ista vox. Quia semper illis imperfecta vita est. Non potest autem stare paratus ad mortem, qui modo incipit vivere. Id agendum est, ut satis vixerimus. Nemo
- 11 hoc putat, qui orditur cum maxime vitam. Non est quod existimes paucos esse hos; propemodum omnes sunt. Quidam vero tunc incipiunt, cum desinendum est. Si hoc iudicas mirum, adiciam quod magis admireris: quidam ante vivere desierunt quam inciperent. VALE.

XXIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Sollicitum esse te scribis de iudicii eventu, quod tibi furor inimici denuntiat, existimas me suasurum, ut meliora tibi ipse proponas et adquiescas spei blandae. Quid enim necesse est mala accersere,

^a Frag. 493 Usener.

^b Seneca's theme is suggested by the fear which possesses Lucilius as to the issue of a lawsuit. This fear is taken as typical of all fears, and Seneca devotes most of his letter to the greatest fear of all,—fear of death.

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are transported gently; others are torn along by a more violent current; some, which are nearest the bank, are left there as the current slackens; and others are carried out to sea by the onrush of the stream. Therefore, we should decide what we wish, and abide by the decision.

Now is the time for me to pay my debt. I can give you a saying of your friend Epicurus ^a and thus clear this letter of its obligation: "It is bothersome always to be beginning life." Or another, which will perhaps express the meaning better: "They live ill who are always beginning to live." You are right in asking why; the saying certainly stands in need of a commentary. It is because the life of such persons is always incomplete. But a man cannot stand prepared for the approach of death if he has just begun to live. We must make it our aim already to have lived long enough. No one deems that he has done so, if he is just on the point of planning his life. You need not think that there are few of this kind; practically everyone is of such a stamp. Some men, indeed, only begin to live when it is time for them to leave off living. And if this seems surprising to you, I shall add that which will surprise you still more: Some men have left off living before they have begun. Farewell.

XXIV. ON DESPISING DEATH ^b

You write me that you are anxious about the result of a lawsuit, with which an angry opponent is threatening you; and you expect me to advise you to picture to yourself a happier issue, and to rest in the allurements of hope. Why, indeed, is

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satis cito patienda cum venerint, praesumere ac praesens tempus futuri metu perdere? Est sine dubio stultum, quia quandoque sis futurus miser, esse iam miserum. Sed ego alia te ad securitatem
2 via ducam: si vis omnem sollicitudinem exuere, quicquid vereris ne eveniat, eventurum utique propone, et quodcumque est illud malum, tecum ipse metire ac timorem tuum taxa; intelleges profecto aut non magnum aut non longum esse, quod metuis.
3 Nec diu exempla, quibus confirmeris, colligenda sunt; omnis illa aetas tulit. In quamcumque partem rerum vel civilium vel externarum memoriam miseris, occurrent tibi ingenia aut profectus aut inpetus magni.

Numquid accidere tibi, si damnaris, potest durius quam ut mittaris in exilium, ut ducaris in carcerem? Numquid ultra quicquam ulli timendum est quam ut uratur, quam ut pereat? Singula ista constitue et contemptores eorum cita, qui non quaerendi, sed
4 eligendi sunt. Damnationem suam Rutilius sic tulit, tamquam nihil illi molestum aliud esset quam quod male iudicaretur. Exilium Metellus fortiter tulit, Rutilius etiam libenter; alter, ut rediret, rei publicae praestitit, alter reditum suum Sullae negavit, cui nihil tunc negabatur. In carcere Socrates disputavit et exire, cum essent qui promitterent fugam, noluit remansitque, ut duarum rerum gravissimarum homini-

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it necessary to summon trouble,—which must be endured soon enough when it has once arrived,—or to anticipate trouble and ruin the present through fear of the future? It is indeed foolish to be unhappy now because you may be unhappy at some future time. But I shall conduct you to peace of mind by another route: if you would put off all worry, assume that what you fear may happen will certainly happen in any event; whatever the trouble may be, measure it in your own mind, and estimate the amount of your fear. You will thus understand that what you fear is either insignificant or short-lived. And you need not spend a long time in gathering illustrations which will strengthen you; every epoch has produced them. Let your thoughts travel into any era of Roman or foreign history, and there will throng before you notable examples of high achievement or of high endeavour.

If you lose this case, can anything more severe happen to you than being sent into exile or led to prison? Is there a worse fate that any man may fear than being burned or being killed? Name such penalties one by one, and mention the men who have scorned them; one does not need to hunt for them,—it is simply a matter of selection. Sentence of conviction was borne by Rutilius as if the injustice of the decision were the only thing which annoyed him. Exile was endured by Metellus with courage, by Rutilius even with gladness; for the former consented to come back only because his country called him; the latter refused to return when Sulla summoned him,—and nobody in those days said “No” to Sulla! Socrates in prison discoursed, and declined to flee when certain persons gave him the opportunity; he remained there, in order to free mankind from the

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5 bus metum demeret, mortis et carceris. Mucius ignibus manum inposuit. Acerbum est uri; quanto acerbius, si id te faciente patiaris! Vides hominem non eruditum nec ullis praeceptis contra mortem aut dolorem subornatum, militari tantum robore instructum, poenas a se inriti conatus exigentem; spectator destillantis in hostili foculo dexteræ stetit nec ante removit nudis ossibus fluentem manum, quam ignis illi ab hoste subductus est. Facere aliquid in illis castris felicius potuit, nihil fortius. Vide quanto acrior sit ad occupanda pericula virtus quam crudelitas ad inroganda: facilius Porsenna Mucio ignovit, quod voluerat occidere, quam sibi Mucius, quod non occiderat.

6 “Decantatae,” inquis, “in omnibus scholis fabulae istae sunt; iam mihi, cum ad contemnendam mortem ventum fuerit, Catonem narrabis.” Quidni ego narrem ultima illa nocte Platonis librum legentem posito ad caput gladio? Duo haec in rebus extremis instrumenta prospexerat, alterum ut vellet mori, alterum, ut posset. Compositis ergo rebus, utcumque componi fractae atque ultimae poterant, id agendum existimavit, ne cui Catonem aut occidere liceret aut
7 servare contingeret. Et stricto gladio, quem usque in illum diem ab omni caede purum servaverat: “Nihil,” inquit, “egisti, fortuna, omnibus conatibus meis obstando. Non pro mea adhuc sed pro patriae

^a The *foculus* in this version of the story was evidently a movable fire, a brazier.

^b The *Phaedo*, on the immortality of the soul.

^c *i. e.*, to save and bring back to Rome as prisoner.

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fear of two most grievous things, death and imprisonment. Mucius put his hand into the fire. It is painful to be burned; but how much more painful to inflict such suffering upon oneself! Here was a man of no learning, not primed to face death and pain by any words of wisdom, and equipped only with the courage of a soldier, who punished himself for his fruitless daring; he stood and watched his own right hand falling away piecemeal on the enemy's brazier,^a nor did he withdraw the dissolving limb, with its uncovered bones, until his foe removed the fire. He might have accomplished something more successful in that camp, but never anything more brave. See how much keener a brave man is to lay hold of danger than a cruel man is to inflict it: Porsenna was more ready to pardon Mucius for wishing to slay him than Mucius to pardon himself for failing to slay Porsenna!

“Oh,” say you, “those stories have been droned to death in all the schools; pretty soon, when you reach the topic ‘On Despising Death,’ you will be telling me about Cato.” But why should I not tell you about Cato, how he read Plato's^b book on that last glorious night, with a sword laid at his pillow? He had provided these two requisites for his last moments,—the first, that he might have the will to die, and the second, that he might have the means. So he put his affairs in order,—as well as one could put in order that which was ruined and near its end,—and thought that he ought to see to it that no one should have the power to slay or the good fortune to save^c Cato. Drawing the sword,—which he had kept unstained from all bloodshed against the final day,—he cried: “Fortune, you have accomplished nothing by resisting all my endeavours. I have fought, till

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libertate pugnavi, nec agebam tanta pertinacia, ut liber, sed ut inter liberos viverem. Nunc quoniam deploratae sunt res generis humani, Cato deducatur
8 in tutum." Inpressit deinde mortiferum corpori vulnus. Quo obligato a medicis cum minus sanguinis haberet, minus virium, animi idem, iam non tantum Caesari sed sibi iratus nudas in vulnus manus egit et generosum illum contemptoremque omnis potentiae spiritum non emisit, sed eiecit.

9 Non in hoc exempla nunc congero, ut ingenium exerceam, sed ut te adversus id, quod maxime terribile videtur, exhorter. Facilius autem exhortabor, si ostendero non fortes tantum viros hoc momentum efflandae animae contempsisse, sed quosdam ad alia ignavos in hac re aequasse animum fortissimorum, sicut illum Cn. Pompei socerum Scipionem, qui contrario in Africam vento relatus cum teneri navem suam vidisset ab hostibus, ferro se transverberavit et quaerentibus, ubi imperator esset, "Imperator,"
10 inquit, "se bene habet." Vox haec illum parem maioribus fecit et fatalem Scipionibus in Africa gloriam non est interrumpi passa. Multum fuit Carthaginem vincere, sed amplius mortem. "Imperator," inquit, "se bene habet." An aliter debebat
11 imperator, et quidem Catonis, mori? Non revoco te ad historias nec ex omnibus saeculis contemptores

^a Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal at Zama in 202 B.C. Scipio Aemilianus, also surnamed Africanus, was by adoption the grandson of Hannibal's conqueror. He captured Carthage in the Third Punic War, 146 B.C. The Scipio mentioned by Seneca died in 46 B.C.

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