Book 1

Sidonius Apollinaris (c. AD 430–490)

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I.

To his friend Constantius c. A.D. 477 [1] WITH all the influence you derive from a genius for sound advice, you have long urged me to correct, revise, and bring together in one volume the more finished of those occasional letters which matters, men, and times have drawn from me: I am to set presumptuous foot where Symmachus of the ample manner, and Pliny of the perfected art have gone before. [2] Of Cicero as letter-writer I had best be dumb; not Julius Titianus himself, in his Letters of Famous Women, could worthily reproduce that model; 1 he tried to imitate a style which was not of his time," and Fronto's other pupils,2 in their jealousy, called him 'ape of orators' for his pains. I have always been horribly conscious how far I fall short of these great examples; I have consistently claimed for each the privilege of his own period and genius. [3] But I have done your will; here you have the letters, not merely to revise, for that is nothing, but to polish and, as the phrase goes, clear of lees. Do I not know you devoted not to studies only, but to the studious too? Which devotion now makes you launch me, despite my fears, upon this deep main of ambition. [4] I had been safer had I breathed no word about these trifles, content with the reception of my poems,1 which good luck surely helped to recognition rather than skill of mine. Such fame as I have should be to me an anchor cast in the haven of safe repute. I ought to be content with it after the envious snarls of all the Scyllas which my ship has passed. But if the tooth of jealousy spares these extravagances of mine, volume shall follow upon volume, all full-brimming with my most copious flow of correspondence. Farewell.

II.

To [his brother-in-law] Agricola* A.D. 454(?) [1] You have often begged a description of Theodoric the Gothic king, whose gentle breeding fame commends to every nation; you want him in his quantity and quality, in his person, and the manner of his existence. I gladly accede, as far as the limits of my page allow, and highly approve so fine and ingenuous a curiosity.

Well, he is a man worth knowing, even by those who cannot enjoy his close acquaintance, so happily have Providence and Nature joined to endow him with the perfect gifts of fortune; his way of life is such that not even the envy which lies in wait for kings can rob him of his proper praise. [2] And first as to his person. He is well set up, in height above the average man, but below the giant. His head is round, with curled hair retreating somewhat from brow to crown. His nervous neck is free from disfiguring knots.1 The eyebrows are bushy and arched; when the lids droop, the lashes reach almost half-way down the cheeks. The upper ears are buried under overlying locks, after the fashion of his race. The nose is finely aquiline; the lips are thin and not enlarged by undue distension of the mouth. Every day the hair springing from his nostrils is cut back; that on the face springs thick from the hollow of the temples, but the razor has not yet come upon his cheek, and his barber is assiduous in eradicating the rich growth on the lower part of the face.2 [3] Chin, throat, and neck are full, but not fat, and all of fair complexion; seen close, their colour is fresh as that of youth; they often flush, but from modesty, and not from anger. His shoulders are smooth, the upper- and forearms strong and hard; hands broad, breast prominent; waist receding. The spine dividing the broad expanse of back does not project, and you can see the springing of the ribs; the sides swell with salient muscle, the well-girt flanks are full of vigour. His thighs are like hard horn; the knee-joints firm and masculine; the knees themselves the comeliest and least wrinkled in the world. A full ankle supports the leg, and the foot is small to bear such mighty limbs.

[4] Now for the routine of his public life. Before daybreak he goes with a very small suite to attend the service of his priests.3 He prays with assiduity, but, if I may speak in confidence, one may suspect more of habit than conviction in this piety. Administrative duties of the kingdom take up the rest of the morning. Armed nobles stand about the royal seat; the mass of guards in their garb of skins are admitted that they may be within call, but kept at

the threshold for quiet's sake; only a murmur of them comes in from their post at the doors, between the curtain and the outer barrier.1 And now the foreign envoys are introduced. The king hears them out, and says little; if a thing needs more discussion he puts it off, but accelerates matters ripe for dispatch. The second hour arrives; he rises from the throne to inspect his treasure-chamber or stable.

[5] If the chase is the order of the day, he joins it, but never carries his bow at his side, considering this derogatory to royal state. When a bird or beast is marked for him, or happens to cross his path, he puts his hand behind his back and takes the bow from a page with the string all hanging loose; for as he deems it a boy's trick to bear it in a quiver, so he holds it effeminate to receive the weapon ready strung. When it is given him, he sometimes holds it in both hands and bends the extremities towards each other; at others he sets it, knot-end downward, against his lifted heel, and runs his finger up the slack and wavering string. After that, he takes his arrows, adjusts, and lets fly. He will ask you beforehand what you would like him to transfix; you choose, and he hits. If there is a miss through either's error, your vision will mostly be at fault, and not the archer's skill.

[6] On ordinary days, his table resembles that of a private person. The board does not groan beneath a mass of dull and unpolished silver set on by panting servitors; the weight lies rather in the conversation than in the plate; there is either sensible talk or none. The hangings2 and draperies used on these occasions are sometimes of purple silk, sometimes only of linen; art, not costliness, commends the fare, as spotlessness rather than bulk the silver. Toasts are few, and you will oftener see a thirsty guest impatient, than a full one refusing cup or bowl. In short, you will find elegance of Greece, good cheer of Gaul, Italian nimbleness, the state of public banquets with the attentive service of a private table, and everywhere the discipline of a king's house. What need for me to describe the pomp of his feast days? No man is so unknown as not to know of them. But to my theme again. [7] The siesta after dinner is always slight, and sometimes intermitted. When inclined for the board-game,1 he is quick to gather up the dice, examines them with care, shakes the box with expert hand, throws rapidly, humorously apostrophizes them, and patiently waits the issue. Silent at a good throw, he makes merry over a bad, annoyed by neither fortune, and always the philosopher. He is too proud to ask or to refuse a revenge; he disdains to avail himself of one if offered; and if it is opposed will quietly go on playing.

You effect recovery of your men without obstruction on his side; he recovers his without collusion upon yours.2 You see the strategist when he moves the pieces; his one thought is victory. [8] Yet at play he puts off a little of his kingly rigour, inciting all to good fellowship and the freedom of the game: I think he is afraid of being feared. Vexation in the man whom he beats delights him; he will never believe that his opponents have not let him win unless their annoyance proves him really victor. You would be surprised how often the pleasure born of these little happenings may favour the march of great affairs. Petitions that some wrecked influence had left derelict come unexpectedly to port; I myself am gladly beaten by him when I have a favour to ask, since the loss of my game may mean the gaining of my

cause. [9] About the ninth hour, the burden of government begins again. Back come the importunates, back the ushers to remove them; on all sides buzz the voices of petitioners, a sound which lasts till evening, and does not diminish till interrupted by the royal repast; even then they only disperse to attend their various patrons among the courtiers, and are astir till bedtime. Sometimes, though this is rare, supper is enlivened by sallies of mimes, but no guest is ever exposed to the wound of a biting tongue. Withal there is no noise of hydraulic organ,1 or choir with its conductor intoning a set piece;

you will hear no players of lyre or flute, no master of the music, no girls with cithara or tabor; the king cares for no strains but those which no less charm the mind with virtue than the ear with melody. [10] When he rises to withdraw, the treasury watch begins its vigil; armed sentries stand on guard during the first hours of slumber. But I am wandering from my subject. I never promised a whole chapter on the kingdom, but a few words about the king. I must stay my pen; you asked for nothing more than one or two facts about the person and the tastes of Theodoric; and my own aim was to write a letter, not a history. Farewell.

* Translated by Hodgkin, Italy and her Invaders, ii. 352. The king here described is Theodoric II, successor of Thorismund, predecessor of Euric.

III.

To his friend Filimatius A. D. 467 [1] INDICT me now by the laws against intrigue,1 degrade me from the Senate for keeping patient eyes on the promotion to which, after all, birth gives me claim, since my own sire and my wife's, my grandsire and his sire too before him were urban and praetorian prefects, or held high rank in court and army.2 [2] If it comes to that, consider our friend Gaudentius, who but now of tribune's rank, towers in the dignity of the Vicariate above the unenterprising sloth of our good citizens.3 Of course our young nobles grumble at his passing over their heads; as for him, his one sentiment is satisfaction. And they now respect a man scorned till yesterday; amazed at such a sudden rise, they look up to one as magistrate on whom as neighbour they looked down. He for his part sets his crier to stun the ears of his drowsy detractors; though envy goads them to hostility they always find a friendly bench reserved for them in court.4 [3] You too had best make good the loss of your old office by the membership of the prefect's council now offered you; if you fail to do so, if you sit without the advantage which such a position confers, you will be set down as one only fit to represent a Vicarius. Farewell.

IV.

To his friend Gaudentius A. D. 467 [1] CONGRATULATIONS, most honoured friend; the rods of office are yours by merit. To win your dignities you did not parade your mother's income, or the largess of your ancestors, your wife's jewels, or your paternal inheritance. In place of all this, it was your obvious sincerity, your proven zeal, your admitted social charm which won you favour in the imperial household.1 O thrice and four times happy man, whose rise means joy to friends, gall to enemies, and glory to your own posterity, to say nothing of the example given to the active and alert, and the spur applied to the listless and the slow. The man who tries to emulate you, be his spirit what it will, may haply owe the last success to his own exertions, but will certainly owe his start to your example. [2] I fancy I see among the envious, with all deference to better citizens be it said, the old miserable arrogance, the old scorn of service affected by men too slack to serve, men lost to all ambition, who crown their cups with sophistries about the charm of a free life out of office, their motive a base indolence, and not the love of the ideal which they pretend. . . .

[3] [Such a] taste the wisdom of our fathers rejected, for fear that boys might take advantage of it; they likened school orations to a textile fabric, and perfectly understood that, in the case of youthful eloquence, it is harder to spin out the terse than cut the exuberant short. So much for this subject; for the rest, remember that if Providence approves my endeavours and brings me back safe and sound, I mean to repay your goodness with equal measure.

V.

To his friend Herenius * A. D. 467

[1] YOUR letter finds me at Rome. You are solicitous to know whether the affairs which have brought me so far go forward as we hoped, what route I took, and how I fared on it, what rivers celebrated in song I saw, what towns famed for their fair sites, what mountains reputed as the haunt of gods, what glorious battlefields; for it is your delight to check the descriptions you have read by the more accurate relation of the eye-witness. I am rejoiced that you inquire about my doings, because I know that your interest springs from the heart. Well then, though little accidents there were, I will begin, under kind Providence, with things of good event; it was the wont of our ancestors, as you know, to develop even a tale of mishap from fortunate beginnings. [2] As bearer of the imperial letter,1 I was able to avail myself of the public post on leaving our beloved Lyons + ; my path lay amid the homes of kinsmen and acquaintances; and I lost less time from scarcity of horses than from multiplicity of friends, so closely did every one cling about me, shouting each against the other best wishes for a happy journey and safe return. In this way I drew near the Alps, which I ascended easily and without delay; formidable precipices rose on either side, but the snow was hollowed into a track, and the way thus smoothed before me.

[3] Such rivers, too, as could not be crossed in boats, had convenient fords or traversable bridges with covered arches, built by the art of old time from the foundations to the stoned road above. On the Ticino I boarded the packet known as the cursoria, which soon bore me to the Po; be sure I laughed over those convivial songs of ours about Phaethon's sisters1 and their unnatural tears of amber gum. [4] I passed the mouth of many a tributary from Ligurian or Euganean heights, sedgy Lambro, blue Adda, swift Adige, slow Mincio,2 borne upon their very eddies as I looked; their margins and high banks were clothed with groves of oak and maple. Everywhere sweetly resounded the harmony of birds, whose loose-piled nests swayed on the hollow canes, or amid the pointed rushes and smooth reed-grass luxuriantly flourishing in the moisture of this wet riverain soil. [5] The way led past Cremona,3 over whose proximity the Mantuan Tityrus so deeply sighed. We just touched at Brescello to take on Aemilian boatmen in place of our Venetian rowers, and, bearing to the right, soon reached Ravenna,4 where one would find it hard to say whether Caesar's road, passing be-

tween the two, separates or unites the old town and the new port. The Po divides above the city, part flowing through, part round the place.

It is diverted from its main bed by the State dykes, and is thence led in diminished volume through derivative channels, the two halves so disposed that one encompasses and moats the walls, the other penetrates them and brings them trade ----[6] an admirable arrangement for commerce in general, and that of provisions in particular. But the drawback is that, with water all about us, we could not quench our thirst; there was neither pure-flowing aqueduct nor filterable cistern, nor trickling source, nor unclouded well. On the one side, the salt tides assail the gates; on the other, the movement of vessels stirs the filthy sediment in the canals, or the sluggish flow is fouled by the bargemen's poles, piercing the bottom slime. [7] From Ravenna we came to the Rubicon, which borrows its name from the red colour of its gravels, and formed the frontier between the old Italians and the Cisalpine Gauls, when the two peoples divided the Adriatic towns. Thence I journeyed to Rimini and Fano, the first famed for its association with Caesar's rebellion, the second tainted by the fate of Hasdrubal1; for hard by flows Metaurus, more durably renowned through the fortune of a single day than if it had never ceased to run red to this hour, and roll down the dead on blood-stained waters to the Dalmatian Sea. [8] After this I just traversed the other towns of the Flaminian Way----in at one gate, out at the other----leaving the Picenians on the left and the Umbrians on the right;

and here my exhausted system succumbed either to Calabrian Atabulus2 or to air of the insalubrious Tuscan region, charged with poisonous exhalations, and blowing now hot, now cold. Fever and thirst ravaged the very marrow of my being; in vain I promised to their avidity draughts from pleasant fountain or hidden well, yes, and from every stream present or to come, water of Velino clear as glass, of Clitunno ice-cold, cerulean of Teverone, sulphureous of Nera, pellucid of Farfa, muddy of Tiber;1 I was mad to drink, but prudence stayed the craving. [9] Meanwhile, Rome herself spread wide before my view, but I felt like draining down her aqueducts, or even the water of her naval spectacles. Before I reached the city limits I fell prostrate at the triumphal threshold of the Apostles, and in a flash I felt the languor vanish from my enfeebled limbs.2 After which proof of celestial protection, I alighted at the inn of which I have engaged a part, and there I am trying to get a little rest, writing as I lie upon my couch. [10] As yet I have not presented myself at the bustling gates of Emperor or Court official. For my arrival coincided with the marriage of the patrician Ricimer, to whom the hand of the Emperor's daughter was being accorded in the hope of securer times for the State.3 Not individuals alone, but whole classes and parties are given up to rejoicing; you have the best of it on your side of the Alps.

While I was writing these lines, scarce a theatre, provision-market, praetorium, forum, temple, or gymnasium but echoed to the passage of the cry Thalassio! 4 and even at this hour the schools are closed, no business is doing, the Courts are voiceless, missions are postponed; there is a truce to intrigue, and all the serious business of life seems merged in the buffooneries of the stage. [11] Though the bride has been given away, though the

bridegroom has put off his wreath, the consular his palm-broidered robe, the brideswoman her wedding gown, the distinguished senator his toga, and the plain man his cloak, yet the noise of the great gathering has not died away in the palace chambers, because the bride still delays to start for her husband's house. When this merrymaking has run out its course, you shall hear what remains to tell of my proceedings, if indeed these crowded hours of idleness to which the whole State seems now surrendered are ever to end, even when the festivities are over. Farewell.

* Paraphrased by Hodgkin, Italy and her Invaders, ii. 454; For the occasion of Sidonius' visit to Rome, see Introduction, p. xxvii. + Rhodanusiae nostrae.

VI.

To his friend Eutropius* A. D. 467 [1] I HAVE long wished to write, but feel the impulse more than ever now, when by the Christ's preventing grace, I am actually on the way to Rome. My sole motive, or at least my chief one, is to drag you from the slough of your domestic ease by an appeal to you to enter the imperial service.1 . . . [2] Moreover, by the goodness of God, your age, your health of body and mind concur to fit you for the task; you have horses, arms, wardrobe, establishment, slaves in plenty; the one thing lacking, unless I greatly err, is the courage to begin. In your own home you are energetic enough; it is only at the idea of exile from it that a dull despondency intimidates you. How can it fairly be described as exile, for one with blood of senators in his veins and with the effigies of ancestors in the trabea daily forced upon his sight, to visit Rome once in his prime----Rome the abode of law, the training-school of letters, the fount of honours, the head of the world, the motherland of freedom, the city unique upon earth, where none but the barbarian and the slave is foreign?1

[3] Shame on you now if you bury yourself among cow-keeping rustics, or grunting swine-herds, as if it were the height of your felicity to feel the plough-handle tremble above the cleft furrow, or, bowed over your scythe, to spoil the meadow of its flowery wealth, or hoe the luxuriant vines with a face bent earthwards. Have done! awake! sleek ease has unstrung the sinews of your mind; raise it to higher things. Is it a less duty in a man of your descent to cultivate himself than his estate? [4] In fine, what you are pleased to call a young man's exercise is really a relaxation only fit for broken soldiers, when their feeble hands exchange rusty sword for belated mattock. Suppose you achieve your end; suppose that vineyard upon vineyard foams with purple juice, while piled granaries collapse under endless mounds of grain; suppose plump neatherds drive the crowding cows with their swollen udders into the reeking yards to milk: what then? What use will it be to have enlarged your patrimony by sordid gains like these, to have lived recluse not only among such things, but, O deeper shame! for such things' sake? You will have only yourself to thank if one day you stand, you a nobleman born, obscure in your white hairs behind your juniors seated in debate, if you smart under the speech of some poor man risen to honour by office, and with anguish see yourself distanced by those in whom it would once have been presumption to follow in our train.

[5] But why say more? 'Take my appeal as it is meant, and you shall find me at your side ready to anticipate and share your every effort.1 But if you let yourself be caught in the insidious nets of pleasure; if you choose to yoke yourself, as the saying is, with the tenets of Epicurus, who frankly sacrifices virtue, and defines the chief good as physical delight, then, be our posterity my witness, I wash my hands of the disgrace. Farewell.

* Partly translated by Chaix; p. 264. For the effect of the letter on Eutropius, see III. vi.

VII.

To his friend Vincentius A. D. 468

[1] THE case of Arvandus2 distresses me, nor do I conceal my distress, for it is our emperor's crowning praise that a condemned prisoner may have friends who need not hide their friendship. I was more intimate with this man than it was safe to be with one so light and so unstable, witness the odium lately kindled against me on his account, the flame of which has scorched me for this lapse from prudence. [2] But since I had given my friendship, honour bound me fast, though he on his side has no steadfastness at all; I say this because it is the truth and not to strike him when he is down. For he despised friendly advice and made himself throughout the sport of fortune; the marvel to me is, not that he fell at last, but that he ever stood so long. How often he would boast of weathering adversity, when we, with a less superficial sense of things, deplored the sure disaster of his rashness, unable to call happy any man who only sometimes and not always deserves the name. [3] But now for your question as to his government; I will tell you in few words, and with all the loyalty due to a friend however far brought low. During his first term as prefect his rule was very popular; the second was disastrous. Crushed by debt, and living in dread of creditors, he was jealous of the nobles from among whom his successor must needs be chosen.

He would make fun of all his visitors, profess astonishment at advice, and spurn good offices; if people called on him too rarely, he showed suspicion; if too regularly, contempt. At last the general hate encompassed him like a rampart; before he was well divested of his authority, he was invested with guards, and a prisoner bound for Rome. Hardly had he set foot in the city when he was all exultation over his fair passage along the stormy Tuscan coast, as if convinced that the very elements were somehow at his bidding. [4] At the Capitol, the Count of the Imperial Largess,1 his friend Flavius Asellus, acted as his host and jailer, showing him deference for his prefectship, which seemed, as it were, yet warm, so newly was it stripped from him. Meanwhile, the three envoys from Gaul arrived upon his heels with the provincial decrees2 empowering them to impeach in the public name. They were Tonantius Ferreolus,3 the ex-prefect, and grandson, on the mother's side, of the Consul Afranius Syagrius, Thaumastus, and Petronius, all men practised in affairs and eloquent, all conspicuous ornaments of our country. [5] They brought, with other matters entrusted

to them by the province, an intercepted letter, which Arvandus' secretary, now also under arrest, declared to have been dictated by his master.

It was evidently addressed to the King of the Goths,* whom it dissuaded from concluding peace with 'the Greek Emperor', + urging that instead he should attack the Bretons north of the Loire, and asserting that the law of nations called for a division of Gaul between Visigoth and Burgundian. There was more in the same mad vein, calculated to inflame a choleric king, or shame a quiet one into action. Of course the lawyers found here a flagrant case of treason. [6] These tactics did not escape the excellent Auxanius and myself; in whatever way we might have incurred the impeached man's friendship, we both felt that to evade the consequences at this crisis of his fate would be to brand us as traitors, barbarians, and poltroons. We at once exposed to the unsuspecting victim the whole scheme which a prosecution, no less astute than alert and ardent, intended to keep dark until the trial; their scheme was to noose in some unguarded reply an adversary rash enough to repudiate the advice of all his friends and rely wholly on his own unaided wits. We told him what to us and to more secret friends seemed the one safe course; we begged him not to give the slightest point away which they might try to extract from him on pretence of its insignificance; their dissimulation would be ruinous to him if it drew incautious admissions in answer to their questions. [7] When he grasped our point, he was beside himself;

he suddenly broke out into abuse, and cried: 'Begone, you and your nonsensical fears, degenerate sons of prefectorian fathers; leave this part of the affair to me; it is beyond an intelligence like yours. Arvandus trusts in a clear conscience; the employment of advocates to defend him on the charge of bribery shall be his one concession.' We came away in low spirits, disturbed less by the insult to ourselves than by a real concern; what right has the doctor to take offence when a man past cure gives way to passion? [8] Meanwhile, our defendant goes off to parade the Capitol square, and in white raiment too; he finds sustenance in the sly greetings which he receives; he listens with a gratified air as the bubbles of flattery burst about him. He casts curious eyes on the gems and silks and precious fabrics of the dealers, inspects, picks up, unrolls, beats down the prices as if he were a likely purchaser, moaning and groaning the whole time over the laws, the age, the senate, the emperor, and all because they would not right him then and there without investigation. [9] A few days passed, and, as I learned afterwards (I had left Rome in the interim), there was a full house in the senate-hall. Arvandus proceeded thither freshly groomed and barbered, while the accusers waited the decemvirs'1 summons unkempt and in half-mourning, snatching from him thus the defendant's usual right, and securing the advantage of suggestion which the suppliant garb confers.

The parties were admitted and, as the custom is, took up positions opposite each other. Before the proceedings began, all of prefectorian rank were allowed to sit; instantly Arvandus, with that unhappy impudence of his, rushed forward and forced himself almost into the very bosoms of the judges, while the ex-prefect* gained subsequent credit and respect by placing himself quietly and modestly amidst his colleagues at the lowest end of the benches, to show

that his quality of envoy was his first thought, and not his rank as senator. [10] While this was going on, absent members of the house came in; the parties stood up and the envoys set forth their charge. They first produced their mandate from the province, then the already-mentioned letter; this was being read sentence by sentence, when Arvandus admitted the authorship without even waiting to be asked. The envoys rejoined, rather cruelly, that the fact of his dictation was obvious.1 And when the madman, blind to the depth of his fall, dealt himself a deadly blow by repeating the avowal not once, but twice, the accusers raised a shout, and the judges cried as one man that he stood convicted of treason out of his own mouth. Scores of legal precedents were on record to achieve his ruin.

[11] Only at this point, and then not at once, is the wretched man said to have turned white in tardy repentance of his loquacity, recognizing all too late that it is possible to be convicted of high treason for other offences than aspiring to the purple. He was stripped on the spot of all the privileges pertaining to his prefecture, an office which by re-election he had held five years, and consigned to the common jail as one not now first degraded to plebeian rank, but restored to it as his own. Eye-witnesses report, as the most pathetic feature of all, that as a result of his intrusion upon his judges in all that bravery and smartness while his accusers dressed in black, his pitiable plight won him no pity when he was led off to prison a little later. How, indeed, could any one be much moved at his fate, seeing him haled to the quarries or hard labour still all trimmed and pomaded like a fop? [12] Judgement was deferred a bare fortnight. He was then condemned to death, and flung into the island of the Serpent of Epidaurus.1 There, an object of compassion even to his enemies, his elegance gone, spewed, as it were, by Fortune out of the land of the living, he now drags out by benefit of Tiberius'2 law his respite of thirty days after sentence, shuddering through the long hours at the thought of hook and Gemonian stairs, and the noose of the brutal executioner.

[13] We, of course, whether in Rome or out of it, are doing all we can; we make daily vows, we redouble prayers and supplications that the imperial clemency may suspend the stroke of the drawn sword, and rather visit a man already half dead with confiscation of property, and exile. But whether Arvandus has only to expect the worst, or must actually undergo it, he is surely the most miserable soul alive if, branded with such marks of shame, he has any other desire than to die. Farewell.

* Euric. + Anthemius. * Tonantius Ferreolus.

VIII.

To his friend Candidianus* A. D. 468 [1] You congratulate me on my prolonged stay at Rome, though I note the touch of irony, and your wit at my expense. You say you are glad your old friend has at last seen the sun, since on the Saône his chances of a good look at it are few and far between. You abuse my misty Lyons,1 and deplore the days so cloaked by morning fog that the full heat of noon can scarcely unveil them. [2] Now does this nonsense fitly come from a native of that oven of a town Cesena? You have shown your real opinion of your charming and convenient natal soil by leaving it. The midges of Po may pierce your ears; the city frogs may croak and swarm on every side, but you know very well that you are better off in exile at Ravenna than at home. In that marsh of yours the laws of everything are always the wrong way about; the waters stand and the walls fall, the towers float and the ships stick fast, the sick man walks and the doctor lies abed, the baths are chill and the houses blaze, the dead swim and the quick are dry, the powers are asleep and the thieves wide awake, the clergy live by usury and the Syrian chants the Psalms, business men turn soldiers and soldiers business men, old fellows play ball and young fellows hazard, eunuchs take to arms and rough allies to letters.2 [3] And that is the kind of city you choose to settle in, a place that may boast a territory but little solid ground. Be kinder, therefore, to Transalpines who never provoked you; their climate wins too cheap a triumph if it shines only by comparison with such as yours. Farewell.

* Partly translated by Hodgkin, i. 860, and by Chaix, i. 273. Cf. Letter V.

IX.

To his friend Herenius A. D. 468

[1] THE patrician Ricimer well married, and the wealth of both empires blown to the winds in the process, the community has at last resumed its sober senses and opened door and field again to business. Even before this happened I had already been made welcome to the home of the prefectorian Paul, and enjoyed the friendliest and most hospitable treatment in a house no less respectable for piety than learning. I do not know the man more eminent in every kind of accomplishment than my host. I am amazed when I think of the subtleties which he propounds, the figures of rhetoric adorning his judgements, the polish of his verses, the wonders which his fingers can perform. And over and above this encyclopaedic knowledge, he has a still better possession, a conscience superior even to all this science. Naturally, my first inquiries as to possible avenues to court-favour were addressed to him; with him I discuss the likeliest patrons for the advancement of our hopes. [2] There is, however, little need to hesitate; the number of those whose influence merits our consideration is so small. There are, indeed, many senators of wealth and birth, ripe in experience, helpful in counsel, all of the highest rank, and equal in real consideration. But without disparagement to others, we found two consulars, Gennadius Avienus and Caecina Basilius, in enjoyment of a peculiar eminence, and conspicuous above the rest;

if you leave out of the account the great military officers, these two members of the exalted order easily come next to the emperor himself. We found them both deserving of the highest admiration; but their characters were very different; what resemblance there was rested rather on inborn than acquired qualities. Let me give you a short description of the pair. [3] Avienus reached the consulate by luck, Basilius by merit. It was observed that the former attained his dignities with enviable rapidity, but that although the latter was slower, he won the greater number of distinctions in the end. If either chanced to leave his house, a whole populace of clients was afoot to escort him, and pressed about him like a human tide. But though the two were in so far on a level, the spirits and expectations of their friends were very far from equal. Avienus would do all that in him lay for the advancement of his sons, or sons-in-law, or brothers, but was so absorbed in family candidates that his energy in the interest of outside aspirants was proportionately impaired. [4] There was a further reason for preferring the Decian to the Corvinian family. What Avienus could only obtain for his

own connexions while in office, Basilius obtained for strangers while he was in a private station. Avienus opened his mind freely, and at' once, but little came of it; Basilius rarely and not for some time, but to the petitioner's advantage. Neither of the two was inaccessible or costly of approach;

but in the one case cultivation reaped mere affability, in the other, solid gain. [5] After long balancing of alternatives, we finally compromised in this sense; we would preserve all due respect for the older consular, whose house we were duly frequenting, but devote our real attention to the habitué's of Basilius' house. Now while, with the assistance of this right honourable friend, I was considering how best to advance the matter of our Arvernian petition,1 the Kalends of January came round, on which day the emperor's name was to be enrolled in the Fasti as consul for a second year. [6] 'The very thing,' cried my patron. 'My dear Sollius, I well know that you are engaged in an exacting duty, but I do wish you would bring out your Muse again in honour of the new consul; let her sing something appropriate to the occasion, in whatever haste composed. I will obtain you an audience, be there to encourage you before you begin to recite, and guarantee you a good reception when you have done. I have some experience in these matters; trust me when I say that serious advantage may accrue from this little scheme.' I took the hint; he did not withdraw from the suggested plan, but gave me the support of an invincible ally in the act of homage imposed upon me, and managed so to influence my new consul, that I was incontinently named president of his senate.

[7] But I expect you are tired to death of this prolix letter, and would much rather peruse my little work1 itself at your leisure. Indeed, I am sure you would, so the eloquent pages bear you the verses herewith, and must do duty for me until I come to speak for myself a few days hence. If my lines win the suffrage of your critical judgement, I shall be just as delighted as if a speech of mine in the assembly or from the rostra called forth the 'bravos' not of senators alone but of all the citizens. I warn you, nay, I insist with you, not to think of setting this slight piece of mine on the same plane as the hexameters of your own Muse, for by the side of yours my lines will suggest the triviality of epitaph-mongers rather than the grandeur of heroic verse. [8] Rejoice, all the same, with the panegyrist; he cannot claim the credit of a fine performance, but at least he has the reward of one. And so, if gay may enliven grave, I will imitate the Pyrgopolinices of Plautus, and conclude in a robustious and Thrasonical vein.1 And since, by Christ's aid, I have got the prefecture by a lucky pen, I bid you treat me as my new state demands; pile up all conceivable felicitations and exalt to the stars my eloquence or my luck, according as I please, or fail to please, your judgement.

I can imagine your smile when you see your friend carrying it off in this style with the braggart airs of the old stage-soldier. Farewell.

X.

To his friend Campanianus A. D. 468 [1] THE Intendant of Supplies 2 has personally presented the letter in which you commend him as your old friend to my new judgement. I am greatly indebted to him, but most of all to yourself for this evidence of your resolve to assume my friendship certain and proof against all suspicion. I welcome, I eagerly embrace this opportunity of acquaintance, and of intimacy, since my desire to oblige you cannot but draw closer the bonds which already unite us. [2] But please commend me in my turn to his vigilant care, commend, that is, my cause and my repute. For I rather fear that there may be an uproar in the theatres if the supplies of grain run short, and that the hunger of all the Romans will be laid to my account. I am on the point of dispatching him immediately to the harbour in person, because news is to hand that five ships from Brindisi have put in at Ostia laden with wheat and honey. A stroke of energy on his part, and we should have these cargoes ready in no time for the expectant crowds; he would win my favour, I the people's, and he and I together yours. Farewell.

XI.

To his friend Montius About A. D. 461-7 [1] ON the eve of your departure to visit your people of Franche-Comté, most eloquent of friends, you ask me for a copy of a certain satire, assuming it really of my composition. I must say the request surprises me; it is not nice to jump to a false conclusion about a friend's conduct in this manner. It is so likely----is it not?----that at my then age and with my total lack of leisure, I should devote my energies to a kind of literature which it would have been presumptuous in a young man doing his service to compose, and assuredly perilous to publish. Why, a mere nodding acquaintance with a grammarian would suffice to recall the advice of the Calabrian: 'Against the libellous poet, is there not remedy of law and sentence?'1

[2] To prevent any more credulity of this sort as regards your old friend, I will set forth at some length, and from the beginning, the events which brought on my head the sound and smoke of public odium. In the reign of Majorian, an anonymous but very mordant satire in verse was circulated at court; gross in its invective, it took advantage of unprotected names, though it lashed vice, its attack was above all personal.1 The inhabitants of Aries (that city was the scene of these events) were much excited; they wanted to know on which of our poets the weight of public indignation was to fall; at their head were the men whom the invisible author had most visibly branded. [3] It chanced that the illustrious Catullinus arrived at this juncture from Clermont; always a close friend of mine, he was then nearer to me than ever, as we had just served together; a common duty away from home brings (you know how) fellow citizens nearer. Well, Paeonius and Bigerrus set a trap for the unsuspecting visitor: they took him off his guard, and asked him, before numerous witnesses, whether he was familiar with the new poem. 'Let me hear some of it,' said Catullinus.

But when they went on jestingly to quote various passages from the satire, he burst out laughing, and asseverated, rather inopportunely, perhaps, that such verses deserved to be immortalized, and set up in letters of gold on the rostra or the Capitol.2 [4] At this Paeonius flamed out, for he was the man whom the fiery tooth of the satirist had most sharply bitten. 'Ha!' he cried to the crowd attracted to the spot, 'I have found out the author of this public outrage. Just look at Catullinus half dead with laughter there; obviously he knew all the points beforehand. How could he thus anticipate, and conclude from a mere part, unless he were already acquainted with the whole? We know that Sidonius is in Auvergne. It is

easy to infer that he wrote the thing and that Catullinus was the first to hear it from his lips.' Now I was not only absent, but ignorant and innocent as a babe; that did not prevent a tempest of fury and abuse against me; they cast to the winds loyalty, fair play, and fair inquiry; [5] such power had this popular favourite to draw the fickle crowd whither he would. As you know, Paeonius was a demagogue well versed in the tribune's art of troubling the waters of faction. But if you asked 'whence his descent and where his home?'1 'tis known he was nothing more than a plain citizen, whom the eminence of his stepfather more than any distinction of his own house first brought to public notice.

He was bent on rising, and more than once let it be seen that he would stick at nothing to attain his end; though mean by nature he would spend freely for his own advancement. For example, when the engagement of his daughter (against whom I would not breathe a word) brought him the alliance of a family above his own, our Chremes,2 if rumour does not lie, announced to his Pamphilus a dower magnificently beyond the strict civic standard. [6] Again, when the Marcellian conspiracy 3 to seize the diadem was brewing, what did our friend do? A novus homo, and in his grey hairs, he must needs constitute himself the leader of the young nobility until in the fullness of time the efforts of a lucky audacity were rewarded, for the interregnum, like a rift in clouds, threw a flash of splendour on the obscurity of his birth. The throne was vacant, the State in confusion; but he, and only he, had the face, without waiting for credentials, to assume the fasces as prefect in Gaul, and for months together climb, in the sight of gods and men, the tribunal distinguished by so many illustrious magistrates. Like a public accountant or advocate promoted to honours at the close of a professional career, he just managed to get recognition at the very end of his official term.

[7] A prefect and senator in such wise that only my respect for the character of his son-in-law prevents me from exposing him as utterly as he deserves, behold him unashamed to fan the odium of good and bad alike against one still nominally his friend, as if I were the only man of my epoch competent to string a verse or two together. I came to Aries suspecting nothing ----how should I?----though my enemies were good enough to believe I dared not venture. The next day I paid my duty to the emperor, and went down to the forum, as I always do. As soon as I appeared, the conspiracy was at once confounded, being of the sort which, as Lucan says,1 dares put nothing to the touch. Some fell cringing at my knees, abasing themselves beyond propriety; others hid behind statues or columns to avoid the necessity of salutation; others, again, with looks of affected sorrow, walked closely at my sides. [8] I was wondering all the time what might be the meaning of this excess, first in insolence and now in abasement, but was determined not to ask, when one of the gang, put up, no doubt, to play the part, came forward to exchange greeting.

We talked, and incidentally he remarked: 'You see these people?' 'I do indeed,' I answered, 'and I may say that their proceedings astonish me as much as they impress me little.' To which my kind interpreter rejoined: 'It is in your quality of satirist that they show this fear or detestation of you.' 'How so,' I cried, 'on what grounds? when did I give them the

excuse? who detected the offence? who brought the charge and who the proof?' Then, with a smile, I continued thus: 'My dear sir, if you don't mind, oblige me by asking these excited persons from me, whether it was a professed informer or spy who got up this imaginative story about my writing a satire. If they have to make the inevitable apology later, it will be better for them to give up this outrageous behaviour at once.' [9] No sooner had he conveyed the message, than they all came to offer their hands and salutations, not man by man, and with decorum, but the whole herd with a rush. Our Curio was left all alone to breathe imprecations on the base deserters, until at fall of evening he was hurried off home on the shoulders of bearers gloomier than mutes. [10] The next day the emperor commanded my presence at the banquet he was giving on the occasion of the Games.

At the left end of the couch 1 was Severinus, the consul of the year, who managed to trim his sails to a wind of even favour throughout our vast dynastic changes and all the uneven fortunes of the State. Next him was the ex-prefect Magnus, who had just laid down the consul's office, and by virtue of these two dignities was no unworthy neighbour. Beyond Magnus was his nephew Camillus, who had also held two offices, and by his conduct of them added equal lustre to his father's proconsular rank and his uncle's consulship. Next to him was Paeonius, and then Athenius, a man versed in every turn of controversy and vicissitude of the times. After them came Gratianensis, a character not to be mentioned in the same breath with evil; and though lower in rank than Severinus, above him in the imperial estimation. I was last, upon the left side of the emperor, who lay at the right extremity of the table. [11] When the dinner was well advanced, the prince addressed a few short remarks to the consul. He then turned to the ex-consul, with whom he talked several times, the subjects being literary. At an early opportunity he addressed himself to Camillus, with the remark: 'My dear Camillus, you have so admirable an uncle that I pride myself on having conferred a consulship on your family.' Camillus, who coveted a like promotion, saw his chance, and replied: 'A consulship, Sire!

you surely mean a first?' Even the emperor's presence did not check the loud applause which greeted this rejoinder. [12] By accident, or of set purpose, I cannot say which, the prince now passed over Paeonius, and addressed some question or other to Athenius. Paeonius had the bad manners to take the oversight ill, and made matters worse by answering before the other had time to speak. The emperor only laughed; it was his way to be very genial in society so long as his own dignity was observed. To Athenius the laugh came as compensation for the slight he had suffered. That craftiest of all the elders had been boiling with suppressed resentment all the time because Paeonius had been placed above him, but he calmed himself enough to say: 'It no longer surprises me, Sire, that he should try to push himself into my place, when he has now pushed into your Majesty's conversation.' [13] The illustrious Gratianensis here remarked that the episode opened a wide field to a satirist.

On this, the emperor turned round to me and said: 'It is news to me, Count Sidonius,1 that you are a writer of satires.' 'Sire,' I answered, 'it is news to me too.' 'Anyhow,' he replied with a laugh, 'I beg you to be merciful to me.' 'I shall spare myself also,' I rejoined, 'by refraining

from illegality.' Thereupon the emperor said: 'What shall we do, then, to the people who have provoked you?' 'This, Sire,' I answered. ' Whoever my accuser be, let him come out into the open. If I am proved guilty, let me abide the penalty. But if, as will probably be the case, I rebut the charge, I ask of your clemency permission to write anything I choose about my assailant, provided I observe the law.' [14] The emperor looked at Paeonius, who was hesitating, and made a sign of inquiry whether he accepted the conditions. But he had not a word to answer, and the prince spared his embarrassment; at last, however, he managed to say: 'I agree to your conditions, if you can put them in verse on the spot.' 'Very well,' I said; and turning back, as if to call for water for my hands, I remained in that attitude the time occupied by a quick servant in going round the table. I then resumed my former position, and the emperor said: 'Your undertaking was to ask in an impromptu our sanction for writing satire.' I replied:

'O mightiest prince, I pray that this be thy decree: let him who calls me libeller or prove his charge, or fear.'

[15] I do not want to seem conceited, but the applause which followed was equal to that which had greeted Camillus; though it was earned, of course, less by the merit of the verse than by the speed with which I had composed. Then the emperor cried: 'I call God and the common weal to witness that in future I give you licence to write what you please; the charge brought against you was not susceptible of proof. It would be most unjust if the imperial decision allowed such latitude to private quarrels that evident malice might imperil by obscure charges nobles whom conscious innocence puts wholly off their guard.' At this pronouncement I modestly bent my head and thanked him; the face of my opponent, which had previously shown successive signs of rage and vexation, now grew pale. Indeed, it was almost frozen with terror, as if he had received the order to present his neck to the executioner's drawn sword. [16] Little more was said before we rose from the table. We had withdrawn a short distance from the imperial presence, and were in the act of putting on our mantles, when the consul fell upon my bosom, the ex-prefects seized my hands, and my guilty friend abased himself so often and so profoundly, that he aroused universal pity, and bade fair to place me in a more invidious position by his entreaties than he had ever done by his insinuations.

Urged to speak by the throng of nobles round me, I closed the episode by telling him that he might set his mind at rest; I should write no satire on his base intrigue so long as he abstained henceforward from the misrepresentation of my actions. It should be punishment enough for him to know that his ascription of the lampoon to me had added to my credit and brought nothing but discredit on himself. [17] In fine, honoured lord, the man whom I thus confounded had not been loudest in calumny; he was a mere whisperer. But since, by his offence, I had the satisfaction of being so warmly greeted by so many men of the highest influence and position, I confess that it was almost worth while to have borne the scandal of the exordium for the sake of so triumphant a conclusion. Farewell.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.