A STOIC IN HIS GARDEN.

LIPSIUS' dialogue, 'De Constantia,' was published about 1584¹ at Leyden. Belgium had long been in the turmoil of civil war. In 1572 Lipsius' own property had been pillaged whilst he was travelling. He had been to Liège to see his friend Charles Lange (or Langius), Canon of Saint-Lambert,² and had afterwards gone on to Germany, Bohemia, and Saxony. After holding for a year or so a professorship at Jena, he returned to his home at Overysse in 1575, by which time the civil war had subsided. But the troubles broke out again, and he had to fly to Louvain. Then in 1578, when the Spaniards entered Louvain, he went to Antwerp, and thence in 1579 to Leyden, where he had secured the chair of History.

His book, 'On Constancy,' written, as he says, for his own edification, is an attempt to define the right attitude of a thoughtful man towards public evils such as Belgium endured. Lipsius wrote as a Stoic. Travel, he says, does not avail to cure the weariness and despondency which such evils induce. It is the mind itself which must be changed and made constant; and true constancy is founded on the judgments of right reason as distinguished

¹ Nisard, in 'Le Triumvirat Littéraire' (pp. 60-2), gives 1583.

² Zanta, 'La Renaissance du Stoicisme' (1914), p. 154.

from those of fickle opinion. The things which chiefly make assault upon our constancy are external good and evil things, both public and private. Of these, probably public evils (or reputed evils) are the most trying—such things, namely, as wars, pestilences, and tyrannies. Yet with regard to these public evils we should remember three things: (1) That we are prone, when apparently lamenting national sufferings, to be really deploring our personal risks or mischances which are therein involved; (2) that an excessive (and erroneous) love of our country may lead us to bewail them overmuch. What, after all, is our own country? The space of a few fields? or the region bounded by certain mountain ranges? or is it, as Socrates held, the whole world? (3) that commiseration for those tossed on the waves of calamities may even be a vice. The sort of effeminate pity which faints at the sight of another's misfortunes is useless and mischievous; on the other hand, that inclination of the mind which prompts us to lighten helpfully the poverty or anguish of another is justifiable and right.

Coming then to the nature and origin of public evils, four main propositions, which form the backbone of the book, are advanced and argued concerning them: (a) That they are sent among us by the Providence of God, who is interested in and presides over all human affairs. (b) That they are necessary, and derived from Fate, in accordance with the law of mutation and death which obtains both throughout the physical world and throughout the affairs, the cities, and the kingdoms of man.

(c) That they are advantageous to us in various ways, e.g. by training us to overcome difficulties; by admonishing us to keep to the right path, and not, in overweening confidence, to forsake it; and by chastising those who do wrong. (d) That they are neither intolerable nor novel: it is less the calamities themselves that we fear than the circumstances with which our imagination tricks them out; we always exaggerate, too, the afflictions of our own age in comparison with those of previous ages—wherein we are wrong, as is shown by an enumeration of the hosts of victims who suffered in certain old wars, famines, pestilences, and oppressions.

Of these four main propositions the second, third, and fourth are developed with some fullness. In the second, drawn from Necessity, and the perpetual 'circle of beginning and ending,' various definitions of Fate are given and expounded, as is to be expected in a book written on Stoic or Neo-Stoic lines. One point which is here brought out is this: To say that the evils are 'fated' does not justify us in sitting with hands folded. It may also be 'fated'—we do not know—that our personal efforts shall be the turning-point in their redress. The point is interesting in regard to the fatalistic attitude of certain Stoics. The third proposition deals with the methods of divine justice, with its sanction of these calamities, and with the apparent inequality of punishments. The fourth includes certain statistics—viz. of the slaughter of the Jews (a million and a quarter), and of the vast number of men and cities destroyed in Grecian and Roman wars; to say nothing of the men,

women, and children carried into captivity, or of the incredible mortality through plagues, starvation, organized murders by consuls or kings, etc. Compared with these appalling losses, Belgium's sufferings, Lipsius thought, were slight.

Such evils, then, are common to all nations. If we recognize clearly that they have formed part of human experience in all ages, we shall cease to be unduly perturbed by them.

The 'De Constantia' is divided into two books; and the garden episode here translated makes an interlude at the beginning of the second part. The interlocutors are Lipsius himself and Langius of Liège, with whom Lipsius represents himself as having held this discussion when he visited him some years before in a flight from Belgium. Langius is the principal speaker, Lipsius the one to be convinced.

Editions of the text which are accurate and pleasant to read are hard to discover. The work would bear reprinting in times like these; or even one of the old translations might be reproduced.

TRANSLATION OF THE 'DE CONSTANTIA' II. 1-3.

I.

ON the following day Langius thought he would take me to his gardens. He had them in two groups, which he looked after with watchful care, one being on a hill just opposite the house, the other lying a little further off on lower ground,

beside the Meuse itself—that river which ‘flows with smooth current through the pleasant town.’ So he caught me quite early in my room, and said, ‘Shall we have a walk, Lipsius, or would you rather keep quiet and sit still?’ ‘I’ll have the walk, Langius, by all means,’ said I, ‘if it’s with you. But where shall we go?’ ‘If you’d like it, to my gardens,’ said Langius, ‘beside the river. They are not a long way off, you’ll get some exercise *en route*, and you’ll see the town; besides, the air is pleasant and cooling in this heat.’ ‘Good,’ said I; ‘and indeed, with you to guide me, no way would be wearisome—barring, say, one to the ends of Asia.’ Thereupon we called for our cloaks and put them on; we set off, and we arrived. At the entrance I looked from point to point with a roaming yet observant glance; I marvelled at the rich elegance and well-kept order of the place. ‘You dear old man,’ said I, ‘how delightful this is; how brilliant! It’s a heaven you have here, Langius, not a garden! Why, the very stars in a serene night burn no more brightly than these flowers of yours that flash and gleam in their variety! The vaunted gardens forsooth of Adonis and Alcinous? They were trifles compared to these, and empty toys.’ As I spoke I went nearer, and drew some of the flowers close to my nostrils and my eyes. ‘Which should I pray for first,’ I said, ‘to become all eyes like Argus, or all nose like Catullus? Each of my senses alike here gets refreshment and delightful stimulus. Avaunt, ye odours of Araby! Ye smell vilely, methinks,

21* ¹ Quod per amoenam urbem leni fluit agmine flumen. Ennius.

beside a fragrance so pure, so truly celestial.' Langius pressed my hand caressingly, though he smiled. 'Let me say, Lipsius,' he replied, 'that neither I, nor this rustic Flora of mine, can accept such urbane and dexterous praise.' I answered, 'But, Langius, it is true. You think I am flattering? I say seriously, and am honestly persuaded, that the Elysian Fields are not Elysian compared with this pleasance of yours. For see, what radiancy is here on all sides! what order! how fittingly things are all set out in their little beds and banks! No floor of mosaic could be worked more daintily! Then what abundance of flowers and herbage! what rarity and novelty! In this little enclosure, one would think, Nature has concentrated every excellence of the old world and of the new.'

II.

'AND I tell you it's a fine thing and a praiseworthy, Langius, this enthusiasm of yours for gardens—an enthusiasm into which, if I am not mistaken, all the best and most simple-minded men get drawn by Nature herself. In proof of this, it would be hard to name any pleasure about which, from all time, notable men have been so eagerly of one mind. Look through the Sacred Writings, what do you find? You will see that with the birth of the world came the birth of gardens, which God himself assigned to the first man as his dwelling, and, so to speak, as the abode of a happy life. And in profane writings? See how proverbs and legends tell of the gardens of Adonis, Alcinous,

Tantalus, the Hesperides. In true and authentic histories, too, you will find that plantations of trees were begun by the hand of King Cyrus; flowers pendent in the air, by that of Semiramis; and, by that of Masinissa, a new and notable cultivation, that set Africa wondering. Then, too, among ancient Greeks and Romans how many famous persons I could recall who, laying aside other cares, gave themselves up to this care only. Among Greeks, you have, in a word, most of the philosophers and wise men; they left the city and the distracted agora and shut themselves within the walks and the hedges of gardens. Among Romans, I see King Tarquinius, far back in antique Rome, gently walking in his gardens, cutting off the heads of the poppies; Cato, the grave Censor, I recognize, devoted to garden affairs, and writing seriously about them; Lucullus, too, after his victories in Asia, I see taking his ease in them; Sulla, when he had given up the Dictatorship, therein quietly passing into old age; and the Emperor Diocletian valuing his cabbage and lettuce at Salona above all his purple and his sceptres. Nor has the crowd differed from the judgment of its betters; for I know that, among it, all men whose minds are simple, and free from evil ambition, have given themselves up to this art.

‘Assuredly there is some secret and congenital force in us (though its origin I cannot readily explain), which draws us to this guileless and simple pleasure—draws, not only us who are disposed to yield, but even those grave and austere men who resist its pull and think scorn of it. And,

as none may behold the firmament and its eternal fires without a hidden dread and awe, so none can see the divine wealth of the earth, and the fair order of this ordered world around us, without a silent thrill and sensation of delight. Question your heart and mind: they will say that such a sight captivates them, nay, feeds them. Question your eyes and senses: they will confess that in no place could they so willingly abide as among these garden beds and flowery banks. Stand, pray, about these swelling ranks of flowers; see how that one is bourgeoning from its cup, this from its sheath, yonder one from the bud; look at this one dying so suddenly, that other just coming to the birth; and observe lastly, in one species and another, the habit, the form, the features, so like in a thousand ways, and so diverse.

‘What mind so rigid as not to unbend, amidst all this, in gentle thoughtfulness, and become softened? Come and give heed, eyes of mine! Fix yourselves a while on these radiancies and tints; look into this purple of nature’s own, this blood colour, this ivory, this snow, this flame, this gold! and all those other hues such as an artist’s brush may rightly emulate—emulate indeed, yet never equal. Lastly, what an exhalation of perfume is here! what a breathing and penetration! Surely some heavenly air is poured upon us from on high. It can be no empty feigning of our poet-folk when they say that most flowers are born of the essence and life-blood of the immortal Gods. Hail, thou true fount of joy and welling pleasure! Hail, thou abode of all Loves and Graces! Mine be it to

possess my life in peace amid your shades! Mine, to be withdrawn far from civic tumults and to roam to and fro among these herbs and flowers—flowers of the known world and of the unknown—with glad, unsated eyes; and as this one droops down, and that one arises, to touch them and watch them; and in a haphazard waywardness to be here beguiled of all cares and labours.’

III.

I SAID all this with some heat, and with eager voice and face. Langius’ aspect was quiet as he said to me, ‘You are in love, Lipsius, you are certainly in love, with this flower-decked, purple-clad nymph; but I fear you love her intemperately. You praise gardens; yet in such a way as to show you admire their many empty or outward delights, whilst you neglect those that are true and legitimate. You gloat, I mean, over the colours, you rest on the banks, you search after flowers from the known and the unknown world. Pray, what is it you really think them? I would fain be sure that you too are not of that sect which has just arisen—a sect of busybodies and idlers—men who turn a very good and simple thing into an instrument of the two vices of Vanity and Laziness. That is the purpose with which they keep gardens. They get together vaingloriously some little herbs and exotic flowers, and having got them they coddle them and guard them more nervously than any mother her son. These are the men whose letters go hurrying about into Thrace, Greece, and India;

and all for the sake of some tiny seed or trifling bulb. To these men the death of some new flower is more grievous than that of an old friend. We may laugh at that old Roman, Hortensius, who went into deep mourning for one of his fish; these do the like for their plant. Again, if one of these courtiers of Flora's has acquired some little novelty or rarity, how he displays it! how the other competitors rival and envy him! but some go home more gloomy than Sulla or Marcellus of old, when, as candidates for the Praetorship, they were beaten. What can we call it, but a kind of laughable madness, not unlike that of children who turn white and furious over their dolls and puppets? Then you must realise the industry of these same men in their gardens! They sit, they walk about, they yawn, they sleep—and naught else! so that, in fact, this is no retreat or leisure that they keep, but a burial-place of sloth. The ignorant crew! I would shut them out—and with justice—from the sacred rites of the true and secret garden; for I know it was designed for temperate pleasure, not for vanity; for peace, not for torpor. Am I so light-minded that the mere getting or losing of some paltry, little-known plant shall make me exult or despair? Nay, I judge things at their proper value. I strip off the meretricious show of novelty; I know that they are plants, know that they are flowers—that is, things shortlived and fugitive, about which the great poet¹ says most rightly, “Zephyr's breeze brings some to the birth, others to maturity.” It is not, then, that I despise this pleasure, or this

¹ Homer, ‘Od.’ 7, 119.

beauty. You see the evidence ! But I differ from the soft school of Hortensius in this, that I am untroubled in acquiring such things, untroubled in possessing them, untroubled in losing them. Nor am I myself so withered, nay, so dead, as to hide away and bury myself, as it were, in these garden shades. I find occupation even in this leisure, and my mind here discovers things which, making no ado, it can do quietly, which it can elaborate without laboriousness. "I am never less solitary," as has been said, "than when alone ; never less leisurely than when at leisure." It is an excellent saying ; and I would dare affirm that it originated in just such gardens as these. Of a truth they are made for the mind, not the body ; for bringing renewal to the one, not slackness to the other ; in a word, for healthful retreat from care and "the madding crowd." Are men wearisome to you ? Here you will be in your own home. Has occupation exhausted you ? Replenishment lies here, where your mind may have the true food of quietness, and may draw from a purer air the inspiration of a new life. Wherefore, behold those Wise Men of old : it was in gardens they dwelt. Behold those erudite and learned souls of to-day : in gardens do they take their pleasure, wherein are mainly wrought and shaped those divine writings at which we marvel, writings to which no sequence of years, no old age, can bring surcease. To the green Lyceum how many treatises on nature do we not owe ? To the Academic groves, how many on ethics ? From garden walks, too, there stream forth those rich rivers of wisdom from which we

drink, and which with their fruitful flood have washed the whole earth. Truly, the mind rises and mounts nearer to those high things when it is free and unshackled, when it can behold its own sky, than when it is enclosed and kept fast in the imprisonment of houses or cities. Fashion here, then, oh ye poets, some enduring song! Meditate and write here, ye men of letters! And do ye, oh philosophers, argue here on tranquillity, on constancy, on life, and on death! See then, Lipsius, the true use and end of gardens: it is leisure, retirement, meditation, reading, writing; and all these, nevertheless, as if by way of relaxation and play. As painters, if their eyes have grown dull by long straining, restore them by looking in mirrors and on greenery; so we here restore our mind when it is weary or prone to wander. And why should I hide from you my own practice? Do you see that pergola, with its topiary art? That is my 'abode of the Muses,' that my gymnasium and wrestling-ground of wisdom. There I either fill my heart with abstruse and serious reading, or I implant, as it were, in it, the seeds of fruitful thoughts; and from these I store in my mind, like weapons in an armoury, precepts which anon are ready at call against the rough force and fickleness of Fortune. As soon as I set foot therein, I bid all common and ignoble cares remain aloof; and holding my head erect as may be, I watch beneath me the pursuits of the ignorant crowd and all the emptiness of human affairs. Nay, I seem to strip off from me the man, and to be caught aloft in the fiery chariots of Wisdom. Am I there,

think you, tormented about the intrigues of the French or the Spaniards? about who keeps or loses the sceptre of Belgium? whether the tyrant of Asia threatens us by sea or land? or, in a word, "what plan the king of the frozen north-land is brooding over?"¹ Not so. Fenced and shut in against outward things, I abide within myself. I am free from all cares save one; that is, to break in and tame my mind in submission to right reason and to God, and to subdue all other human affairs to my mind. So that whenever my last, fated day shall come, I may receive it with tranquil mien and without sorrow; and may go out from this life not as a man who is cast forth, but like a man set free. These, Lipsius, are my leisurely meditations in the gardens; these are the fruits which, so long as my mind keeps its health, I would not exchange for all the treasures of Persia or of the Indies.'

BASIL ANDERTON.

¹ Quid sub Arcto | Rex gelidæ meditetur orae [*vice* Quis sub Arcto | Rex gelidæ metuatur orae. Horace, 'Odes,' i, 26].