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## SENECA AND NERO.

### II.

In 62, Burrus died, and Seneca knew that the newer and coarser favorites (*Tac. Ann.*, 14, 52) were incessantly intriguing against him, charging particularly against him the enormous wealth he had amassed, the magnificence of his parks and villas, and that he disapproved of Nero's appearing in musical monologs and in horse-racing. The emperor was old enough, they urged, to dispense with his preceptor. Seneca requested permission to retire from public affairs. The emperor accepted his resignation, but refused to take back to himself the wealth which he had bestowed upon him who had been foremost in his affections (*praecipuus caritate*).

But three years were left to the brilliant Corduban, years which he largely spent far from the madding crowd and from the insincerities of a courtier's life. More than half of Seneca's extant prose writings, inclusive of his enquiries into physical phenomena (*Quaestiones Naturales*), were composed by the retired minister of state in these three years. He resided often on his estate near Nomentum, not far from Rome, or on the Gulf of Naples.

He was now indeed an old man, and was bent on living what little span there might be largely in company with his better self, and cheered by the company of his second wife, Paulina, a lady sprung from the aristocracy of Rome. The greater and better part of these readings must deal with the thinker and moralist, and largely be made up from his own

thoughts and utterances. Of these latter I beg to cite from, (*Epist. Moral.*, 26, 1 sqq.)

"I was just telling you that I was in sight of old age; I now fear that I have left old age behind me. A different term befits my years, assuredly befits my body. Since, indeed, old age is the term for a worn-out period of life, not a broken one, count me among the decrepit, and those who are touching the last things. Still I am rendering thanks to myself in your estimate. I do not feel in my mind the ravages of age, while I do feel them in my body. Only faults, and the agencies that serve faults, have aged; my soul is vigorous, and rejoices that it has not much in common with the body. A great part of the burden of itself it has laid down. It exults and challenges me to a debate about old age; it claims that old age is its flowering period. Let us believe it; let it avail itself of its advantage. It bids me reflect and examine what part of this calm and this simplicity of living I owe to philosophy, what to my time of life, and carefully to investigate what I cannot do, and what I do not wish to do; . . . for what a plaint is it, what disadvantage, if, whatever ought to terminate, has given out? The greatest discomfort it is, you say, to be lessened, to pass away, and, to speak exactly, to be dissolved. For not suddenly are we driven in and leveled; we are consumed bit by bit. . . . I certainly, as though the test were approaching and that the day had come, which is to pass a verdict on all my years, thus observe myself: A mere nothing, I say, as yet, is that which I have put forward either by acts or words. Slight and deceptive pledges of the soul are those and wrapped up in many coverings of mere glitter. Without fear, therefore, I shall arrange my being for that day, on which, after tortuous devices and varnishes have been removed, I am to sit in judgment on myself, whether I merely utter brave words, or really hold them as conviction, whether something has been merely a pretense and an acted part, whatever of contemptuous words I have flung forth against fortune. Away with the opinion which men have been entertaining of me! It is always one

of doubt and equally allotted to good or evil. Away with the pursuits followed all my life! Death is to pronounce judgment on you. So I say: discourses and conferences on letters and words gathered from the precepts of philosophers, and scholarly talk, do not display the real strength of the soul. Mere *words* are bold even for the most timid; what you have *done* will appear when you will lie in your last struggle. I accept the terms, I shrink not from the judgment." Elsewhere (*Ep.* 30, 3): "It is a great thing, this, and one which must be learned during a long period, when comes on the inevitable hour, to go away with a calm soul." Everywhere the deep conflict in the soul, which insists, or would gladly insist, on autonomy and sovereignty in the face of death, and maintain the scepter in the face of dissolution. How frank, too, the complete denial of value for all that the world holds dear, and the confession that all attainments and achievements are as nothing on the inevitable day!—Who is not reminded of the 90th Psalm by these reflections (*Ep.* 49, 2): "It is but now that I seem to have lost you. For what is not 'but now' if you recall things? It is but now that 'as a young person I sat at the feet of the philosopher Lotion. It is but now that I began to plead cases. It is but now that I ceased to be able to do so. Immense is the swiftness of time, which appears more when we look back. For it deceives those who are engrossed with pleasant things; so imperceptible is the passing of headlong flight. You ask the cause of this? Whatever time has gone by is in the same situation: it presents the same aspect, it is equally destroyed. Everything falls into the abyss." And he, indeed, had gained all that the world of men held dear and holds dear, fame, power, money, and for some years the real administration of the Mediterranean world.

It may interest us to pass from these reflections to the concrete details of the manner in which in his old age he spends his day (*Ep.* 83). "It is wholly divided between reclining and reading. Very little is betowed upon physical exercise; and on the score of this I am grateful to old age:

it costs me not much; when I have stirred a bit, I am tired. And this, indeed, is the end of training exercise even for the most vigorous of men. You ask me who my trainers are? The single Earinus does for me, a charming boy, as you know. But he will change. I am now looking for one of more tender age. He indeed says we have the same crisis, because we are both losing our teeth. But now I hardly keep up with him when he is running, and in a few days I shall not be able to do so. . . . From this, which is exhaustion rather than exercise, I descend into my cold bath; this, in my present estimation, I call not warm enough. I, the great believer in the cold water regimen, who was wont to greet my channel (in the villa) on the first day of January, who on the new year, as to read, write, say something, was wont to make a beginning by jumping into the Aqua Virgo, first shifted my camp to the Tiber, then to this throne, which, when I am particularly vigorous and everything good as I trust, the sun controls. There is not much left for me for the bath. Then some dry bread and a luncheon without a table, after which it is not even necessary to wash my hands. I sleep very little. You know my habits; my sleep is very short and with intervals. I am satisfied. Sometimes I really know that I have slept; sometimes I suppose so. Why, there the din of the circensian games interferes with my hearing! My ears are sharply struck by some kind of sudden and general shouting. Still these things do not upset my reflection nor interrupt it. The roar, indeed, I bear with complete patience. Many voices which commingle into one are for me like the noise of many waters, or when the gale lashes a forest, and the other sounds, which have no connection with intelligence."

How little the Roman religion, so called, figured in Seneca's life or in his soul we could even now freely assume. It was a body of ritual, of institutions, of anniversaries, which were closely bound up with the history and achievements of the commonwealth; nothing can be conceived that was more non-spiritual, more outward and external. When we consider

that St. Paul resided at Rome about the same time that Seneca composed his *Epistulae Morales*, we pause for many a reflection. One impressive truth seems to rise before our historical quest: The Roman ritual had no concern with conscience and eternal hopes; where Christianity was to enter in was not as a citadel held by a goodly host, but a vacuum, or a bleak cave, crossed and recrossed by many a dangling spider-web of Etruscan superstition; it was not, in any higher sense, any religion at all worthy of that name. Among the lost essays of Seneca there was one entitled *De Superstitione*, known to us mainly through St. Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* 6, 10). The great theologian readily felt, as to Seneca, the same contrast which we feel between the outward conduct of his life and his writings. In that composition, then, Seneca expounded the natural theology of his own Stoic sect and of other Greek philosophies, and contrasted these with some ritual institutions of early Rome: "What then? Do more true seem to you the dreams of T. Tatius or of Tullus Hostilius? A deity of the sewers Tatius dedicated as a goddess; Romulus established Picus and Tiberinus; Hostilius, Pavor and Pallor, the most repulsive of human emotions, one of which is the stirring of the frightened mind, the other, not even a disease of the body, but its complexion. Will you rather believe these to be divine powers, and receive them in heaven?" After referring to the noisome cult of Cybele, the Phrygian Earth-mother, with the self-emasculation of its votaries and its insane debauchery, all figuring as "religion," he turns with fearless satire to the foremost sanctuary of the imperial commonwealth, that of the Capitoline Jupiter, tutelary deity of Rome.

During his sojourn in Egypt Seneca had observed the annual mourning for the lost Osiris, soon followed by the ritual exultation due to his being found again. This had amused him, as it was all a fiction. "Still," Seneca proceeded in that treatise, "there was a definite time for that insanity; it is endurable to be out of one's wits once a year. I came into the Capitol; I will be ashamed of the imbecility displayed

to the world, what function the vain insanity imposes upon itself. One furnishes names to the god, another reports to Jupiter what time it is, another is bailiff to him, another 'the anointer, who with a vain movement with his arms counterfeits one who is anointing. There are those who dress the hair of Juno and Minerva; standing at a distance from the temple, not merely from the cult figure, they move their fingers in the manner of hair-dressers.' There are women who hold a mirror; there are men who summon the gods to attend on their own bail-bonds; there are those who present written memoranda, and explain their case to them. A well-drilled chief actor, an old man, mere skin and bones, every day in the Capitol, went through a pantomime as though the gods took satisfaction in seeing one whom men had ceased to see; every kind of stage artist is loafing there, going through their performances for the benefit of the immortal gods. Even certain women sit in the Capitol who think Jupiter is enamored of them, and they are not even frightened by regard for Juno, a most wrathful being, if you will believe the poets." It was all institutional, and Seneca expresses his own attitude as that of purely civic conformity and tradition in these words: "All these things the sage will preserve as ordered by the laws, but not as welcome to the gods." "All that contemptible medley of gods which long superstition has gathered together in a long span of time we will so worship as to remember that their cult is more a matter of custom than of any vital concern." Augustine censures Seneca even for this minimal degree of outward conformity. We marvel how author and conformist and philosopher could dwell together in the same person.

In the same essay, indeed, Seneca, as a man of affairs, criticized also the Jews and their Sabbaths, whereby they lost the seventh part of their lives. Within a century or a little more, however, as we perceive from Dio Cassius, the custom of the week had imposed itself fairly upon all parts of the Mediterranean world. Seneca in that essay called the Jews "*sceleratissima gens*." We know that even in Horace's time

there were synagogues in Rome; if it was in the time of Claudius (who banished the Jews from Rome)<sup>1)</sup> or of Nero that Seneca wrote, we take notice of that sweeping and severe term of condemnation. The Christian religion came out of Palestine and specifically out of the holy city of Jerusalem; we have no reason for assuming not only that a mind like Seneca's knew much or cared much for the difference, if any, let alone the cosmopolitan mob which then, in the main, constituted the population of Rome, and more than half, perhaps, were slaves in a population at this time of Seneca and St. Paul, probably, some 1,600,000. The hatred of the Jews, I say, Seneca attests himself; how deeply he felt it we know not. But when St. Augustine, in his survey of Seneca's essay on Superstition goes further, I for my part cannot follow him. "He dared not," says the bishop of Hippo some 350 years later, "he dared not mention the Christians for good or evil." I personally greatly doubt whether the great man, in many ways the proudest man of the day, even knew or had heard the name of the Christians before the great conflagration of Rome and before the cruel persecution right in the capital, which blazoned their name through the empire. Of this in a later reading. The first church in Rome, to which St. Paul wrote his epistle, was, in part, composed of Jewish Christians, who, of course, were of the type that "abominates the idols" (Rom. 2, 22), the cult-figures: the very things over which the leader of Roman culture had poured out the vials of his scorn and satire, a polemic directed not so much against these fictions and figments as against the notion that such could be connected with any genuine religion. And when St. Paul came to Rome, probably in the spring of 61 A. D. by the Appian Way, and entered the city, passing under the arch of Drusus, he reported in the Praetorium, where Burrus then commanded in the last year of his life. We learn (Acts 28, 17) that three days after his arrival he presented his case to Jews resident in Rome, the

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1) Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit. (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25.)

leading men (τοῖς πρώτοις) of that communion. And when they, in their reserve and guarded answer to Paul, stated that this sect, *viz.*, that of the Christians, "everywhere experienced contradiction," it is obvious that this term of "everywhere" (πανταχοῦ) must be understood as meaning everywhere in the Jewish communion. No, to the mind of Seneca all, both Jews and Christians proper, must have appeared as one sect, one form of Palestinian superstition.

And this brings us to the fictitious correspondence of Seneca and Paul. Even a superficial examination of the literary style of these missives makes it unthinkable that either Paul or the famous Stoic had any part in their composition. Jerome is indeed inclined to accept them, but his knowledge of Seneca's genuine manner can have been but of the slightest in that case, or of Seneca's secular history. Jerome places Paul's martyrdom in 67. The wildest of these forged documents is Letter 12, which pretends to deal with the conflagration of 64 and the charge against the Christians, of whose innocence Seneca professes to be convinced, with hints at Nero, unnamed, and allusion to cruel autocrats of the past, such as Alexander of Macedon and Caligula. The forger, indeed, found these (quite correctly, too) as appearing quite freely as types of the cruel autocrats in Seneca's writings. Seneca already has learned the chief article of Christian salvation (*ut optimus quisque unum pro multis donatum est caput*). To expend any serious criticism, whether material or literary, on this piece of pious forgery cannot be my purpose in this place. There are some curious allusions that Poppaea Sabina (*Ep.* 5) was addicted to the Jewish cult, and was angry at Paul for converting Jews to Christianity. Poppaea, indeed, whom Tacitus (*Ann.* 13, 45) thus delineates: "Virtue was her outward demeanor, but wantonness the practise of her conduct; . . . with her reputation she had no mercy, between husbands and paramours she made no distinction; from whatever side profit was displayed, thither she was wont to transfer her appetites." Seneca is fully conversant with language and dogma of the



Christian faith; he writes of the "Holy Spirit in Paul and over Paul," and expresses the hope or trust that Nero has been stirred by Paul's ideas. Paul (*Ep.* 8) is well aware that Nero is "an admirer of our side." Seneca is to send a Latin phrase-book for Paul's use. Seneca tells Paul that he, Paul, is the peak of all the highest mountains, and it is sure that Paul must rejoice in the prospect that Seneca will be reckoned as nearest to him, nay, as his *alter ego*. Seneca tells Paul about the great fire,—but why go on; this correspondence is not merely a pious forgery, but a very silly and childish fabrication.

At this point it may be well to excerpt from Seneca some glimpses of the actual Rome of Seneca and St. Paul. For in Seneca, after all, there is a much more searching standard of judgment than in Pliny's letters, or in Juvenal's satires, or in Martial's epigrams. "How much more" (Seneca, *Provid.* 3, 13) "ought one to envy Socrates (who died of hemlock) than these people, who are served in bejeweled dishes, for whom the boy concubine, taught to submit to anything, a cunuch or something like it, dissolves the snow in a golden dish? Whatever these drink they throw up by vomit, tasting their own bile again. . . . Why enumerate details?" *De Ira*, 2, 8, 1: "When you see the Forum packed with a multitude, and the voting enclosures (*septa*) filled with the concourse of a teeming mass of men, and that Circus, in which the people displays the greatest part of itself: know this, that in that place there are as many faults as there are human beings. Among those of them whom you see garbed in the toga there is no peace; the one is led to the destruction of the other by a slight profit. None makes a living but by wronging the other. The prosperous one they hate; the unlucky one they despise. Their superior they are annoyed with, to their inferior they are an annoyance. By different appetites they are goaded on. All their desires aim at ruin, and this for a slight pleasure or booty. Not different from that in a training-school of gladiators is the life of those who live and fight with the same. It is an assemblage

of wild beasts, except that these are harmless to one another, and abstain from sinking their fangs in their own kind, while those satisfy their appetites by rending one another. But in this one point they differ from dumb beasts, that these are tame towards those who feed them, whereas the ravenous fury of the others feeds on those by whom it has been nourished." The indifference of the rich for the poor (*De Ira* 3, 35, 5): "They take umbrage at spots and stains and at silver that is not resplendent from polish, and at a basin of water that is not transparent from the bottom. These eyes, indeed, which have not patience with marble but of multicolored veins, and glistening with fresh polishing, who will not have a table but marked with varied streaks of surface, who in their own residence disdain to tread on a floor not more costly than gold, these, when outdoors, with complete complacency gaze upon rough and muddy lanes, and upon the greater part of those who meet them in squalid attire, the walls of tenement blocks crumbling, full of cracks and out of plumb. What else, then, is it which outdoors does not annoy them, yet troubles them at home, but that mental attitude which in that sphere is complacent and apathetic, but at home censorious and querulous?" Of the inconsistency of one who professes philosophy, and still pursues also wealth and fashion (*De Vita Beata* 17, 1): "Why do you talk more bravely than you live? Why do you speak in meek accents to your superior, and deem money a necessary equipment for yourself, and are troubled by a loss, and shed tears when you hear of the death of wife and friend, and pay attention to what people say, and feel pain at ungenerous remarks? Why is your country place more elegantly gotten up than natural need requires? Why do you not order your table in conformity to your moral precepts? Why is your furniture rather splendid? Why do they drink wine in your house older than you are yourself? Why is your meadow artistically laid out? Why are no trees spared on your place, except those destined for shade? Why does your wife wear in her ears the value of a rich mansion? Why is your body of slaves

garbed in costly dress? Why is it a fine art to serve at your table in your house, and why is your silver-plate not placed at random and as your mood is, but the service is arranged with expert skill, and there is some one who superintends the carving? And, if you please, why have you possessions beyond the sea? Why more than you know?" There is something of Seneca's own circumstances here as they were under Caligula, and before he was relegated to his Corsican exile. Stoic profession and fashionable prosperity, too. It is the antagonism between the finer and the inner voice of the soul and the pride of the world.

His exile in Corsica had been in good harmony with the simpler life of his stoic creed. When he had not long returned from that island, he became an inmate of the imperial court, and was surrounded once more by the fashionable luxury of Rome. "I like," he then wrote (*De Tranq.* 1, 6), "food which neither whole herds of slaves prepare nor look on when it is consumed, food not ordered many days in advance nor served by many hands, but readily provided, but simple, not brought from a great distance nor costly, nowhere apt to give out, neither oppressive to purse nor health, not destined to return by the way it entered. I like a plain attendant, a slave born in the house, heavy silver-plate of a father reared in the country, and a table not conspicuous by the motley effects of its stains, and not known to the community through many successions of fastidious owners, but placed for practical needs, which neither arrests the eyes of any guest, nor inflames them by envy." He adverts to those who, while mentally indolent, collect great libraries (*ib.* 9, 4): "To what end countless books and libraries, whose owner in all his life barely reads through the catalogs? The mass burdens him who desires to learn, it furnishes him no equipment, and it is much better to devote yourself to a small number of authors than to stray through many. . . . Faulty everywhere is that which is excessive. Why should you pardon a man who is collecting library cases of citrus wood and ivory, gathering together the works of unknown and indifferent authors, and yawning amid so many thousands of

scrolls whose outward fronts and titles are his chief delight? In the houses of the most indolent, therefore, you will see all the orations and histories of the world, pigeon-holes reared up to the very ceiling." Of the cosmopolitan population of Rome (*Helv.* 6, 2): "Do look at these teeming multitudes, for whom the dwellings of the vast city barely suffice. The greatest part of that crowd has no country of its own. From their municipal towns and colonies, from the whole world they have streamed together. Some, ambition has brought here; others, the necessity of public service; others, a mission imposed upon them; others, dissipation, seeking a suitable and rich place for their vices; others, their eagerness for liberal studies; others, the public shows. Some, friendship drew hither; others, their industry, which gained a freer object for displaying their merits. Some brought their body to sell, some their eloquence to sell. Every class of men hastened to the city, which affords great rewards both for virtues and vices." Of the delicacies brought from far away (*Helv.* 10, 2): "It is not necessary to fathom the depths of every sea, nor to burden the stomach with the slaughter of living beings, nor to pluck shell-fish from the furthestmost sea. May the gods and goddesses destroy those folk whose luxury goes beyond the limits of so jealous an empire! Beyond Phasis (in the Caucasus) they insist that there be caught what shall equip the ambitious restaurant, and they are not loath to get game-fowl from the Parthians, from whom we have not gotten the satisfaction of punishment. From everywhere they import everything known to their fastidious maw. What their throat, ruined by exquisite luxuries, barely admits is brought from the furthestmost Atlantic. They vomit in order to eat; they eat in order to vomit. And the feasts which they gather from the whole world they do not even deign to digest." Such sermonlike outbursts against the luxury of the times could be multiplied by citation from his moral essays. In such a world and in such a society there were famous, by contrast, certain types that illustrated the virtue of poverty, like the mendicant friars of later times. Such

a one was Demetrius the Cynic. Him Seneca in his last years kept, like a living sermon, about his person. His life and dress and witty repartee were much bruited about. He was an exponent of virtues which many admired, but few followed. Here, too, Rome was the heir of all that had gone before. "He is not a teacher of truth," said Seneca of him (*Ep.* 20, 9), "but a living witness of the same."

Of the ladies of fashionable society (*Benef.* 3, 16): "Is there any woman now who blushes when her husband puts her away, since certain distinguished and aristocratic ladies count their years not by the number of consuls, but by their husbands, and they get divorces for the sake of matrimony, and they wed for the sake of divorce? . . . Is there really any shame of adultery left, since matters have come to such a pass that no woman has a husband but to allure a paramour? Chastity is a proof of ugliness. What woman will you find so wretched, so mean, as to be satisfied with a single pair of paramours, unless she has allotted hours to one each?" Men who indulged habitually in unmentionable vices were known as such in the circles of the aristocracy, but do not seem to have suffered, or to have been ostracized, on that account. Such, *e. g.*, was Marcus Scaurus (*Benef.* 4, 31, 3), whom Emperor Caligula elevated to the consulate. Such a one was Hostius Quadra, whose bestial lusts lowered him indeed far below the beasts, and whose murderers, when he had been slain by his own slaves, Emperor Augustus declined to prosecute. (*Nat. Quaest.* 1, 16.) From many more sides could we look at Roman life and morals if there were time.

Seneca tells us of the awful penalties of slaves. (*De Ira* III, 3—6.) They were placed on wooden horses, so called, with sharp metal points entering the flesh of the suffering servitor. There was the cross; their bodies dug into the earth, upright, and the projecting part surrounded by fires; their limbs were torn, their foreheads branded with hot irons, and they were thrown to the wild beasts, to be devoured by them in the cages. Such was the rule in dealing with slaves who had escaped. Who

at this point can avoid thinking of St. Paul and Onesimos, the slave, whose spiritual father the apostle had become in his own bonds (Philemon 10), his "own flesh and blood" henceforth (τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα)? Here Christianity appears to us in its essential strength and glory, that is, not as a stage of social development, not as an achievement of human evolution, but as the power derived from God, which announces to men that supreme truth, spiritual equality and the kingdom of God, while maintaining and respecting the institutions of men.

Before leaving Rome as it then was, let us hear Seneca as he deals with the ruling class and the aristocracy of the capital.

It was at Baiae, on that Gulf of Paradise, where, since the time of Lucullus, the villas of the rich and great fringed the shore, the Newport and the Trouville of those times. Seneca's villa, too, could be seen there. But what does he say of the life carried on by the smart set? "To see them tipsy, strolling along the shores, and the revels of those out in their yachts, and the lakes resounding with the strains of their orchestras, the misdeeds which luxury, as though freed from the laws, not only commits, but flaunts, — what need, I say, to see these things?" (*Ep.* 51, 4.) "Do you think a Cato would ever have made his residence by the glistening sand in order to count the dissolute women sailing by, and so many kinds of cymbals painted in different colors, and roses floating on the lake, that he might listen to the abusive shouts of those singing in the night time?" (*Ib.* 12.) "Do not they live contrary to nature (*Ep.* 122, 8) who in winter time crave the rose, and through the soft aid of hot waters and by means of the suitable change of winterly sports rear the flowers of spring time? Whose forests waver in the breeze on the roofs and pinnacles of their palaces? . . . Do not they live contrary to nature who lay the foundations of their warm baths in the very sea, and who do not think they can comfortably swim unless their warm swimming pools are buffeted by the floods and storm? When they have established the principle of willing everything

contrary to the custom of nature, at least they desert her entirely. The day dawns, it is time to go to sleep. It is time for sleep; now let us be active, now let us take a turn in the avenues of our villas, now let us take luncheon. Now daylight is approaching; it is time for dinner."

It will always remain an impressive lesson how this man, the most gifted and brilliant of that generation, turned from it, and in a measure was a stranger among it. But the point has come in these readings when we should learn, by some systematic survey, what it was that made him differ and dissent from that world. In a word, let us learn from him, to some degree, what was the philosophy which furnished him buckler and spear in his hostility. For Seneca was, if not the last nor greatest, at least the most brilliant of the Roman Stoics. And this sect was indeed the most virile of the schools of ancient philosophy. And bound up with these tenets, we shall from time to time come upon passages which indeed we may consider as *suspiria* of the human soul in that quest for rest and freedom which cannot but receive at our hands a large measure at least of respect and, may I say, of spiritual sympathy.

And first we must take up that which is the dominant power and the sovereign for the soul and for the conduct of life. The Stoics call it Nature, or the Universe, or God (*Universum, Rerum Natura, Natura, Mundus, Deus*). When Seneca, and this but rarely, used the plural, "*gods*," we readily perceive that this is but a concession to popular and current phrase, and that the polytheism of the pagan world is to him nothing but a body of traditional fancies and legends. This philosophy, which, in the main, may be called a form of pantheism, is immanent in all his writings, and runs and circulates through them as the warm blood circulates through the human frame and furnishes to it heat and life. I must add that another term of the general conception is Providence. "It is superfluous for the moment" (*Prov.* 1, 2) "to point to the fact that so great a work [as the Universe] is maintained (*stare*) not without some guardian or other, and that this assemblage and movement, in different

directions, of the stars is not a matter of chance impulse, and that those things which chance (*casus*) sets in motion are often thrown into disorder and quickly collide, but that this speed without any collision moves forward in its course, leaving such a total of things on land and sea, so great a number of luminous bodies most brilliant and giving out their light in an ordered way, that this order is not one of straying matter nor of things which were joined together haphazard; they are suspended with so great a skill that the supremely heavy weight of the earth is poised unmoved, and gazes about itself on the flight of the speeding heaven. . . . Let me reconcile you with the gods, who are the best in dealing with the best. For the Universe (*Rerum Natura*) does not suffer it that its blessings (*bona*) should ever be harmful to the good. . . . Therefore, when you see that good men, and those pleasing to the gods, are toiling, are perspiring, are mounting by a steep ascent, while the evil are living in wantonness, and moving easily among pleasures, think that we are being delighted with the self-restraint of *sons*, the others with the license of domestic *slaves*; but the former are being constrained by a sterner discipline, while the boldness of the latter is fed. Let the same become clear to you about god: he tests, he hardens, he makes that one ready for himself."

An eternal sequence orders and foreordains all. (*Prov.* 5, 8.) "Why, therefore, are we indignant? Why do we complain? It is for this that we are organized. . . . It is a superb thing to be whirled away with the universe. Whatever it is that has bidden us so to live, so to die, by the same necessity it binds the gods also. . . . That very founder and ruler of all has indeed written the fates, but he follows them, too. It is *always* that he obeys, it is *once* that he has issued his commands."

Speaking of anger and man (*De Ira* 1, 5, 2): "Who, then, is more ignorant of the Universe than he who assigns to its best and most flawless creation [man] this savage and pernicious fault?"

The material universe in which we now dwell is destructible and will be destroyed. *Ad Marciam* 26, 6: "Nothing will



abide in the place in which it now abides; age will carry off and level everything. . . . And when the time shall come, when the Universe, about to renew itself, shall destroy itself, those elements will hew themselves by their own forces, and stars shall crash into stars; and when all substance will be on fire, whatever now gleams in an ordinary way will glow with one great fire. We also, the blessed souls, have gotten a lot of eternity, when it shall please god once more to execute those mighty tasks, when all things shall totter, — ourselves, a slight addition to the mighty collapse, will be changed into our ancient elements."

Whatever had a beginning has also an end (*Pol.* 1, 2): "There are certain forces, which threaten the world with destruction, and this Universe, which embraces all divine and human things, some day will scatter, and sink into chaos and ancient darkness." "The two things which are the most beautiful will follow us in whatever direction we shall turn, the common nature and our personal virtue. This was done, believe me, by him, whoever gave the Universe its form, whether he is god, powerful over all, or an immaterial reason, the creator of stupendous works, or a divine spirit pervading all greatest and least with equal energy: this, I say, was done in order that none but the most insignificant things should not be subject to the decision of another." (*Helv.* 8, 3.) We see here that notable and central doctrine of the school: While the material and organic world is subject to immutable and eternal laws, the will and conduct of man, too, under all circumstances, shall be determined by conformity with that Universe and divine reason, which absolutely decrees to man to choose the right, the wise, the pure, the just, in preference to the wrong, the foolish, the lustful, and to injustice.

Elsewhere he says (*Benef.* 4, 8, 2—3): "Therefore thou failest in thy contention, thou most ungrateful of mortals, in saying that thou owest nothing to god, but to nature; because neither is nature without god nor god without nature, but both is the same and differs not in function. If you were to say that

what you had received from Seneca you owed not to Annaeus or to Lucius, you would not change your creditor, but merely the name, since, whether you have his forename or name or surname, he would still be the same. Thus now call it Nature, Fate, Fortune—all are names of the same deity, using his power in different ways. And justice, goodness, foresight, bravery, sound economy, all boons for one and the same soul: whatever of these you have approved, it is the soul that you have approved of." "Nature devised us before she shaped us, nor are we so trivial a work that nature should have forgotten us." (*Benef.* 6, 23, 5.)

And the underlying pantheism of it all is set forth in these words of his last stage (*Prolog. N. Q.* 13. 14): "What is God? The mind of the Universe. What is God? All that you see, and all that you do not see. For thus alone his greatness is ascribed to him, than whom nothing greater can be conceived. If he alone is all, then he holds his own work both within himself and beyond himself. What difference is there between the nature of God and our own? Of ourselves the soul is the better part, in him there is no part outside of his soul. He is all reason, whereas so great an error sometimes holds possession of mortal man that men think this Universe, than which there exists nothing more fair nor better ordered nor more unvarying in design,—that men think it is a matter of chance and moving by accident, and therefore replete with disorder amid the lightning, clouds, and storms, and the other things by which the earth and the regions near to it are buffeted."

From this underlying conception let us turn more particularly to man, his life duty and conduct. For the Stoics claimed that they were, preeminently, the *virile* among the sects of the ancient world, that their aim was not merely academic, but action, deeds, and right living.

Like their chief rivals, the Epicureans, they promised happiness and tranquillity of the soul, imperturbable calm amid the storms of life and the strokes of fortune, but with a profound difference of methods and ideals. In their moral quest the

Stoics emphasized the contrast and conflict between Reason and the Passions, nay, we may say the Emotions. This, they claimed, was "living in harmony with Nature" (*secundum naturam vivere*) (*κατὰ φύσιν ζῆν*). We will always bear in mind the dominant and semireligious position of that "Nature" which infinitely transcended all the myths and legends and the naive anthropomorphism of Greece. But let us again listen to Seneca directly: "The highest good is a soul which looks down upon the fortuitous things, rejoicing in virtue; or the invincible strength of the soul, well acquainted with the world, unruffled in action, coupled with much refinement and concern for those with whom one associates. We may also define it thus, that we say a happy man is he who cultivates what is honorable, who has no boon or evil but a good soul or an evil soul; a happy man he who cultivates what is honorable, is content with virtues, one whom the fortuitous things neither cause to be elated nor crush, who knows no greater boon than that which he can give to himself, whose truest pleasure is the contempt of pleasures." (*Vit. Beat.* 4, 2.) It is that sovereign pride and self-sufficiency which, after all, marks the trenchant difference, nay, the chasm not to be bridged over, between Stoicism and Christianity. It is quite true, on the other hand, that in the general outlook upon the world that system presents many features which, if we will not admire, we may at least respect. There are certain aspects, undoubtedly, of their ethics which have at least a resemblance to Christianity. They presented boons in certain categories. Those, however, which the world then ranked higher, and does so even now, are greatly reduced in their valuation. These are wealth, beauty, public honors, pleasures of food and drink, nay, even life and death. All these are not boons proper, but *fortuita, indifferentia* (*ἀδιάφορα*). "You think," he writes (*Ep.* 23, 2), "I wish to take from you many pleasures, in removing the fortuitous things, in holding that hopes, the sweetest diversions, should be avoided? Nay, quite the opposite; I do not want joyousness ever to be lacking to you. I want it to spring at home from you; it is born if your home

is in your own consciousness. The other forms of cheer do not fill your breast. They do indeed smooth out the furrows on your forehead; they are trivial, however, unless perhaps, you think he is rejoicing who laughs. The soul should be, must be, alert and firm in its trust and rise above everything. Or do you think that any one despises death with a smooth mien, as they say, with a pretty cheerful one, as those *bon vivants* say? that (with cheerfulness) he opens his house to poverty? that he holds appetites in curb? that he strives to have patience for pain?" Or again: "The place which in this world God holds, this the soul is in man. What *matter* is there, that is the *body* in us. Let, then, the inferior be subject to the better. Let us be brave in confronting the fortuitous things. We must not shiver at injuries, at wounds, at prison, at poverty. What is death? Either an end or a passing to another state, and I am not afraid to cease to be, for it is the same as never to have begun. Nor [am I afraid] to pass over into a different state, because nowhere will I be in as narrow quarters as here." (*Ep.* 65, 24.) We may pass over his decrying wealth. His generation observed his vast accumulation of it, and was strongly inclined not to take some of his moral preaching very seriously. Even Tacitus, that delicate artist in psychological analysis, generally speaks of our philosopher with striking coolness and reserve.

### III.

Let us turn, therefore, at this point to the great topic of Death, which figures so largely in his writings. And is it not one of the towering concerns in all philosophies and all religions? We shall behold this topic to be inextricably intertwined with the Stoic axiom of freedom and with the latter's ultimate postulate, *viz.*, with suicide. "Death," he says (*Ep.* 82, 15), in a fine passage, reminding us not a little of the familiar soliloquy of Hamlet, "is not an adiaphoron or a neutral thing (as the question whether your hair is symmetrically arranged). Death is among those things which indeed are not evil, but have the appearance of an evil; it is the love of one's self, and the innate will to endure, and preserve oneself, and

the passionate reluctance from dissolution, because death seems to wrest many boons from us, and to lead us out of this resource of things to which we have become accustomed. This also estranges us from death, that we know these things now; and as to those other to which we are to pass over, we know not what they are, and we shrink from the unknown. Besides, there is a natural fear of darkness into which it is believed death is going to lead us. Therefore, even if death is an adiaphoron, it is not something that may be treated with neglect; by great training the soul must be hardened, in order that it may endure its sight and approach."

Suicide, I said, was a postulate and a logical sequence of the Stoic doctrine of freedom. Particularly so it was in the first century after Christ, when the Roman aristocracy was often sorely beset by the tyranny of their autocrats, and it was to some of them almost the only way left to combine a certain fame with the freedom of the olden time, to pass out of a life which for them no longer contained either freedom or fame. Speaking of the slavish condition of certain Oriental courtiers, moralizing about it all, (and it was before he became a courtier himself,) Seneca goes on to say (*De Ira* 3, 15, 3): "We will not find any consolation for so gloomy a slave-pen; we will not encourage any one to endure the commands of hangmen: we will point out in every form of slavery an open road to freedom. . . . Whithersoever you will direct your glance, there is an end of troubles. Do you see the precipitous place? There is a descent to freedom. Do you see that sea, that stream, that cistern? There freedom reposes at the bottom. Do you see that tree, low, shriveled, dead? Freedom grows on it. Do you see your throat, your heart? They are means of escape from slavery." Elsewhere, as an old man, he writes (*Ep.* 17, 9): "The sage will accommodate himself to nature. But if the uttermost has befallen, he will speedily pass out of life, and will cease to be an annoyance to himself." Or again (*Ep.* 58, 35): "I shall not forsake old age, if it will reserve me wholly to myself, wholly, I mean, on the score of the better part;

but if it shall begin to undermine my mental powers, to rudely shake its structure, if it will leave me not life, but mere vegetative existence, I shall leap forth out of the tumble-down and tottering structure." Socrates is praised for not anticipating the hemlock, but practically awaiting it for thirty days. (*Ep.* 70, 9.) Under all circumstances, he argues, the sage should anticipate a death decreed by a tyrant: "If one death is attended with torture, and the other is simple and easy, why should one not apply oneself to the latter? As I may choose a vessel when I am about to go on a voyage, and a house when about to choose a residence, so the form of death when about to pass from life. Besides, as a longer life is absolutely not the better life, so a more protracted death is absolutely the worse death. In nothing more than death ought we to humor our soul. Let him pass out (*exeat*) by that avenue by which he has the impulse to do so; whether he seeks the steel, or the rope, or some potion that takes possession of his veins, let him go forward and snap asunder the bonds of slavery." (*Ep.* 70, 11. 12.) As in many of the problems which confront the soul of man uncheered by any revelation, so our philosopher, too, is uncertain about immortality. He was here not without some impress and influence that came from Plato; so, consoling the lady Marcia at the death of her young son (*Marc.* 25, 1): "There is no reason, therefore, why you should hasten to the tomb of your son; the worst part of him, and the most troublesome to him, lies there, bones and ashes, no more real parts of him than garments and other coverings of bodies." Your father, Marcia, there clasps to his bosom his grandson, although there all are kin to all, and teaches him who rejoices in the new light, and teaches him the orbits of the neighboring constellations." But elsewhere he leaves it quite undecided (*Polyb.* 9, 2. 3): "If the deceased have no consciousness remaining, my brother has escaped all the troubles of life, and has been restored to that state in which he was before he was born; and, free from all troubles, he fears nothing, desires nothing, suffers nothing. . . . If, on the other hand, the deceased have perception, then my

brother's soul, as though let out of long imprisonment, at least in full control of himself, is in transports, and enjoys the sight of the universe."

But we must begin to conclude this survey of Seneca's thoughts, though in that generation they were clearly all that he had for beacon and consolation. There remains a side of these moral essays where the dignity or purity of his ideas certainly approaches Christianity, or reminds us of that which we hold so dear. So in placing the essence of wrong in the purpose and consciousness (*Const.* 7, 4): "One may commit a sin without having committed any. If one cohabit with his own wife in the belief she is another man's wife, he will be an adulterer, although she will not be an adulteress. . . . All crimes have been accomplished even before the execution of the deed, sufficiently to establish the guilt." Fiery coals: "Some one will be angry against you? Challenge him by acts of kindness." (*De Ira* 2, 34, 5.) "Why do I by soft phrases conceal the ulcer which is world-wide? We are all of us evil; whatever, therefore, will be censured in another each single one will discover in his own bosom." "Examine the entire attitude of your own mind; although you have done no evil, you *can* do it." (*De Ira* 3, 26, 4.) "A wise way to curb anger and to strive for peace and gentleness is to think deeply of our mortality." (*De Ira* 3, 42, 2.) "To obey God is freedom." (*Vita Beat.* 15, 7.) "Not even the bitterness which you direct against others . . . will hinder me from persisting in praising not the life which I lead, but that which I know I ought to lead, will prevent me from following virtue even at a great distance, crawling." (*Ib.* 18, 2.) "When we have driven out the covetousness for what is another's, out of which arises all the evil of the soul." (*Clem.* 2, 1, 4.) "God also" (*Benef.* 4, 28, 3) "gives certain gifts to the entire human race from which none are excluded. For it was not possible that the wind should be favorable to the good and adverse to the wicked, . . . nor could a law be given to the rain-showers that were to fall that they should not fall on the lands of the evil and wicked." We will

close with an impressive testimony of the soul as to the uniform prevalence of sin and evil in mankind: "Moral faults do not wait in one place; but nimble and separating they raise an uproar. They rout one another and are routed. But the same judgment we will always be compelled to utter, that evil we are, evil we have been, and, unwillingly I will add it, that evil we shall be."

Turn we now from this survey of philosophy, precept, and ideals to the last years of Nero's tutor and minister.

Probably nowhere in the entire extent of the Roman Empire was there any one whose life and whose striving was in more complete contrast with Seneca than his imperial pupil, patron, sovereign.

What was Nero? What was in his innermost soul? We often say, If we could but fathom the soul of such and such a one! In the case of this ruler that word would be quite inept and unmeaning. For his soul had no depths whatever; shallow and superficial in its very structure, it became more and more impervious to the monition of what conscience there was in him. He was convinced that he had in himself the endowment of a great musical artist. His voice was thin and poor, but no matter. He entered into training with earnest devotion, and omitted nothing observed and practised by professional vocalists; *e. g.*, to lie on his back with a leaden plate on his chest, to purge in all the ways known to nature, to regulate his diet. He knew that his will was the supreme power in his world, and he was unable to see anything to furnish a motive other than the gratification of this shallow ambition. His first appearances before a whole community was at Naples, because it was a Greek city. More than 5,000 strong young men of the lower classes were organized as *claqueurs*, who were regularly drilled in the various forms of applause. (*Suet.* 20.) At his first appearance before a general Roman audience he appeared in the role of Niobe (we may assume a Greek text), his musical character monologs lasting to 4 P.M. Of his appearance as a charioteer with race-horses I will not go into detail. In the



imperial collection of ancient coins at Vienna there are some on which Nero strides as Apollo Citharoedus. Here, too, he is presented with the crown of rays, as though he were a scion of Helios. He emphasized thus, perhaps quite consciously, his freedom, *viz.*, his freedom from his mother. There is a coin with the inscription *Libertas*, and a head of the genius of Freedom on the reverse. When Burrus died, in 62, he was followed by Tigellinus. Seneca and Burrus had been appointed for state reasons. The new favorite was given this great place purely because he was really an affinity of the shallow and superficial autocrat, and because he knew how to present himself as a ubiquitous shield of Nero's personal safety. After having figured in Caligula's time as a lover of that emperor's sisters (Mayor on *Juvenal*, III, 155), he had been exiled. Inheriting a fortune, and permitted to return to Italy, he had bought large pasture lands in Calabria and Apulia, where he bred race-horses, and this very thing was a link in the series of matters which made him Nero's chief adviser. As such he established a vast system of espionage, when every utterance that could be interpreted as unfriendly to Nero could be converted into matter for a trial for treason. He induced Nero to assassinate two Romans related to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, although they were living in quiet privacy. Clearly they were presented to the imperial jockey and opera singer as possible future heads of movements to unseat and destroy him. Tigellinus thus came to figure in Nero's valuation as the guardian of his throne. Such fears were now steadily lurking in Nero's heart. (*Tacitus, Annal.* 14, 57.)

But let us pass on to the momentous year of 64. More and more, as time went on, Nero was tempted to direct his sovereign power to do things that never had been done before, and incidentally to reveal the real Nero more and more. He had at first in that year (*Tacitus*, 15, 36) given out that he planned a tour of the eastern provinces. Superstitious fears, however, had made him pause, and the multitudes of the lower class at Rome, if we accept Tacitus's version, had been disturbed

by this project. Senate and aristocracy, however, were not so sure as to their grieving at this temporary separation. Whatever that may have been, the emperor (perhaps advised here by Tigellinus) determined to show his Romans that nowhere was he more happy to be than among them. The Neronian way of making known this sentiment is thus related by Tacitus (*Annal.* 15, 37): "He himself, in order to have every one believe that nowhere he was as happy [as in Rome] arranged banquets under the open sky, and used the entire city as though it were a single house; and more cited than all the rest were the feasts which Tigellinus arranged, more cited as to being noteworthy and superb, which I shall tell of as a type, lest I may have to tell of the same lavish profusion over and over again. In the pond of Agrippa then he [Tigellinus] built a raft, which was the scene of the banquet, which raft was to be moved by other ships acting as tugs. Barges, tricked out with gold and ivory, and as oarsmen male concubines, according to their ages and their knowledge of wantonness, were provided. Fowl and game from every land, and sea-fish, he had sent for all the way from the Atlantic. On the margin of the basin brothels were erected, filled with women of distinguished aristocratic society, and on the other bank appeared harlots stark naked. Further there were gestures and dances of grossly immoral nature, and when darkness came on, all the grove close by and the houses around resounded with music and were brilliantly lighted. Nero himself, stained with permissible and impermissible debauchery, had left no form of shamelessness untried, to have his conduct even sink to lower depths but this. A few days later he went through the forms prescribed for wedding with one of that band of boy concubines; his name was Pythagoras. The emperor assumed the fire-colored robe, and auspices were taken. There were dowry and the conjugal couch and nuptial torches, and everything was disposed to the gaze, which even in the case of a woman night covers with its veil." The stern and serious Tacitus certainly did not invent or exaggerate these things. The report of Dio Cassius (*Ep.* 62, 15) is dis-

tinctly independent of Tacitus, and probably reproduces the concrete actuality with even greater precision: "As master of the feast Tigellinus had been appointed, and every kind of preparation had been made in abundance, and it had been arranged in this way: in the center and on the water both the large wooden structures for the wine-supply had been set up free for all, and upon them cross-beams were fastened, and round about taverns and booths had been erected, so that Nero and Tigellinus and their fellow-banqueters, occupying the center, feasted on purple rugs and on dainty spreads, and all the others enjoyed themselves in the booths. And they entered into the brothels, and carnally mingled with all the women promiscuously who sat there; and they were the most beautiful and socially distinguished, slaves and free, courtesans, virgins, married wives of certain men, not only those of plebeian rank, but even the most aristocratic maidens and matrons. And every one who wished to had the permission to have what woman he wished, for these had no permission to refuse any." We shrink from citing further; the accounts illumine and confirm one another in the most convincing manner. A Neronian feast—Neronian ideals of life. A Seneca once the chief adviser of Agrippina's son, now a Tigellinus; the latter a true affinity, and one who brought out all that was worst in Nero. Nero, then in his twenty-seventh year, had indeed achieved a sovereignty in which the last remnant of good was trampled under foot. Neros would abound among men if irresponsible power such as his and the uncurbed fancies of the lowest appetites, coupled together in one person, were multiplied on our groaning earth.

Not so long after this there broke out the great fire at Rome. Tacitus, whose relation is the earliest we have (15 *Ann.* 38—41), leaves it uncertain whether the origin of that calamity was due to accident or to the wiles of Nero. At all events, it was the severest visitation through fire known to the annals of the Eternal City. It began in that part of the Circus which lay near Palatine and Caelius; it broke out in those shops which

dealt with fuel and inflammable materials, was fanned into a fury by a strong gale, and speedily enwrapped the great oblong of the Circus Maximus. Here there were no party walls or other impediment. It spread first to the higher points of the city and then again to the lower levels, where an intricate network of narrow lanes made impossible the work of extinguishing and checking the flames. The mere saving of life and body from the labyrinth of fire was desperately difficult. Some camped in the open country, some perished in the attempt to find and recover their own. The odd thing was that men abounded who boldly opposed those who tried to put out the flames; others hurled firebrands, shouting that they had orders from a person who stood high. Not even the plateau of the Palatine (and with it the chief residential buildings of the court) could be saved; for Nero was at Antium, by the sea, and did not come to Rome until the flames seized upon his own palace. Then he came, but it was in vain. Asylums were furnished to the houseless fugitives on Campus Martius, in the Pantheon, and other monumental structures situated in the west and the northwest sections of Rome. Nero threw open his parks, and even provided temporary shelter. Supplies were brought in from Ostia and other near-by places; grain was given out for a nominal price. Still the moral effect of these measures was not productive of good, because the rumor had spread that, while Rome was burning, Nero had mounted a domestic stage and chanted the Fall of Troy, comparing the present calamity with that classic catastrophe. On the sixth day only the fire was checked in the lowest part of the Esquilian district. The measure which proved effective was the demolition of buildings over a very great surface, which deprived the fire of an object.

But in other sections the fire resumed its fury, and particularly in this postlude of the long-drawn-out catastrophe temples, porticoes, and many historical mansions of the aristocracy were destroyed. The second conflagration much more was made subject of unfavorable comment, because Nero had

hurried forth from the *Praedia Aemiliana* (blocks of houses), now belonging to Tigellinus, and to Nero was ascribed the ambition of founding a new and finer capital to be called after himself. Of the fourteen *Regiones* (or wards) of Rome but four remained untouched; three of the ten were utterly leveled to the ground.

Suetonius, who published his *Twelve Caesars* about 120 A. D., some 56 years after the event, makes Nero (c. 38) directly responsible. Nero was, or affected to be, displeased with the ugliness of the old buildings and with the crooked windings of the streets, and so he himself had the city set on fire, and this with so little concealment that some consulars did not dare to lay hands on certain of Nero's footmen, who were caught with tow (*stuppa*) and pitch pine torches in real estate belonging to the emperor, and certain granaries near the *Domus Aurea* of Nero, whose room he greatly desired, were actually shattered with catapults and set on fire. The conflagration raged for six days and seven nights, the populace being driven to seek shelter in public memorial structures and mausoleums. Apart from an immense number of blocks of tenements (*insulae*) and mansions (*aedes*), the residences of ancient generals, still adorned with the spoils of the enemy, were consumed, also the temples dedicated to the kings and later as memorials of the Punic and Gallic wars, in fact, points of historical association with the classic past of republican greatness. This conflagration he viewed from the Tower of Maecenas (on the edge of the Esquiline), and, charmed with the esthetical effect of the sheet of fire as he himself expressed it, he chanted completely (*decantavit*) the taking of Troy. Dio Cassius (62, 16—18) is even more rancorous than Suetonius, who preserves the calm of the delving antiquarian even when recounting the most harrowing details. Dio even, in his hurry, places Nero on the highest point of the Palatine (instead of on Maecenas's tower), where there was the best panoramic view of the burning sections, when he, in his citharoedic robe, sang the fall of Troy, as he himself said, but as he was seen to do, that of Rome.

But the entire Palatine Hill was itself burned over, as Dio himself says. It was indeed very close to the Circus Maximus; we cannot, then, fairly, charge Nero with the responsibility for the great disaster. But for all that he was blamed for it by the sentiment and the utterances of the day. There seemed to be, in the view of his own generation, an inherent probability and plausibility to lay it at his door. His fondness for the enormous, the striking, and the wildly extraordinary was familiar to every mind. An inscription in Orelli (No. 736) of Region XI deals with the event, and would seem to be the earliest record and document of the disaster.

Ex voto suscepto, quod diu erat neglectum nec redditum, incendiorum arcendorum causa quando urbs per novem dies (*sic*) arsit, Neronianis temporibus — providing also a *litatio* by certain magistrates on August 23d of every year, in honor of the God of Fire, on the *Vulcanalia*.

Great were the improvements observed in the rebuilding of Rome, with streets wider and straighter: the sheltering of *insulae* with porticoes, the use of fire-proof stone in certain portions, bounties for speed in rebuilding, a more generous supply of water from the aqueducts, ready means for fighting fires. And still the rumor would not down that Nero was responsible. And so, probably advised by Tigellinus, he turned the public anger against those persons whom the common people called Christians, hated as Tacitus (*Annal.* 15, 44) says, on account of their shameless deeds. "The originator of that name, Christus, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius through the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition, checked for the moment, broke out again, not only in Judea, the source of that evil, but even in the capital, into which from everywhere awful and shameful things flow together and are observed in worship. Therefore there were first seized those who confessed; then, through their informing, a vast number was found guilty, not so much in the judicial investigation of the conflagration as in the hatred which they entertained for mankind." Little doubt that they had lived in the conviction of the sinfulness and wickedness of the world surging about

them, and expected the speedy coming of our Lord and His judgment. I proceed with the words of the Roman historian: "And as they were being executed, forms of sport were brought into play to have them perish covered with the pelts of game, and so mangled by dogs, or pinned to crosses, or to be burned alive, and when the day was done, burned so as to illumine the night. Nero had offered his own parks [where now St. Peter's Place is], and presented sports of horse-races, mingling with the mob in the garb of a charioteer, or standing upon a chariot. Hence, although they were wretches, and had deserved the most exquisite penalties, pity for them arose, as though they were done away with, not for the common good" (as Tacitus estimates they deserved, as a kind of plague), "but to serve the cruelty of a single person." Suetonius, writing a few years later than Tacitus (*Nero* 16): "The Christians were executed, a class of men attached to a new and pernicious superstition." Of the same generation as these prose writers was the poet Juvenal (*Sat.* 1, 155). As he intimates, Tigellinus, the emperor's favorite counselor, had been charged with the fire.

Pone Tigellinum: taeda lucebis in illa  
qua stantes ardent, qui fixo pectore fumant  
et latum media sulcum deducit harena.

A long row of martyrs were buried to their middle in the sand and so burned. The very variety of these cruel illuminations by human tapers constituted that cruel sport to which Tacitus alludes. Here, too, it is most likely (Jerome's chronology seems faulty) that there perished the great apostle of the Gentiles. He had at one time (*Phil.* 1, 26) expected to regain his freedom. Timothy had come to him and had returned to the East. Paul's particular sojourn and perhaps also the particular sphere of his preaching had been in the praetorian barracks (*Phil.* 1, 13). There had been those, perhaps Jews, who spoke of Christ largely to turn public attention against Paul. The current conception of that communion by the pagan world, as we see, was atrociously untrue. Second Timothy seems to be the last document of Paul's life and faith (2 *Tim.* 2, 4. 6).

There are two schools of interpretation in dealing with the Revelation of St. John the Divine, the one with Irenaeus, placing it in the time of Domitian, while the other connects it with these Neronian times: Rome, on her seven hills, the unspeakable wantonness rampant under Nero, the conflagration, and the martyrdom of the Roman Christians, and 666 (Apoc. 13, 18) as the veiled designation of Nero himself, the Beast. The consonants in "Neron Kaisar" by Hebrew numerical symbols (as Benary showed, and as a Talmud scholar recently worked out for me) total 666. And it is right at the central abode of the crimson harlot, Apoc. 17, 6: "And I saw the woman drunken from the blood of the saints and from the blood of the witnesses of Jesus." Cf. Apoc. 17, 8: "The Beast that was, and is not, and will come again," with which compare Suetonius, *Nero* 57: "Et tamen non defuerunt, qui per longum tempus vernis aestivisque floribus tumulum eius ornarent, ac modo imagines praetextatas in rostris proferrent quasi viventis et brevi magno inimicorum malo reversuri." 2)

2) It is not easy to define in detail the fulfilment of the visions and prophetic sayings in the Apocalypse. Against the numerical symbolism which the author favors for the interpretation of chap. 13, 18 the reasons of Dr. Salmon (*Introduction to the N. T.*, pp. 291 ff.) still stand. He argues "that Nero could not have been intended, because 1) the prophecy in that case would have been immediately falsified; 2) the solution would have been known to the early Christians; but it was *not* known according to Irenaeus." Dr. Salmon then adds (p. 300): "Pages might be filled with a list of persons whose names have been proposed as solutions of the problem. Among the persons supposed to be indicated are the emperors Caligula, Trajan, and Julian the Apostate, Genseric the Vandal, Popes Benedict IX and Paul V, Mahomet, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Beza, and Napoleon Bonaparte. There are three rules by the help of which I believe an ingenuous man could find the required sum in any given name. First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin; thirdly, do not be particular about the spelling." One example which he gives elsewhere, not, of course, seriously, is amusing, particularly if vv. 16. 17 be borne in mind. It is  $\pi\alpha\rho\rho\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\omicron\varsigma$  ( $\pi = 80 + \alpha = 1 + \rho = 100 + \rho = 100 + \nu = 50 + \varepsilon = 5 + \lambda = 30 + \lambda = 30 + o = 70 + \varsigma = 200$ ; total = 666). (Plummer, in *Pulp. Comm.*, *ad loc.*) Luther assigns the entire book of Revelation to the third class of prophecies, "those without words and interpretations, exhibited by means of mere emblems and figures."



In 65 A. D. occurred the conspiracy of Piso, which was intended to relieve Rome and the world of Nero. Gaius Piso was a scion of the noble house of the Calpurnii; he counted among his ancestors very many of those men who had made Rome's greatness in the past. He was a pleader of eminent ability also (Tac., *Ann.* 15, 48), affable in speech and social contact; he was favored with a stately presence and noble features; as for the rest, he was of easy morals and fond of pleasure. The movement to place him on the throne in place of Nero was very popular, and consequently the number of those who took share in the plot was so great that Tacitus was unable to name any individual as the real originator of the conspiracy. Some officers of the Praetorian Guards were eminent for determination and perseverance in the enterprise. One of the conspirators was that brilliant young man of letters, the poet Lucan, a son of Seneca's brother, Mela. The most important accomplice was Faenius Rufus, who shared with Tigellinus the chief command of the Praetorians. Tigellinus had long intrigued against this colleague of his, charging that he had been a paramour of Agrippina, and was plotting revenge for her death. The inception for the Pisonian conspiracy, by the bye, antedated the great fire.

Finally, the date of the annual games of Ceres, the Cerelia (April 25), were chosen as the time for action. Piso himself was to await the issue in the temple of Ceres. But the freedman of the man who was to deliver the decisive stroke weakened. His wife urged him to secure for himself the immense reward, which, if he acted promptly, he need not share with any other

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Of this class of prophecies he holds: "As long as they remain uninterpreted and no reliable interpretation is offered, they are hidden and mute prophecies, and have not reached the point where they may be of that use and benefit to Christians for which they were intended." He offers his own opinion on the meaning of the strange events which John has recorded, however, without any claim to absolute certainty. He holds that in the 13th chapter the activity of the seventh angel, the third woe, signifies papal imperialism or the imperial papacy. "Here the papacy also secures secular power, and proceeds to dominate men, not with the Book, as in the second woe, but with the sword."

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informer. Thus his master was promptly arrested and still another was brought in. The prospect of torture unsealed their lips. Thus, Piso was named, thus Seneca himself was named; his nephew Lucan, who even named his own mother, to gain mercy. Then followed the tortures and the superb firmness of the woman Epicharis and her death. The number of names swelled like a flood. In vain Piso was urged to rise openly and appeal to Rome and the moral support of men's minds; he returned to his mansion, and died by opening his veins.

And now we are to tell, largely from Tacitus, the end of the man to whom in great measure these readings have been devoted. But before we present this account, an important element in his philosophy and his ideals should, however succinctly, be presented, *viz.*, the sage and his attitude towards autocratic rule and autocrats. Nowhere so strongly as here is the essence revealed of that curious blending of lofty precepts and sovereign pride which is so characteristic of the Stoic School, and in which its deepest difference from Christianity and from Seneca's contemporary St. Paul stands revealed.

"Never yet did that perfect man who has attained moral excellence abuse fortune. Never did he meet things that befell him in a gloomy mood. Believing himself a citizen of the Universe and a warrior, he underwent hardships as though these were imposed upon him by orders. Whatever befell him he did not spurn as an evil, and which had struck him by chance, but as entrusted to him." (*Ep.* 120, 12.) "The sage maintains his stand as a neighbor and as nearest to the gods, apart from his mortality resembling the deity." (*Const.* 8, 2.) Speaking of the loss of great gains planned and striven for: "From all these things the sage escapes who does not know how to live either with a view to hope nor to fear." (*Ib.* 9, 2.) "A mood free from concern is the specific property of the sage." (*Ib.* 13, 5.) "The sage knows that all these that stride along in toga and purple, men lusty of brawn and tanned by the sun, are not quite sound in mind, who in his eyes are merely ill and uncontrolled." (*Ib.* 13, 2.) Of course, he admits here and

there that this state of perfect wisdom is, alas! an unattainable ideal: "Do I say that I am a sage? By no means. For if I could claim that, not only would I deny that I was miserable [he was then to go into his Corsican exile], but I would vaunt it to every one that I was the most fortunate of mankind, and brought into the neighborhood of god." (*Helv.* 5, 2.) "Over and over again I must remind you that I am not speaking of the sages, to whom is welcome whatever is necessary, who have their soul in their control, and impose upon themselves whatever law they choose, and who keep the laws they have imposed, but of imperfect men." (*Benef.* 2, 18, 4.) "That proud promise, that the wise never regrets his action, nor ever revises what he has done, nor changes his design." (*Ib.* 4, 34, 3.) And finally this noble passage: "That is pleasure, not to fill and fatten the body, nor to stir the appetites, from which sleep is safest, but to be free from that unrest which the scheming of men quarreling with one another mightily shakes up, and that other form of unrest, which is outrageous, and comes to us from far-away tradition [the Homeric Olympus], when the legends of the gods had credence, and we rated them by the standard of our own faults. This pleasure, equable, fearless, sure never to feel any weariness of itself, *he* realizes whom we are depicting [the ideal sage], preeminently, so to speak, versed in divine and human law. He rejoices in that which is at hand; he hangs not on things which are to come, for no firmness has he whose bias is toward uncertain things." Socrates was, if I may so call it, the foremost among the Stoic saints of the past; for although the Attic sage antedated the Stoic sect by many years, they still claimed him as their own, as one who in a particular sense, and in a degree never surpassed, had in his life and death been an incarnation of what the Stoic sect held most dear. Not far from him stood the firm and fearless Roman, Caesar's unflinching foe, Cato of Utica; and while these heroes of freedom are again and again extolled and brought into play as living examples of Stoic doctrine, Seneca is outspoken in his aversion for autocrats as the archenemies

of human freedom. And when we stop to consider that from Caligula to Nero Seneca was the foremost man of letters in the Roman Empire, we marvel not a little at the fact that he lived as long as he did, and that he wrote what he did. As regards the Emperor Caligula, Seneca was perhaps not quite free from a personal grudge against him. He tells us how that tyrant threatened the sky because it interfered with a pantomime show (*De Ira* 1, 20), of his exquisite cruelty (*ib.* 2, 33, 3), his amusement with scenes of torture (*ib.* 3, 18, 3). And between this predecessor and maternal uncle of Nero there existed more than one band of affinity. It is not only Marius and Sulla the puffed-up Xerxes and the mad Cambyeses, not only Phalaris and Dionysius, the Sicilian tyrants, not only the Thirty Tyrants of Attic Annals, whose memory our philosopher of freedom reprobates. He entertained a keen dislike for Alexander of Macedon, and conquerors as such were keenly distasteful to him, and the Macedonian preeminently so, "from his boyhood a highway robber and a ravager of nations, destroyer of the enemy as well as his own friends" (*Ben.* 1, 13, 3). His killing of the philosopher Callisthenes is called "an indictment that will go down through the ages" (*crimen aeternum*, *Nat. Q.* 6, 23, 2. 3). In fact, Seneca exhausts his vocabulary of moral condemnation in dealing with the Macedonian.

Turn we now, in concluding these readings, to the death of Seneca. For death is often not only the most momentous part and conclusion of a man's life, but it places not rarely a lasting seal on the worth of his life, and is apt to have a conclusive force in determining the lasting estimate of men. How often in his brilliant and stirring essays has not Seneca told his generation that death belonged to the fortuitous things; that it was no evil; that the study of no theme was as necessary as this; that in the incalculable revolutions of human fortune it was the only certain thing; that it was the best device of nature; that it was the only harbor in a stormy sea; that it was as base to flee from death as to resort to death; that the foulest death was preferable to the most luxurious servitude. Once or twice he seems to have

aspired to the Platonic conception of a new life, as in *Ep.* 36, 10: "Et mors, quam pertimescimus ac recusamus, intermittit vitam, non eripet: veniet iterum qui nos in lucem reponat dies, quem multi recusarent, nisi oblitos reduceret. Sed postea diligentius docebo omnia, quae videntur perire, mutari." Thus he wrote in that last span of time which lay between his own retirement from power and his death.

That Seneca was named in the conspiracy we must not marvel when a chance meeting, joint attendance at a banquet, accompanying one to public games, had proved adequate cause for indictment and prosecution (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15, 58). The Roman historian does not believe (*ib.* 60) that the retired philosopher had been at all implicated in the plot, but the joy at reveling at will in any mood was always a motive welcome to this particular autocrat. Besides, it seems that Nero had, before this, intended to remove the old man by poison, secretly, but had failed. Seneca had, it seems, on the very date returned from Campania, and taken residence in a suburban villa four miles from the capital. He was dining with his wife Pompeia Paulina and two friends, when the villa was surrounded by praetorian troops, whose commanding officer entered, and put to Seneca certain questions based on the statements of an informer, Natalis. He readily disposed of the main charge, which was flimsy enough. As for the rest, he demeaned himself in his utterances of Nero's emissary with very positive freedom and fearlessness. He had no reason to prefer the welfare of a private person (Piso) to his own safety. His own character was not inclined to flattery, and no one was more aware of this than Nero, who had more frequently experienced freedom than servility at the hands of Seneca. The officer carried back this report to Rome. Nero at that time was in a state of chronic fury. He received the emissary's report in the presence of Tigellinus and the empress Poppaea, his chief counselors at the time. Nero asked the officer whether Seneca was preparing for a voluntary death. The reply was that there had been no symptoms whatever of fear or terror, no gloom in words or mien of

the former minister and counselor. The officer was ordered to return at once to the villa, and announce to Seneca that he must die. He returned,—he was a *tribunus militum*, of the social class of gentlemen, we would say,—but he felt a delicacy to appear before the philosopher himself and to speak to him these tidings, so he sent into the villa a centurion to deliver the emperor's judgment. Seneca asked for his testament, desiring to remember some of his friends by codicil; but the centurion said this could not be. If, then, Seneca went on, he could not leave his friends any material bequest, he still could leave them the only thing he had to leave, and still the fairest he had, *viz.*, the image of his life, and if they remembered that, they would win the reputation both of noble culture and of faithful friendship. At the same time he restrained their tears, now by quiet conversation, now by more emphatic insistence, and recalled them to firmness, asking them what had become of the precepts of philosophy, what of the theory pursued by the study of so many years. For who had not been aware of Nero's cruel character? Nor was there anything left after the slaying of his mother and brother than to add the death of his educator and teacher. It was almost like a lecture (62). He then embraced his wife, and urged her not to join him in death, but in the contemplation of his life virtuously spent to endure the yearning for her husband by honorable forms of consolation. But she insisted on sharing his fate. Both cut the veins of their wrists. But Seneca was old and his body enfeebled through slender food, and the circulation of the blood was sluggish in that enfeebled body; the blood consequently trickled out but slowly. Seneca, therefore, made incisions in the veins of his thighs and the hollow of his knees, and worn out by cruel suffering, lest by his own pain he might weaken his wife's spirit, and himself, by witnessing her pain, might be weakened to a point of non-endurance, urged her to withdraw to another chamber. Before the end came, the philosopher called in writers, we may assume that they were *notarii* or shorthand experts. These last utterances were, later on, published, and in Tacitus's time a familiar piece of literature. That was the end.

It cannot be my aim, it is no part of my task, to draw from these readings any commonplace appeal or any application for hearers and readers. All this period of history and letters is one where the rising Church of Christ and the declining and descending Greco-Roman world first come into touch. It is a great and a noble theme. In Seneca and his imperial pupil the world will always have an impressive and momentous lesson, whether the world is Christian or not. Seneca was almost canonized by Jerome, whose restless industry indeed rushed over enormous spaces, but whose accuracy and lack of sober judgment often is at fault. Philosophy could not then redeem, it could not even slightly touch or move that cesspool of evil and that dance of death which so largely was exemplified by the sovereign of the Mediterranean world. It cannot any more do now what it failed to do then. The soul needs, and indeed seeks, a redemption which no mere man can achieve for his weak and sinful brethren.

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