

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

XXV.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quod ad duos amicos nostros pertinet, diversa via eundum est; alterius enim vitia emendanda, alterius frangenda sunt. Utar libertate tota. Non amo illum, nisi offendo. "Quid ergo?" inquis, "quadragenarium pupillum cogitas sub tutela tua continere? Respice aetatem eius iam duram et intractabilem.
- 2 Non potest reformari; tenera finguntur." An profecturus sim nescio. Malo successum mihi quam fidem deesse. Nec desperaveris etiam diutinos aegros posse sanari, si contra intemperantiam steteris, si multa invites et facere coegeris et pati. Ne de altero quidem satis fiduciae habeo, excepto eo, quod adhuc peccare erubescit. Nutriendus est hic pudor, qui quamdiu in animo eius duraverit, aliquis erit bonae spei locus. Cum hoc veterano parcius agendum puto, ne in desperationem sui veniat. Nec ullum tempus adgrediendi fuit melius quam hoc, dum interquiescit, dum emendato similis est. Aliis haec intermissio eius inposuit; mihi verba non dat. Exspecto cum magno faenore vitia reditura, quae nunc scio cessare, non deesse. Inpendam huic rei dies et utrum possit aliquid agi an non possit, experiar.

^a The second friend, whose faults are to be crushed out. He proves to be some forty years old; the other is a youth.

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XXV. ON REFORMATION

With regard to these two friends of ours, we must proceed along different lines; the faults of the one are to be corrected, the other's are to be crushed out. I shall take every liberty; for I do not love this one "if I am unwilling to hurt his feelings. "What," you say, "do you expect to keep a forty-year-old ward under your tutelage? Consider his age, how hardened it now is, and past handling! Such a man cannot be re-shaped; only young minds are moulded." I do not know whether I shall make progress; but I should prefer to lack success rather than to lack faith. You need not despair of curing sick men even when the disease is chronic, if only you hold out against excess and force them to do and submit to many things against their will. As regards our other friend I am not sufficiently confident, either, except for the fact that he still has sense of shame enough to blush for his sins. This modesty should be fostered; so long as it endures in his soul, there is some room for hope. But as for this veteran of yours, I think we should deal more carefully with him, that he may not become desperate about himself. There is no better time to approach him than now, when he has an interval of rest and seems like one who has corrected his faults. Others have been cheated by this interval of virtue on his part, but he does not cheat me. I feel sure that these faults will return, as it were, with compound interest, for just now, I am certain, they are in abeyance but not absent. I shall devote some time to the matter, and try to see whether or not something can be done.

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4 Tu nobis te, ut facis, fortem praesta et sarcinas
contrahe. Nihil ex his, quae habemus, necessarium
est. Ad legem naturae revertamur; divitiae paratae
sunt. Aut gratuitum est, quo egemus, aut vile;
panem et aquam natura desiderat. Nemo ad haec
pauper est, intra quae quisquis desiderium suum clusit,
cum ipso Iove de felicitate contendat, ut ait Epicurus,
5 cuius aliquam vocem huic epistulae involvam. "Sic
fac," inquit, "omnia, tamquam spectet Epicurus."
Prodest sine dubio custodem sibi inposuisse et habere,
quem respicias, quem interesse cogitationibus tuis
iudices. Hoc quidem longe magnificentius est, sic
vivere tamquam sub alicuius boni viri ac semper
praesentis oculis, sed ego etiam hoc contentus sum,
ut sic facias, quaecumque facies, tamquam spectet
6 aliquis; omnia nobis mala solitudo persuadet. Cum
iam profeceris tantum, ut sit tibi etiam tui reverentia,
licebit dimittas paedagogum; interim aliquorum te
auctoritate custodi, aut Cato ille sit aut Scipio aut
Laelius aut talis, cuius¹ interventu perditique quoque
homines vitia supprimerent, dum te efficis eum, cum
quo peccare non audeas. Cum hoc effeceris, et aliqua
coeperit apud te tui esse dignatio, incipiam tibi per-
mittere, quod idem suadet Epicurus: "Tunc prae-
cipue in te ipse secede, cum esse cogaris in turba."

¹ *aut talis, cuius* Disselbeck and Buecheler; *aut alicuius*
(*aut cuius*) MSS.

^a Frag. 211 Usener.

^b Frag. 209 Usener.

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But do you yourself, as indeed you are doing, show me that you are stout-hearted; lighten your baggage for the march. None of our possessions is essential. Let us return to the law of nature; for then riches are laid up for us. The things which we actually need are free for all, or else cheap; nature craves only bread and water. No one is poor according to this standard; when a man has limited his desires within these bounds, he can challenge the happiness of Jove himself, as Epicurus says. I must insert in this letter one or two more of his sayings: ^a "Do everything as if Epicurus were watching you." There is no real doubt that it is good for one to have appointed a guardian over oneself, and to have someone whom you may look up to, someone whom you may regard as a witness of your thoughts. It is, indeed, nobler by far to live as you would live under the eyes of some good man, always at your side; but nevertheless I am content if you only act, in whatever you do, as you would act if anyone at all were looking on; because solitude prompts us to all kinds of evil. And when you have progressed so far that you have also respect for yourself, you may send away your attendant; but until then, set as a guard over yourself the authority of some man, whether your choice be the great Cato, or Scipio, or Laelius,—or any man in whose presence even abandoned wretches would check their bad impulses. Meantime, you are engaged in making of yourself the sort of person in whose company you would not dare to sin. When this aim has been accomplished and you begin to hold yourself in some esteem, I shall gradually allow you to do what Epicurus, in another passage, suggests: ^b "The time when you should most of all withdraw into yourself is when you are forced to be in a crowd."

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- 7 Dissimilem te fieri multis oportet. Dum tibi tutum non est ¹ ad te recedere, circumspice singulos; nemo est, cui non satius sit cum quolibet esse quam secum. "Tunc praecipue in te ipse secede, cum esse cogeris in turba"; si bonus vir, si quietus, si temperans. Alioquin in turbam tibi a te recedendum est; istic malo viro propius es. VALE.

XXVI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Modo dicebam tibi, in conspectu esse me senectutis; iam vereor, ne senectutem post me reliquerim. Aliud iam his annis, certe huic corpori, vocabulum convenit, quoniam quidem senectus lassae aetatis, non fractae, nomen est; inter decrepitos me numera et extrema tangentis.
- 2 Gratias tamen mihi apud te ago; non sentio in animo aetatis iniuriam, cum sentiam in corpore. Tantum vitia et vitiorum ministeria senuerunt; viget animus et gaudet non multum sibi esse cum corpore. Magnam partem oneris sui posuit. Exultat et mihi facit controversiam de senectute. Hunc ait esse
- 3 florem suum. Credamus illi; bono suo utatur. Ire in cogitationem iubet et dispicere, quid ex hac

¹ *est* Muretus; *sit* MSS.

^a Because "solitude prompts to evil," § 5.

^b See the twelfth letter. Seneca was by this time at least sixty-five years old, and probably older.

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You ought to make yourself of a different stamp from the multitude. Therefore, while it is not yet safe to withdraw into solitude,^a seek out certain individuals; for everyone is better off in the company of somebody or other,—no matter who,—than in his own company alone. “The time when you should most of all withdraw into yourself is when you are forced to be in a crowd.” Yes, provided that you are a good, tranquil, and self-restrained man; otherwise, you had better withdraw into a crowd in order to get away from your self. Alone, you are too close to a rascal. Farewell.

XXVI. ON OLD AGE AND DEATH

I was just lately telling you that I was within sight of old age.^b I am now afraid that I have left old age behind me. For some other word would now apply to my years, or at any rate to my body; since old age means a time of life that is weary rather than crushed. You may rate me in the worn-out class,—of those who are nearing the end.

Nevertheless, I offer thanks to myself, with you as witness; for I feel that age has done no damage to my mind, though I feel its effects on my constitution. Only my vices, and the outward aids to these vices, have reached senility; my mind is strong and rejoices that it has but slight connexion with the body. It has laid aside the greater part of its load. It is alert; it takes issue with me on the subject of old age; it declares that old age is its time of bloom. Let me take it at its word, and let it make the most of the advantages it possesses. The mind bids me do some thinking and consider how much of this

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