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SENECA
MORAL ESSAYS
VOLUME I



Translated by
JOHN W. BASORE

SENECA

MORAL ESSAYS

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WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY

JOHN W. BASORE
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SENECA

I

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INTRODUCTION

SPRUNG from the rich and talented Spanish family of the *Annaei*, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, second son of Seneca the rhetorician, became the most important public and literary figure at Rome in the age of Nero. His mother was Helvia, a lady of native intelligence, some culture, and many virtues. An elder brother, Novatus, known after his adoption as Gallio, was governor of Achaia under Claudius, and survives in Christian annals (Acts xviii. 12-17) with undeserved odium as the Roman official before whom the apostle Paul was arraigned. Mela, the younger brother, of more retiring disposition, but rated by his father as the ablest of the three, lives only as the father of a famous son—the epic poet Lucan, whose precocious and flamboyant powers marked him out as the prodigy of his distinguished, but ill-fated, family, of which no chief member survived the catastrophe of the Pisonian conspiracy. Lucan, his father, and both his uncles were all objects of Nero's vengeance.

The career of Seneca himself was marked by spectacular shifts of fortune, amid which he appears a puzzling and at times a pathetic figure—the victim alike of imperial hostility and favour. Born

INTRODUCTION

at Corduba about 4 B.C., he was brought to Rome while still a child in arms. There, carefully nurtured and broadly trained in rhetoric and philosophy, he entered upon the senatorial career and gained the quaestorship probably under Tiberius. By his eloquence in the Senate, he is said to have aroused the jealousy of Caligula and to have escaped death only because, it was averred, he was already doomed by ill-health to die. Of his ill-health we hear much in his writings, but he outlived Caligula and missed no opportunity to take pitiless revenge upon him with his pen. Under Claudius he fell upon actual disaster. Through the agency of the empress Messalina, Seneca, now established as a man of letters and, apparently, of fashion, was accused of an intrigue with the notorious Julia Livilla, sister of Caligula, whom her uncle promptly upon his accession had recalled from exile, and both were banished. After he had spent eight weary and fretful years in dismal Corsica, during which, however, he found some solace in writing and study, Agrippina, now the wife of Claudius, secured his recall in A.D. 49, and raised him to the post of tutor to her young son, the future emperor Nero. A year later he was praetor. From this time Seneca's fortunes were linked with those of Nero. He grew in honour, wealth,^a and power, and for five years after Nero's accession was, along with Burrus, the virtuous old praetorian, the emperor's acknowledged confidant and guide. But gradually his influence weakened, and after the death of Burrus in A.D. 62 he sought unavailingly for obscurity

^a There are many references to the lordly wealth which Seneca amassed. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* xiii. 42. 6; Juv. x. 16; Dio, lxi. 10. 2.

INTRODUCTION

in retirement. Three years later, charged with complicity in the conspiracy of Piso, he was forced to commit suicide, and met death with dignity and Stoic fortitude.

The special significance of Seneca is, in brief, that he revived the subject of philosophy in Latin literature, spiritualized and humanized Stoicism, and became the exponent of a new style, that exploited the short sentence, rhetoric, and declamation. The artificialities of his pointed style have found many critics, both early and late. Caligula^a called his speeches—not now extant—"prize declamations, sand without lime," the archaist Gellius^b condemns his influence, and Fronto^c censures his literary affectations. Quintilian^d with truer discernment indicts more severely his taste than his methods, for it is in the excesses of rhetoric that he most often offends.^e That he was the most brilliant writer, as well as the most independent thinker, of his day few will now deny.

In philosophy Seneca's interests were purely ethical. He was a bold, but inconsistent, moralist—a preacher rather than an exemplar of Stoic virtue. His discourses are, in the end, Stoic sermons, informal in structure, lacking too often the marks of ordered presentation, but usually effective in the quickness of their appeal. While ostensibly an adherent of Stoic materialism, he shows the independence of an eclectic and becomes particularly noteworthy in his

^a Suet. *Calig.* 53.

^b xii. 2.

^c *Epist.* p. 156 (Naber).

^d x. 1. 130.

^e An admirable analysis and discussion of Seneca's style will be found in the Introductions A and B of Mr. Summers's edition of *Select Letters*.

INTRODUCTION

Virgil. Younger than Seneca, he seems to have maintained with him a long friendship of peculiar loyalty. If, as Waltz supposes, the *De Providentia* belongs to the early years of the exile, Seneca's own fortunes may well have called forth the questioning of Lucilius concerning the ways of Providence which gave excuse for the essay. In treating his subject Seneca elaborates the thesis that no evils can befall the good man, by interpreting adversities, not as evils, but as wholesome opportunities provided by a beneficent deity for the testing of virtue. The discourse closes with a passage of restrained rhetoric, giving Stoic approval of suicide as a reasonable departure from trials too great.

Annaeus Serenus, the young friend, or relative, of Seneca to whom are addressed the *De Constantia* and two other treatises, is said to have been prefect of Nero's nightwatchmen (*praefectus Neronis vigilum*). He is mentioned by Tacitus^a as an intimate friend of Seneca, who with a show of loyalty screened the indiscretions of Nero in his affair with Acte. Seneca had for him the deepest affection and counselled him in philosophy with fatherly solicitude. He apparently was an Epicurean. Though much younger than Seneca, he died first, probably in A.D. 62. Seneca descants upon his premature death in one of his *Letters* (lxiii. 14), and refers feelingly to the bitterness of his grief.

The essay itself is exceptional in its orderly arrangement. After affirming the superiority of the Stoics over other schools of philosophy, the author takes as his text the Stoic paradox that the wise man can receive no injury. This he proceeds to relieve

^a *Ann.* xiii. 13.

INTRODUCTION

by an exposition of the true inwardness of the wise man's fortunes. Setting up a distinction between "injury" and "insult," he shows *seriatim* the invulnerability of the wise man to both, and after conditioned praise of Epicurus's view, closes the discussion with a justification of the Stoic position.

Of Seneca's brother Novatus, to whom the *De Ira* is addressed, something has already been said. He was much beloved for his amiability, was an eminent declaimer, if we are to trust Jerome,^a and at an unknown date was adopted by the rhetorician Junius Gallio. He reached the consulship, was governor of Achaia in A.D. 52, and died by his own hand in 66.

Seneca used authorities assiduously, and for the elaborate disquisition *On Anger* had several available; Sotion, his master in philosophy, had written *περὶ ὀργῆς*, and may well have been one. Though the arrangement of the essay is noticeably faulty,^b and its style is fervid with rhetoric, the wealth of its illustrative matter gives it unusual interest. Book I. deals with the outward aspects, the harm, and the various definitions of anger; Book II. discusses its origin, its nature, and its remedies; Book III. repeats much that has been said before, and continues with the new topic of how to check the anger of others.

The *De Clementia*, addressed to the emperor Nero, was written just after the young prince had finished his eighteenth year, and was intended to guide him toward the ideal of a merciful and popular ruler. It gives interesting evidence of Seneca's own public

^a In the statement of Jerome (*ad a. Abr.* 2080) the son may be confused with his adoptive father.

^b Compare the similarity of the topical divisions in ii. 18. 1 and iii. 5. 2.

INTRODUCTION

wisdom, of his tendency to flattery, and of his method in dealing with his difficult pupil. Unfortunately, more than half of the work has been lost.

The most important manuscript of the *Dialogues* is the *Codex Ambrosianus*, at Milan, belonging to the tenth or the eleventh century. This has been designated A, and the readings of its later correctors, A¹⁻⁶. An additional manuscript available for the *De Ira* is the *Codex Laurentianus* (designated L) of the twelfth or thirteenth century. The best manuscript of the *De Clementia* is the *Codex Nazarianus* (designated N) in the Palatine collection of the Vatican. This belongs to the eighth or ninth century. Two others of the twelfth century are the *Codex Amplonianus* at Erfurt (designated A), which is not complete, and the *Codex Parisinus* 8542 (designated T). In the critical notes O is used to designate a consensus of N, A, and other principal manuscripts. For the complete apparatus the editions of Hermes and Hosius may be consulted.

The texts adopted for translation are, for the *Dialogues*, that of Hermes, Leipzig, 1905, for the *De Clementia*, that of Hosius, Leipzig, 1900. Except minor changes in punctuation and orthography, divergencies from these have been duly recorded in the critical notes.

J. W. B.

PRINCETON, N.J.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	vii
DE PROVIDENTIA	2
DE CONSTANTIA	48
DE IRA	106
DE CLEMENTIA	356
INDEX OF NAMES	450

SENECA
MORAL ESSAYS

L. ANNAEI SENECAE DIALOGORVM

LIBER I

AD LVCILIVM

QVARE ALIQUA INCOMMODA BONIS VIRIS
ACCIDANT, CVM PROVIDENTIA SIT

(*De Providentia*)

- 1 1. Quaesisti a me, Lucili, quid ita, si providentia mundus regeretur, multa bonis viris mala acciderent. Hoc commodius in contextu operis redderetur, cum praeesse universis providentiam probaremus et interesse nobis deum; sed quoniam a toto particulam revelli placet et unam contradictionem manente lite integra solvere, faciam rem non difficilem, causam deorum agam.
- 2 Supervacuum est in praesentia ostendere non sine aliquo custode tantum opus stare nec hunc siderum coetum discursumque fortuiti impetus esse, et quae casus incitat saepe turbari et cito arietare, hanc inoffensam velocitatem procedere aeternae legis imperio

THE DIALOGUES OF LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA

BOOK I

TO LUCILIUS ON PROVIDENCE

*Why, though there is a Providence, some Misfortunes
befall Good Men.*

You have asked me, Lucilius, why, if a Providence rules the world, it still happens that many evils befall good men. This would be more fittingly answered in a coherent work designed to prove that a Providence does preside over the universe, and that God concerns himself with us. But since it is your wish that a part be severed from the whole, and that I refute a single objection while the main question is left untouched, I shall do so ; the task is not difficult, —I shall be pleading the cause of the gods.

For the present purpose it is unnecessary to show that this mighty structure of the world does not endure without some one to guard it, and that the assembling and the separate flight of the stars above are not due to the workings of chance ; that while bodies which owe their motion to accident often fall into disorder and quickly collide, this swift revolution of the heavens, being ruled by eternal law, goes

SENECA

tantum rerum terra marique gestantem, tantum clarissimorum luminum et ex disposito relucentium ; non esse materiae errantis hunc ordinem nec quae temere coierunt tanta arte pendere, ut terrarum gravissimum pondus sedeat immotum et circa se properantis caeli fugam spectet, ut infusa vallibus maria molliant terras nec ullum incrementum fluminum sentiant, ut ex minimis seminibus nascantur
3 ingentia. Ne illa quidem quae videntur confusa et incerta, pluvias dico nubesque et elisorum fulminum iactus et incendia ruptis montium verticibus effusa, tremores labantis soli aliaque quae tumultuosa pars rerum circa terras movet, sine ratione, quamvis subita sint, accidunt, sed suas et illa causas habent non minus quam quae alienis locis conspecta miraculo sunt, ut in mediis fluctibus calentes aquae et nova
4 insularum in vasto exsipientium mari spatia. Iam vero si quis observaverit nudari litora pelago in se recedente eademque intra exiguum tempus operiri, credet caeca quadam volutatione modo contrahi undas et introrsum agi, modo erumpere et magno cursu repetere sedem suam, cum interim illae portionibus crescunt et ad horam ac diem subeunt ampliores

^a Seneca's rhetoric omits the intermediate step of the transformation into rain.