Epictetus

1 THE ENCHIRIDION

Translated by Elizabeth Carter

1. Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions.

The things in our control are by nature free, unrestrained, unhindered; but those not in our control are weak, slavish, restrained, belonging to others. Remember, then, that if you suppose that things which are slavish by nature are also free, and that what belongs to others is your own, then you will be hindered. You will lament, you will be disturbed, and you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you suppose that only to be your own which is your own, and what belongs to others such as it really is, then no one will ever compel you or restrain you. Further, you will find fault with no one or accuse no one. You will do nothing against your will. No one will hurt you, you will have no enemies, and you not be harmed.

Aiming therefore at such great things, remember that you must not allow yourself to be carried, even with a slight tendency, towards the attainment of lesser things. Instead, you must entirely quit some things and for the present postpone the rest. But if you would both have these great things, along with power and riches, then you will not gain even the latter, because you aim at the former too: but you will absolutely fail of the former, by which alone happiness and freedom are achieved.

Work, therefore to be able to say to every harsh appearance, "You are but an appearance, and not absolutely the thing you appear to be." And then examine it by those rules which you have, and first, and chiefly, by this: whether it concerns the things which are in our own control, or those which are not; and, if it concerns anything not in our control, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you.

2. Remember that following desire promises the attainment of that of which you are desirous; and aversion promises the avoiding that to which you are averse. However, he who fails to obtain the object of his desire is disappointed, and he who incurs the object of his aversion wretched. If, then, you confine your aversion to those objects only which are contrary to the natural use of your faculties, which you have in your own control, you will never incur anything to which you are averse. But if you are averse to sickness, or death, or poverty, you will be wretched. Remove aversion, then, from all things that are not in our control, and transfer it to things contrary to the nature of what is in our control. But, for the present, totally suppress desire: for, if you desire any of the things which are not in your own control, you must necessarily be disappointed; and of those which are, and which it would be laudable to desire, nothing is yet in your possession. Use only the appropriate actions of pursuit and avoidance; and even these lightly, and with gentleness and reservation.

2 DISCOURCES - BOOK ONE

Translated by George Long

Chapter 1

Of the things which are in our Power, and not in our Power

Of all the faculties, you will find not one which is capable of contemplating itself; and, consequently, not capable either of approving or disapproving. How far does the grammatic art possess the contemplating power? As far as forming a judgment about what is written and spoken. And how far music? As far as judging about melody. Does either of them then contemplate itself? By no means. But when you must write something to your friend, grammar will tell you what words you must write; but whether you should write or not, grammar will not tell you. And so it is with music as to musical sounds; but whether you should sing at the present time and play on the lute, or do neither, music will not tell you. What faculty then will tell you? That which contemplates both itself and all other things. And what is this faculty? The rational faculty; for this is the only faculty that we have received which examines itself, what it is, and what power it has, and what is the value of this gift, and examines all other faculties: for what else is there which tells us that golden things are beautiful, for they do not say so themselves? Evidently it is the faculty which is capable of judging of appearances. What else judges of music, grammar, and other faculties, proves their uses and points out the occasions for using them? Nothing else.

As then it was fit to be so, that which is best of all and supreme over all is the only thing which the gods have placed in our power, the right use of appearances; but all other things they have not placed in our power. Was it because they did not choose? I indeed think that, if they had been able, they would have put these other things also in our power, but they certainly could not. For as we exist on the earth, and are bound to such a body and to such companions, how was it possible for us not to be hindered as to these things by externals?

But what says Zeus? "Epictetus, if it were possible, I would have made both your little body and your little property free and not exposed to hindrance. But now be not ignorant of this: this body is not yours, but it is clay finely tempered. And since I was not able to do for you what I have mentioned, I have given you a small portion of us, this faculty of pursuing an object and avoiding it, and the faculty of desire and aversion, and, in a word, the faculty of using the appearances of things; and if you will take care of this faculty and consider it your only possession, you will never be hindered, never meet with impediments; you will not lament, you will not blame, you will not flatter any person."

"Well, do these seem to you small matters? " I hope not. "Be content with them then and pray to the gods." But now when it is in our power to look after one thing, and to attach ourselves to it, we prefer to look after many things, and to be bound to many things, to the body and to property, and to brother and to friend, and to child and to slave. Since, then, we are bound to many things, we are depressed by them and dragged down. For this reason, when the weather is not fit for sailing, we sit down and torment ourselves, and continually look out to see what wind is blowing. "It is north." What is that to us? "When will the west wind blow? " When it shall

choose, my good man, or when it shall please Aeolus; for God has not made you the manager of the winds, but Aeolus. What then? We must make the best use that we can of the things which are in our power, and use the rest according to their nature. What is their nature then? As God may please.

"Must I, then, alone have my head cut off? " What, would you have all men lose their heads that you may be consoled? Will you not stretch out your neck as Lateranus did at Rome when Nero ordered him to be beheaded? For when he had stretched out his neck, and received a feeble blow, which made him draw it in for a moment, he stretched it out again. And a little before, when he was visited by Epaphroditus, Nero's freedman, who asked him about the cause of offense which he had given, he said, "If I choose to tell anything, I will tell your master."

What then should a man have in readiness in such circumstances? What else than "What is mine, and what is not mine; and permitted to me, and what is not permitted to me." I must die. Must I then die lamenting? I must be put in chains. Must I then also lament? I must go into exile. Does any man then hinder me from going with smiles and cheerfulness and contentment? "Tell me the secret which you possess." I will not, for this is in my power. "But I will put you in chains." Man, what are you talking about? Me in chains? You may fetter my leg, but my will not even Zeus himself can overpower. "I will throw you into prison." My poor body, you mean. "I will cut your head off." When, then, have I told you that my head alone cannot be cut off? These are the things which philosophers should meditate on, which they should write daily, in which they should exercise themselves.

Thrasea used to say, "I would rather be killed to-day than banished to-morrow." What, then, did Rufus say to him? "If you choose death as the heavier misfortune, how great is the folly of your choice? But if, as the lighter, who has given you the choice? Will you not study to be content with that which has been given to you? "

What, then, did Agrippinus say? He said, "I am not a hindrance to myself." When it was reported to him that his trial was going on in the Senate, he said, "I hope it may turn out well; but it is the fifth hour of the day". This was the time when he was used to exercise himself and then take the cold bath — "let us go and take our exercise." After he had taken his exercise, one comes and tells him, "You have been condemned." "To banishment," he replies, "or to death? " "To banishment." "What about my property? " "It is not taken from you." "Let us go to Aricia then," he said, "and dine."

This it is to have studied what a man ought to study; to have made desire, aversion, free from hindrance, and free from all that a man would avoid. I must die. If now, I am ready to die. If, after a short time, I now dine because it is the dinner-hour; after this I will then die. How? Like a man who gives up what belongs to another.

Chapter 19

How we should behave to tyrants

If a man possesses any superiority, or thinks that he does, when he does not, such a man, if he is uninstructed, will of necessity be puffed up through it. For instance, the tyrant says, "I am master of all." And what can you do for me? Can you give me desire which shall have no hindrance? How can you? Have you the infallible power of avoiding what you would avoid? Have you the power of moving toward an object without error? And how do you possess this power? Come, when you are in a ship, do you trust to yourself or to the helmsman? And when you are in a chariot, to whom do you trust but to the driver? And how is it in all other arts? Just the same. In what then lies your power? "All men pay respect to me." Well, I also pay respect to my platter, and I wash it and wipe it; and for the sake of my oil flask, I drive a peg into the wall. Well then, are these things superior to me? No, but they supply some of my wants, and for this reason I take care of them. Well, do I not attend to my ass? Do I not wash his feet? Do I not clean him? Do you not know that every man has regard to himself, and to you just the same as he has regard to his ass? For who has regard to you as a man? Show me. Who wishes to become like you? Who imitates you, as he imitates Socrates? "But I can cut off your head." You say right. I had forgotten that I must have regard to you, as I would to a fever and the bile, and raise an altar to you, as there is at Rome an altar to fever.

What is it then that disturbs and terrifies the multitude? Is it the tyrant and his guards? I hope that it is not so. It is not possible that what is by nature free can be disturbed by anything else, or hindered by any other thing than by itself. But it is a man's own opinions which disturb him: for when the tyrant says to a man, "I will chain your leg," he who values his leg says, "Do not; have pity": but he who values his own will says, "If it appears more advantageous to you, chain it." "Do you not care? " I do not care. "I will show you that I am master." You cannot do that. Zeus has set me free: do you think that he intended to allow his own son to be enslaved? But you are master of my carcass: take it. "So when you approach me, you have no regard to me? " No, but I have regard to myself; and if you wish me to say that I have regard to you also, I tell you that I have the same regard to you that I have to my pipkin.

This is not a perverse self-regard, for the animal is constituted so as to do all things for itself. For even the sun does all things for itself; nay, even Zeus himself. But when he chooses to be the Giver of rain and the Giver of fruits, and the Father of gods and men, you see that he cannot obtain these functions and these names, if he is not useful to man; and, universally, he has made the nature of the rational animal such that it cannot obtain any one of its own proper interests, if it does not contribute something to the common interest. In this manner and sense it is not unsociable for a man to do everything, for the sake of himself. For what do you expect? that a man should neglect himself and his own interest? And how in that case can there be one and the same principle in all animals, the principle of attachment to themselves?

What then? when absurd notions about things independent of our will, as if they were good and bad, lie at the bottom of our opinions, we must of necessity pay regard to tyrants; for I wish that men would pay regard to tyrants only, and not also to the bedchamber men. How is it that the man becomes all at once wise, when Caesar has made him superintendent of the close stool? How is it that we say immediately, "Felicion spoke sensibly to me." I wish he were ejected from the bedchamber, that he might again appear to you to be a fool.

Epaphroditus had a shoemaker whom he sold because he was good for nothing. This fellow by some good luck was bought by one of Caesar's men, and became Caesar's shoemaker. You should have seen what respect Epaphroditus paid to him: "How does the good Felicion do, I pray? " Then if any of us asked, "What is master doing? " the answer "He is consulting about something with Felicion." Had he not sold the man as good for nothing? Who then made him wise all at once? This is an instance of valuing something else than the things which depend on the will.

Has a man been exalted to the tribuneship? All who meet him offer their congratulations; one kisses his eyes, another the neck, and the slaves kiss his hands. He goes to his house, he finds torches lighted. He ascends the Capitol: he offers a sacrifice of the occasion. Now who ever sacrificed for having had good desires? for having acted conformably to nature? For in fact we thank the gods for those things in which we place our good.

A person was talking to me to-day about the priesthood of Augustus. I say to him: "Man, let the thing alone: you will spend much for no purpose." But he replies, "Those who draw up agreements will write any name." Do you then stand by those who read them, and say to such persons, "It is I whose name is written there;" And if you can now be present on all such occasions, what will you do when you are dead? "My name will remain." Write it on a stone, and it will remain. But come, what remembrance of you will there be beyond Nicopolis? "But I shall wear a crown of gold." If you desire a crown at all, take a crown of roses and put it on, for it will be more elegant in appearance.