

Seneca on pleasure

Seneca has much to say *contra voluptatem*, as might be expected of a Stoic philosopher. Pleasure, we must recall, was the *summum bonum* of the Epicureans, the rival school of the Stoics. The latter stressed *apatheia*, selfregulation, and restraint; they lauded the suppression of pleasure, arguing that *voluptas* was invidious to a life of reason, constancy, and virtue. Needless to say, Seneca was especially outspoken about pleasures because of the excessive pursuit of them by his contemporaries in Imperial Rome. It is notorious that the Romans of the first century A. D. exceeded all bounds in their craving for and idealization of extravagance and luxury ¹.

This Philosopher of the Neronian Age is well aware of the fatal attraction of sensual pleasures.

*Si de bono sensus iudicarent, nullam
voluptatem reiceremus, nulla enim
non invitat, nulla non delectat...*

(*Ep.*, 124.2)

*(If the-senses were to judge what is
good, we would reject no pleasure,
for there is none that does not en-*

¹ Luxury was the common target of the Roman moralists. Livy, for example, observes that it threatened the entire social fabric of Rome: ... nuper divitiae avaritiam et abundantes voluptates desiderium per luxum atque libidinem perdendique omnia invexere (Bk, I, Praef.).