Book 2

Sidonius Apollinaris (c. AD 430–490)

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I.

To [his brother-in-law] Ecdicius* c. A.D. 470 [1] YOUR countrymen of Auvergne suffer equally from two evils. 'What are those?' you ask. Seronatus' presence, and your own absence. Seronatus----his very name first calls for notice; 1 I think that when he was so named, a prescient fortune must have played with contradictions, as our predecessors did, who by antiphrasis used the root of 'beautiful' in their word for war, the most hideous thing on earth; and, with no less perversity, the root of mercy in their name for Fate, because Fate never spares. This Catiline of our day is just returned from the region of the Adour to blend in whole confusion the fortune and the blood of unhappy victims which down there he had only pledged himself in part to shed. [2] You must know that his long-dissembled savagery comes daily further into the light. His spite affronts the day; his dissimulation was abject as his arrogance is servile. He commands like a despot; no tyrant more exacting than he, no judge more peremptory in sentence, no barbarian falser in false witness. The livelong day he goes armed from cowardice, and starving from pure meanness. Greed makes him formidable, and vanity cruel; he continually commits himself the very thefts he punishes in others. To the universal amusement he will rant of war in a civilian company, and of literature among Goths. Though he barely knows the alphabet, he has the conceit to dictate letters in public and the impudence to revise them under the same conditions.

[3] All property he covets he makes a show of buying; but he never thinks of paying, nor does he trouble to furnish himself with deeds, knowing it hopeless to prove a title.1 In the council-chamber he commands, but in counsel he is mute. He jests in church and preaches at table; snores on the bench, and breathes condemnation in his bedroom. His actions are filling the woods with dangerous fugitives from the estates, the churches with scoundrels, the prisons with holy men. He cries the Goths up and the Romans down; he prepares illusions for prefects and collusions with public accountants. He tramples under foot the Theodosian Code to set in its place the laws of a Theodoric,2 raking up old charges to justify new imposts. [4] Be quick, then, to unravel the tangle of affairs that makes you linger; cut short whatever causes your delay. Our people are at the last gasp; freedom is almost dead. Whether there is any hope, or whether all is to be despair, they want you in their midst to lead them. If the State is powerless to succour, if, as rumour says, the Emperor Anthemius is without resource, our nobility is determined to follow your lead, and give up their country or the hair of their heads.3 Farewell.

* Partly translated by Fertig, Part i, p. 20.

II.

T0 his friend Domitius A.D. 461-7(?) [1] You attack me for staying in the country; I might with greater reason complain of you for lingering in town. Spring already gives place to summer; the sun has travelled his full range to the Tropic of Cancer and now advances on his journey towards the pole. Why should I waste words upon the climate which we here enjoy? The Creator has so placed us that we are exposed to the afternoon heats. Enough said; the whole world glows; the snow is melting on the Alps; the earth is seamed with gaping heat-cracks. The fords are nothing but dry gravel, the banks hard mud, the plains dust; the running streams languish and hardly drag themselves along; as for the water, hot is not the word; it boils. [2] We are all perspiring in light silks or linens; but there you stay at Ameria all swathed up under your great gown, buried in a deep chair, and setting with many yawns 'My mother was a Samian' 1 to pupils paler from the heat than from any fear of you. As you love your health, get away at once from your suffocating alleys, join our household as the most welcome of all guests, and in this most temperate of retreats evade the intemperate dog-star.

[3] You may like to know the kind of place to which you are invited. We are at the estate known as Avitacum,2 a name of sweeter sound in my ears than my own patrimony because it came to me with my wife. Infer the harmony which established between me and mine; it is God's ordinance; but you might be pardoned for fearing it the work of some enchantment. On the west rises a big hill, pretty steep but not rocky, from which issue two lower spurs, like branches from a double trunk, extending over an area of about four jugera. But while the ground opens out enough to form a broad approach to the front door, the straight slopes on either side lead a valley right to the boundary of the villa, which faces north and south. [4] On the south-west are the baths,1 which so closely adjoin a wooded eminence that if timber is cut on the hill above, the piles of logs slide down almost by their own weight, and are brought up against the very mouth of the furnace. At this point is the hot bath, which corresponds in size with the adjoining unguentarium, except that it has an apse with a semicircular basin; here the hot water pressing through the sinuous lead pipes that pierce the wall issues with a sobbing sound. The chamber itself is well heated from beneath; it is full of day, and so overflowing with light that very modest bathers seem to themselves something more than naked.

[5] Next come the spacious frigidarium, which may fairly challenge comparison with those in public baths. The roof is pyramidal, and the spaces between the converging ridges are covered with imbricated tiles; the architect has inserted two opposite windows about the junction of walls and dome, so that if you look up, you see the fine coffering displayed to the best advantage. The interior walls are unpretentiously covered with plain white stucco, and the apartment is designed by the nicest calculation of space to contain the same number of persons as the semicircular bath holds bathers, while it yet allows the servants to move about without impeding one another. [6] No frescoed scene obtrudes its comely nudities, gracing the art to the disgrace of the artist. You will observe no painted actors in absurd masks, and costumes rivalling Philistio's gear with colours gaudy as the rainbow.1 You will find no pugilists or wrestlers intertwining their oiled limbs in those grips which, in real bouts, the gymnasiarch's chaste wand unlocks the moment the enlaced limbs look indecent. [7] Enough you will see upon these walls none of those things which it is nicer not to look upon. A few verses there are, harmless lines enough, since no one either regrets perusal or cares to peruse again. If you want to know what marbles are employed, neither Paros nor Carystos, nor Proconnesos, nor Phrygia, nor Numidia, nor Sparta have contributed their diverse inlays.

I had no use for stone that simulates a broken surface, with Ethiopic crags and purple precipices stained with genuine murex. Though enriched by no cold splendour of foreign marble, my poor huts and hovels do not lack the coolness to which a plain citizen may aspire. But now I had really better talk about the things I have, than the things I lack. [8] With this hall is connected on the eastern side an annexe, a piscina, or, if you prefer the Greek word, baptistery, with a capacity of about twenty thousand modii. Into this the bathers pass from the hot room by three arched entrances in the dividing wall. The supports are not piers but columns, which your experienced architect calls the glory of buildings. Into this piscina, then, a stream lured from the brow of the hill is conducted in channels curving round the outside of the swimming basin; it issues through six pipes terminating in lions' heads which, to one entering rapidly, seem to present real fangs, authentic fury of eyes, indubitable manes. [9] When the master of the house stands here with his household or his guests about him, people have to shout in each other's ears, or the noise of falling water makes their words inaudible; the interference of this alien sound forces conversations which are quite public to assume an amusing air of secrecy. On leaving this chamber you see in front of you the withdrawing-room;

adjoining it is the storeroom, separated only by a movable partition from the place where the maids do our weaving.

[10] On the east side a portico commands the lake, supported by simple wooden pillars instead of pretentious monumental columns. On the side of the front entrance is a long covered space unbroken by interior divisions; it may be incorrect to call this a hypodrome, but I may fairly award it the name of cryptoporticus. At the end it is curtailed by a section cut off

to form a delightfully cool bay, and here when we keep open festival, the whole chattering chorus of nurses and dependants sounds a halt when the family retires for the siesta.

[11] The winter dining-room is entered from this cryptoporticus; a roaring fire on an arched hearth often fills this apartment with smoke and smuts. But that detail I may spare you; a glowing hearth is the last thing I am inviting you to enjoy just now. I pass instead to things which suit the season and your present need. From here one enters a smaller chamber or dining-room, all open to the lake and with almost the whole expanse of lake in its view. This chamber is furnished with a dining-couch and gleaming sideboard upon a raised area or dais to which you mount gradually, and not by abrupt or narrow steps from the portico below. Reclining at this table you can give the idle moments between the courses to the enjoyment of the prospect. [12] If water of our famous springs is served and quickly poured into the cups, one sees snowy spots and clouded patches form outside them; the sudden chill dulls the fugitive reflections of the surface almost as if it had been greased. Such cups restrict one's draughts; the thirstiest soul on earth, to say nothing of Your Abstemiousness, would set lip to the freezing brims with caution. From table you may watch the fisherman row his boat out to mid-lake, and spread his seine with cork floats, or suspend his lines at marked intervals to lure the greedy trout on their nightly excursions through the lake with bait of their own flesh and blood: what phrase more proper, since fish is literally caught by fish?

[13] The meal over, we pass into a withdrawing-room, which its coolness makes a perfect place in summer. Facing north, it receives all the daylight but no direct sun: a very small intervening chamber accommodates the drowsy servants, large enough to allow them forty winks but not a regular sleep. [14] It is delightful to sit here and listen to the shrill cicala at noon, the croak of frogs in the gloaming, the clangour of swans and geese in the earlier night or the crow of cocks in the dead of it, the ominous voice of rooks saluting the rosy face of Dawn in chorus, or, in the half-light, nightingales fluting in the bushes and swallows twittering under the eaves. To this concert you may add the seven-stopped pipe of the pastoral Muse, on which the very wakeful Tityri of our hills will often vie one with another, while the herds about them low to the cow-bells as they graze along the pastures. All these tuneful songs and sounds will but charm you into deeper slumbers. [15] If you leave the colonnade and go down to the little lakeside harbour, you come to a greensward, and, hard by, to a grove of trees where every one is allowed to go. There stand two great limes, with roots and trunks apart, but the boughs interwoven in one continuous canopy. In their dense shade we play at ball1 when my Ecdicius honours me with his company;

but the moment the shadow of the trees shrinks to the area covered by the branches we stop for want of ground, and repose our tired limbs at dice.

[16] I have described the house; I now owe you a description of the lake. It extends in a devious course towards the east, and when violent winds lash it to fury, drenches the lower part of the house with spray. At its head the ground is marshy and full of bog-holes, impassable to the explorer; a slimy and saturated mud has formed there, and cold springs

rise on all sides; the edges are fringed with weed. When the wind drops, small boats cleave its changeful surface in all directions. But if dirty weather comes up from the south the whole lake is swollen into monstrous waves and a rain of spray comes crashing over the tree-tops upon the banks. [17] By nautical measure, it is seventeen stadia in length. Where the river comes in, the broken water foams white against the rocky barriers; but the stream soon wins clear of the overhanging crags, and is lost in the smooth expanse. Whether the river itself makes the lake, or is only an affluent, I know not; certain it is that it reaches the other end, and flows away through subterranean channels which only deprive it of its fish, and leave it intact in volume. The fish, driven into more sluggish waters, increase in size, red bodied and white under the belly. They cannot either return or escape; they fatten, and go self-contained as it were in portable jails of their own composition. [18] On the right, a wooded shore curves with an indented line;

on the left, it opens to a level sweep of grass. On the southwest the shallows along the banks look green; overarching boughs lend the water their own hue, and the water transmits it to the pebbles at the bottom; on the east, a similar fringe of foliage produces a like tint. On the north, the water preserves its natural colour; on the west, the shore is covered with a tangle of common growths crushed in many places where boats have rowed over them; close by, tufts of smooth reeds bend to the wind, and pulpy flat leaves of aquatic plants float upon the surface; the sweet waters nourish the bitter sap of the grey-green willows growing near. [19] In the deep middle of the lake is an islet, at one end of which projects a turning post upon boulders naturally piled, worn by contact with oar-blades during our aquatic sports; at this point competitors often collide and come to cheerful grief. Our fathers used to hold boat-races here in imitation of the Trojan ceremonial games at Drepanum.1

It is not in my bond to describe the estate itself; suffice it to say that it has spreading woods and flowery meadows, pastures rich in cattle and a wealth of hardy shepherds. [20] Here I must conclude. Were my pen to run on much further the autumn would overtake you before you reached the end. Accord me, then, the grace of coming quickly; your return shall be as slow as ever you choose. And forgive me if, in my fear of overlooking anything about our situation here, I have given you facts in excess and beyond the fair limits of a letter. As it is, there are points which I have left untouched for fear of being tedious. But a reader of your judgement and imagination will not exaggerate the size of the descriptive page, but rather that of the house so spaciously depicted. Farewell.

III.

To [his friend Magnus] Felix c. A.D. 472 [1] I REJOICE, honoured lord, to see you win the distinction of this most exalted title;1 and all the more because the news is announced to me by special messenger. For though you are now high among the powers, and after all these years the patrician dignity comes back to the Philagrian house by your felicity 2, you will discover, most loyal of friends, how much your honours grow by being shared, and how far so rare a modesty as yours exalts a lofty station. [2] It was for these qualities that the Roman people once preferred Quintus Fabius the Master of the Horse to Cursor with his dictatorial rigour and his Papirian pride;3 for these that Pompey surpassed all rivals in a popularity which he was too wise to scorn. By these Germanicus won the whole world's favour and forced Tiberius to repress his envy. For these reasons I will not concede all the credit for your promotion to the imperial pleasure. It has only one advantage over ours; were we to oppose your claims, it has the power to override us. Your peculiar privilege, your unique advantage is this: you have neither actual rival nor visible successor. Farewell.

IV.

To his friend Sagittarius* A.D. 461-7 [1] THE honourable § Projectus is ardently bent upon your friendship; I trust that you will not repel his advances. He is of noble lineage; the reputation of his father and his uncle, and his grandfather's eminence in the Church unite to lend a lustre to his name; he has indeed all that conduces to distinction; family, wealth, probity, energetic youth; but not till he is assured of your good graces, will he consider himself to have attained the culminating point of his career. [2] Although he has already asked and obtained from the widow of the late honourable Optantius her daughter's hand----may God speed his hopes----he fears that little will have been gained by all his vows, unless his own solicitude, or my intercession gains him your support as well. For you have taken the place of the girl's dead father; you have succeeded to his share in the responsibility for her upbringing; it is to you that she looks for a father's love, a patron's guidance, a guardian's bounden care. [3] And since it is but natural that your admirable government of your household should attract men of the right stamp even from distant places, reward the modesty of this suppliant wooer by a kindly response. In the usual course of events it would have fallen to you to obtain him the mother's consent; as it is, he saves you this trouble, and you have only to sanction a troth already approved. Your reputation gives you in effect a parental authority in regard to this match; the father himself, if he had lived, could not have claimed a greater. Farewell.

* Or to Syagrius, as C. § Clarissimus.

V.

To his friend Petronius A.D. 461-7 [1] JOHN, my friend, is caught inextricably in the labyrinth of a complex business, and is at a loss what to hope and what abandon until your experienced eye, or another as good (if such there be), has looked into his titles to determine their validity. The case is confusing in that it has more than one side, and he does not see whether his statement should maintain one line of action or impugn another. [2] I most earnestly beg you, therefore, to examine his documents and tell him what his rights are, what he ought to allege or refute, and what his procedure should be. Let but the stream of this affair flow from the springs of your advice, and I have no fear that the other side will manage to reduce its volume by any unfair diversion. Farewell.

VI.

To his friend Pegasius A.D. 461-7 [1] THERE is a proverb that delay is often best; I have just had proof that it is true. We have had your friend Menstruanus long enough among us, to find him worthy of a place among our dearest and most intimate friends. He is agreeable, and of refined manners, moderate, sensible, religious, and no spendthrift; his is a personality which confers as much as it obtains when admitted to the most approved of friendships. [2] I tell you this for my own satisfaction, and not to inform you of what you already know. As a result, content will now reign in three separate quarters. You will be pleased at this seal set on your judgement in the choice and adoption of your friends; the Arvenians will be pleased, since to my certain knowledge they liked him for the very qualities which, I am sure, commended him to you; lastly Menstruanus himself will be gratified at receiving the good opinion of honourable men. Farewell.

VII.

To his friend Explicius A.D. 461-7 [1] You have given so many proofs of your impartiality that you have won universal respect, and for that reason I am always more than eager to send all seekers after justice to your judgement-seat; by so doing I ease the disputants from their burden, and myself from all necessity of argument. These ends I shall attain in the present case, unless your diffidence should prompt you to refuse the parties audience; but your very inaccessibility is the best proof of your impartiality. For almost every one else intrigues to be chosen as an arbitrator, expecting to gain something in influence or advantage. [2] Be indulgent, therefore, to men who press on each other's heels to enjoy the privilege of pleading before so fair a judge; your repute is such that the loser can never be so stupid as to impugn your verdict, or the winner so over-subtle as to deride it. Both sides respect the truth; those against whom the verdict goes respect you; those whom it favours show their gratitude. Therefore I implore your early decision on the matter in dispute between Alethius and Paulus. I believe your sound sense and healthy judgement can alone heal the malady of this interminable quarrel, and that they will be far more effective than any decrees of decemvirs or of pontiffs. Farewell.

VIII.

To his friend Desideratus A.D. 461-7 [1] I WRITE oppressed by a great sorrow. Three days ago Filimatia died, and all business was suspended out of respect to her memory. She was an obedient wife, a kindly mistress, a capable mother, a dutiful daughter, whether at home or abroad, earning the willing service of her inferiors, the affection of her equals, and the consideration of the great. Left an only daughter at her mother's death, she so bewitched her father by her charming ways, that though he was still a young man, he never longed for a male heir. And now her sudden death pierces two hearts, leaving a husband desolate and a father childless. The mother of five children has been snatched away before her time, her very fertility her worst misfortune1; had she been left, and the invalid father taken, the little ones would seem less helpless than now. [2] The tributes of affection which we pay the dead are not vain; it was not the sinister train of bearers who buried her; all present were dissolved in tears, and the very strangers hung upon the bier as if they would hold it back. They imprinted kisses on it, until more like one in slumber than one dead, she was received by her relatives and the clergy, to be laid to rest in her long home. When the rites were done, the bereaved father begged me to write an elegy for her tombstone; I did it while my tears were still almost warm, choosing the hendecasyllabic in place of the elegiac measure. If you do not think the lines too bad, my bookseller shall include them in the volumes of my selected poems; if you do, the heavy verse shall be confined to the heavy stone.

[3] Here is my epitaph: 'In this tomb a mourning country's hands have laid the matron Filimatia, whom with fierce stroke and swift, fate snatched from spouse, from sire, from five orphaned children. O pride of thy house, O glory of thy consort, O wise and pure and seemly, O strict and tender, and worthy to precede even the aged, by what art of thy gentle nature didst thou unite the qualities which seem at discord with each other? For a grave ease and a modesty not too severe for gaiety were ever the companions of thy life. Therefore we mourn thee taken, thy sixth lustre hardly run, and the due rites paid in this undue season of thy prime.' 1 Whether you like the verses or not, hasten back to the city. You owe the bereaved homes of two fellow townsmen the duty of consolation. Pray God you so act that the manner of your action may never be your reproach hereafter. Farewell.

IX.

To his friend Donidius * A.D. 461-7

[1] To your question why, having got as far as Nimes, I still leave your hospitality expectant, I reply by giving the reason for my delayed return. I will even dilate upon the causes of my dilatoriness, for I know that what I enjoy is your enjoyment too. The fact is, I have passed the most delightful time in the most beautiful country in the company of Tonantius Ferreolus and Apollinaris, the most charming hosts in the world. Their estates march together; their houses are not far apart; and the extent of intervening ground is just too far for a walk and just too short to make the ride worth while.2 The hills above the houses are under vines and olives; they might be Nysa and Aracynthus, famed in song.3 The view from one villa is over a wide flat country, that from the other over woodland; yet different though their situations are, the eye derives equal pleasure from both. [2] But enough of sites; I have now to unfold the order of my entertainment. Sharp scouts were posted to look out for our return; and not only were the roads patrolled by men from each estate, but even winding short-cuts and sheep-tracks were under observation, to make it quite impossible for us to elude the friendly ambush. Into this of course we fell, no unwilling prisoners; and our captors instantly made us swear to dismiss every idea of continuing our journey until a whole week had elapsed.

[3] And so every morning began with a flattering rivalry between the two hosts, as to which of their kitchens should first smoke for the refreshment of their guest; nor, though I am personally related to one, and connected through my relatives with the other, could I manage by alternation to give them quite equal measure, since age and the dignity of prefectorian rank gave Ferreolus a prior right of invitation over and above his other claims. [4] From the first moment we were hurried from one pleasure to another. Hardly had we entered the vestibule of either house when we saw two opposed pairs of partners in the ball-game1 repeating each other's movements as they turned in wheeling circles; in another place one heard the rattle of dice boxes and the shouts of the contending players; in yet another, were books in abundance ready to your hand; you might have imagined yourself among the shelves of some grammarian, or the tiers of the Athenaeum, or a bookseller's towering cases.2 They were so arranged that the devotional works were near the ladies' seats; where the master sat were those ennobled by the great style of Roman eloquence. The arrangement had this defect, that it separated certain books by certain authors in manner as near to each other as in

matter they are far apart. Thus Augustine writes like Varro, and Horace like Prudentius; but you had to consult them on different sides of the room.

[5] Turranius Rufinus' interpretation of Adamantius Origen1 was eagerly examined by the readers of theology among us; according to our several points of view, we had different reasons to give for the censure of this Father by certain of the clergy as too trenchant a controversialist and best avoided by the prudent; but the translation is so literal and yet renders the spirit of the work so well, that neither Apuleius' version of Plato's Phaedo, nor Cicero's of the Ctesiphon of Demosthenes is more admirably adapted to the use and rule of our Latin tongue. [6] While we were engaged in these discussions as fancy prompted each, appears an envoy from the cook to warn us that the moment of bodily refreshment is at hand. And in fact the fifth hour had just elapsed, proving that the man was punctual, had properly marked the advance of the hours upon the water-clock 2. The dinner was short, but abundant, served in the fashion affected in senatorial houses where inveterate usage prescribes numerous courses on very few dishes, though to afford variety, roast alternated with stew. Amusing and instructive anecdotes accompanied our potations; wit went with the one sort, and learning with the other. To be brief, we were entertained with decorum, refinement, and good cheer. [7] After dinner, if we were at Vorocingus 3 (the name of one estate) we walked over to our quarters and our own belongings.

If at Prusianum, as the other is called, [the young] Tonantius and his brothers turned out of their beds for us because we could not be always dragging our gear about: 1 they are surely the elect among the nobles of our own age. The siesta over, we took a short ride to sharpen our jaded appetites for supper. [8] Both of our hosts had baths in their houses, but in neither did they happen to be available; so I set my own servants to work in the rare sober interludes which the convivial bowl, too often filled, allowed their sodden brains. I made them dig a pit at their best speed either near a spring or by the river; into this a heap of red-hot stones was thrown, and the glowing cavity then covered over with an arched roof of wattled hazel. This still left interstices, and to exclude the light and keep in the steam given off when water was thrown on the hot stones, we laid coverings of Cilician goats' hair over all.2 [9] In these vapour-baths we passed whole hours with lively talk and repartee; all the time the cloud of hissing steam enveloping us induced the healthiest perspiration.

When we had perspired enough, we were bathed in hot water; the treatment removed the feeling of repletion, but left us languid; we therefore finished off with a bracing douche from fountain, well or river. For the river Garden runs between the two properties; except in time of flood, when the stream is swollen and clouded with melted snow, it looks red through its tawny gravels, and flows still and pellucid over its pebbly bed, teeming none the less with the most delicate fish. [10] I could tell you of suppers fit for a king; it is not my sense of shame, but simply want of space which sets a limit to my revelations. You would have a great story if I turned the page and continued on the other side; but I am always ashamed to disfigure the back of a letter with an inky pen. Besides, I am on the point of leaving here, and hope, by Christ's grace, that we shall meet very shortly; the story of our friends'

banquets will be better told at my own table or yours----provided only that a good week's interval first elapses to restore me the healthy appetite I long for. There is nothing like thin living to give tone to a system disordered by excess. Farewell.

* Translated by Hodgkin, ii. 324 f.

X.

To his friend Hesperius c. A. D. 470 [1] WHAT I most love in you is your love of letters, and I strive to enhance the generous devotion by the highest praises I can give; your firstfruits please the better for it, and even my own work begins to rise in my esteem. For the richest reward of a man's labours is to see promising young men growing up in that discipline of letters for which he in his own day smarted under the cane. The numbers of the indifferent grow at such a rate that unless your little band can save the purity of the Latin tongue from the rust of sorry barbarisms we shall soon have to mourn its abolition and decease. All the fine flowers of diction will lose their splendour through the apathy of our people. [2] But of that another time. My present duty is to send you what you asked, namely, any verses I might have written since we saw each other last, to compensate you for my absence. I now satisfy your desire; young though you are, your judgement is already so matured that even we seniors like to obey your wishes.

A church has recently been built at Lyons,1 and carried to a successful completion by the zeal of Bishop Patiens; you know his holy, strenuous, and ascetic life, how by his abounding liberality and hospitable love towards the poor he erects to an equal height the temple of a spotless reputation. [3] At his request I wrote a hurried inscription for the end of the church in triple trochaic, a metre by this time as familiar to you as it has long been to me. Hexameters by the illustrious poets Constantius and Secundinus adorn the walls by the altar; these mere shame forbids me to copy here for you. It is with diffidence that I let my verse appear at all; comparison of their accomplished work with the poor efforts of my leisure would be too overwhelming. Just as a too beautiful bridesmaid makes the worst escort for a bride, and a dark man looks his swarthiest in white, so does my scrannel pipe sound common and is drowned by the music of their nobler instruments. Holding the middle post in space and the last in merit, my composition stands condemned as a poor thing, no less for its faulty art than for the presumption which has set it where it is. Their inscriptions properly outshine mine, which is but a sketchy and fanciful production. But excuses are of little use: let the wretched reed warble the lines demanded of me:

[4] 'O thou * who here applaudest the labours of Patiens our pontiff and father, be it thine to receive of heaven an answer to a prayer according with thy desire. High stands the church in splendour, extending neither to right nor left, but with towering front looking towards the

equinoctial sunrise. Within is shining light, and the gilding of the coffered ceiling allures the sunbeams golden as itself. The whole basilica is bright with diverse marbles, floor vaulting and windows all adorned with figures of most various colour, and mosaic green as a blooming mead shows its design of sapphire cubes winding through the ground of verdant glass.1 The entrance is a triple portico proudly set on Aquitanian columns; a second portico of like design closes the atrium at the farther side, and the mid-space is flanked afar by columns numerous as forest stems. On the one side runs the noisy highway, on the other leaps the Saône; here turns the traveller who rides or goes afoot, here the driver of the creaking carriage; here the towers, bowed over the rope, raise their river-chant to Christ till the banks re-echo Alleluia. So raise the psalm, O wayfarer and boatman, for here is the goal of all mankind, hither runs for all the way of their salvation.'

[5] You see I have done your bidding as if you were the older and I the younger man. But mind not to forget that I expect repayment with compound interest; and to make the payment easy and positively delightful, there is only one thing to do: read shamelessly; never stop longing for your books. The auspicious event, now so near, I mean the home-coming of your bride, must not distract you; keep steadily before your mind how many wives have held the lamp for studious or meditative lords----Marcia for Hortensius, Terentia for Tullius, Calpurnia for Pliny, Pudentilla for Apuleius, Rusticana for Symmachus. [6] When you are inclined to complain that feminine companionship may deaden not only your eloquence but your poetic talent as well, and dull the fine edge which long study has set upon your diction, remember how often Corinna helped her Ovid to round off a verse, Lesbia her Catullus, Caesennia her Gaetulicus, Argentaria her Lucan, Cynthia her Propertius, or Delia her Tibullus. Why, it is as clear as day that, to the studious, marriage is opportunity, and only to the idle an excuse. Set to, then; do not permit a mob of the unlettered to discourage your zeal for letters. For it is Nature's law in all the arts that the rarer the accomplishment, the higher the value. Farewell.

* Translated by Hodgkin, ii. 328 ff., who uses a corresponding English metre; also by Fertig, ii. 37.

XI.

To his friend Rusticus A. D. 461-7 [1] IF only we lived nearer to each other, and the distance which sunders us were less vast, I should allow no remissness in correspondence to affect the duties of our established intimacy. I should not cease, the foundations of our mutual friendship once laid, to raise thereon a noble structure by all honourable attention. The distance of our homes from each other may hardly affect the union of hearts linked once for all, yet it interferes with the intercourse of minds. [2] The remoteness of our cities is really responsible for the rarity of our letters; but so close is our friendship that we keep accusing ourselves, though all the time the obstacles are purely natural, and afford no real ground either for blame or for excuse. I opened my gates in a good hour, illustrious lord, to your messengers, in whom I marked the effect of your training and the influence of their master's unassuming manners. I heard with pleasure all they had to say, and finally dismissed them as the event required. Farewell.

XII.

To his brother-in-law Agricola A. D. 461-7

[1] WHAT a fast and well-built boat you have sent, roomy enough to hold a couch; and a present of fish too! In addition, a steersman who knows the whole river well, with sturdy and expert oarsmen who seem able to shoot up-stream just as fast as down. But you must hold me excused if I decline your invitation to join your fishing; stronger nets than yours detain me here, nets of anxiety for our invalids, a source of concern not merely to our own circle but to many beyond its limits. If the natural feelings of a brother awaken in you the moment you open this, you too will give up the expedition and return. [2] The cause of this general solicitude is our Severiana. At first she was troubled by a shattering intermittent cough; upon this an exhaustive fever supervened which has grown worse during successive nights. She longs to get away into the country; when your letter came, we were actually preparing to leave town for the villa. Whether you decide to stay where you are, or to come to us, join your prayers to ours that Nature with her vigorous growth may bring back health to one pining for country air. Your sister and I have been living in suspense between hope and fear; we thought that to oppose the invalid's wish would only make her fret the more.

So under Christ's guidance we are determined to fly the languor and heat of town with all our household, and incidentally escape the doctors also, who disagree across the bed, and by their ignorance and endless visits conscientiously kill off their patients. Only Justus shall be of our party, but in the quality of friend, not as physician; Justus, who, if this were a time for jesting, I could easily prove a Chiron rather than a Machaon.1 Let us then with all the more diligence entreat and beseech the Lord that the cure which our efforts fail to effect may come down to our invalid from above. Farewell.

XIII.

To Senanus* A. D. 461-7

[1] THE advocate Marcellinus has brought your letter; I find him a man of experience; he is of the sort that makes friends. The consecrated words of greeting over, you give all the rest of your space, no trifling amount, to laudation of Petronius Maximus, your imperial patron. With more persistence (or shall I call it amiability? than truth and justice, you style him 'the most fortunate', because, after holding all the most honourable offices of state, he at last attained the diadem. Personally, I shall always refuse to call that man fortunate who is poised on the precipitous and slippery peak of office. [2] O the unspeakable miseries of that life, the life of your fortunates! And are they who usurp the title, as Sulla did, really to be so styled for trampling upon all law and justice, and believing power the only happiness? Does not their blindness to their own most harassing servitude alone prove them more wretched than other men? For as kings rule their subjects, so desire of domination dominates kings. [3] Were the fate of all princes before and after him left out of the account, this Maximus of yours would alone provide the maximum of warnings.1 He had scaled with intrepidity the prefectorian, the patrician, the consular citadels; with an unsated appetite for office, he took for a second term posts which he had already held.

But when the supreme effort brought him to the yawning gulf of the imperial dignity, his head swam beneath the diadem at sight of that enormous power, and the man who once could not bear to have a master could not now endure to be one. [4] Imagine how much was left in all this of the influence, the power, and the stability of the old life; then think of this two-months' principate, its beginning, its whirlwind course, its end. Is it not plain that his real happiness was over and done before this epithet of 'fortunate' was ever given him? The man who once was so great a figure, with his conspicuous way of life, his banquets, his lavish expense, his retinues, his literary pursuits, his official rank, his estates, his extensive patronage; who so jealously watched the flight of time that the clock 2 must set before his eyes the passage of every hour; this man, once made emperor, and prisoned in the palace walls, was rueing his own success before the first evening fell. And when his mountainous cares forbade him to mete the hours in his former tranquil way, he had to make instant renunciation of the old regular life; he soon discovered that the business of empire and a senatorial ease are inconsistent with each other. [5] The future did not deceive his sad

forebodings; it was no help to him to have traversed all other offices of the court in the fairest of fair weather;

his rule of it was from the first tempestuous, with popular tumults, tumults of soldiery, tumults of allies. And the climax was unprecedentedly swift and cruel; Fortune, who had long cozened him, showed now all her faithlessness and made a bloody end; it was the last of her that stung him, as the tail of the scorpion stings. A prominent, noble man of high culture, whose talents raised him to quaestor's rank, a man of great influence among the nobility, I mean Fulgentius, used to say that whenever the thrice-loathed burden of a crown set Maximus longing for his ancient ease, he would often hear him exclaim: 'Happy thou, O Damocles, whose royal duresse did not outlast a single banquet!' [6] History tells us that Damocles was a Sicilian of Syracuse, and an acquaintance of the tyrant Dionysius. One day, when he was extolling to the skies the privileges of his patron's life without any comprehension of its drawbacks, Dionysius said to him: 'Would you like to see for yourself, at this very board, what the blessings and the curses of royalty are like?' 'I should think I would,' replied the other. Instantly the dazzled and delighted creature was stripped of his commoner's garb and made resplendent with robes of Tyrian and Tarentine dye; they set him on a gold couch with coverings of silk, a figure glittering with gems and pearls. [7] But just as a Sardanapalian feast was about to begin, and bread of fine Leontine wheat was handed round;

just as rare viands were brought in on plate of yet greater rarity; just as the Falernian foamed in great gem-like cups and unguents tempered the ice-cold crystal; just as the whole room breathed cinnamon and frankincense and exotic perfumes floated to every nostril; just as the garlands were drying on heads drenched with nard,----behold a bare sword, swinging from the ceiling right over his purple-mantled shoulders, as if every instant it must fall and pierce his throat. The menace of that heavy blade on that horsehair thread curbed his greed and made him reflect on Tantalus; the awful thought oppressed him that all he swallowed might be rendered through gaping wounds. [8] He wept, he prayed, he sighed in every key; and when at last he was let go, he was off like a flash, flying the wealth and the delights of kings as fast as most men follow after them. A horror of high estate brought him back with longing to the mean, nicely cautioned never again to think or call the mortal happy who lives ringed round with army and guards, or broods heavy over his spoils 1 while the steel presses no less heavily upon him than he himself upon his gold. If such a state be the goal of happiness I know not my lord brother; but that those who attain it are the most miserable of men is proved beyond dispute. Farewell.

* Partly translated by Hodgkin, ii. 200-3.

XIV.

To his friend Maurusius A. D. 461-7 [1] I HEAR that your vines have responded to your hard work and our general hopes with a more abundant harvest than a threatening and lean year promised. I expect that you will consequently stay longer at the village of Vialoscum; 1 was not the place formerly called Martialis, from the time when it formed Caesar's winter quarters? Of course you have a rich vineyard there, and a large farm besides worthy of its great proprietor, both of which will keep you and yours busy harvesting the various crops and always in fresh quarters. [2] When your granaries and stores are full, you may decide to pass the snowy months of Janus and Numa in rural ease 2 by your smoking hearth until swallow and stork reappear; if so, we too shall cut short engagements hardly promising enough to keep us in town, and while you enjoy your country life we shall enjoy your society. You know me well enough to be aware that even the sight of a fine estate with ample revenues could never give me half the satisfaction or the keen pleasure which I derive from intercourse with a neighbour of my own years and so worthy of my esteem. 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.