

**THE CREED OF
LUCIUS
ANNAEUS SENECA**

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The Creed of Lucius Annaeus Seneca by Virginia Beauchamp

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VIRGINIA BEAUCHAMP

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BY

Virginia Beauchamp, A. M.

Colorado Springs, Colorado.



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NOTE.—Owing to delay in correcting proof at a distance of two thousand miles, some slight errors have crept into the printing of this paper, most of which have been corrected with the pen. Preface and page 37 change Durny to Duruy; preface, change editions to edition; page 28 change ineffeminate to effeminate; page 37 change Tubner to Teubneri. V. B.

PREFACE.

THE exact position that Lucius Annæus Seneca occupied in regard to philosophy and Christianity has long been a matter of debate. The letters purporting to have been exchanged between St. Paul and Seneca, are generally regarded as spurious. Therefore, in the present discussion, they have not been considered. Neither are the deeds of Seneca called in question, but the beliefs that he held. To the following authorities, as well as to the various encyclopedias, I am indebted. History of Modern Philosophy, by Kuno Fischer; History of Philosophy, G. H. Lewes; Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Conybeare and Howson; History of Latin Literature, Simcox; Epistle to the Philippians, Bishop Lightfoot; Merivales and Durny's Histories of Rome; Notes of Lipsius. 2nd Vol. of Elzevir Editions. To Dr. Francis W. Kelsey my thanks are due for his kindly criticisms.

V. BEAUCHAMP.

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THE CREED OF LUCIUS ANNÆUS SENECA

INTRODUCTION.

TIME OF BIRTH.

1. When Lucius Annæus Seneca was born about 7 B. C., the great religious crisis of the world was at hand. All over the known world there was an unrest, a dissatisfaction with the degradation into which society was falling, an expectation of some help that should come to show men the way to the perfect Ideal.

THE RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE OF THE WORLD.

2. The old philosophies and religions were unconsciously preparing to merge into Christianity, insomuch that many of their vital principles, of necessity, such as were true, were in part identical with Christianity itself. At Rome, the cosmopolitan, the religious attitude of the nations might be seen in miniature. The rabble were superstitious, seeing no symbolism in the deities in whom they believed. The nobility, educated by Greek teachers, favored the great schools of Zeno and Epicurus, or else were Agnostics, doubting doubt itself.

THE GROWTH OF PHILOSOPHY.

3. Six hundred years before, in Greece, the philosophers had studied the world-material problem, its order, its process, and then the Eternal Purpose of all. This paved the way for Plato's world of ideals in contradistinction to that of material. Towards this world of ideals men began to strive, and in time it became

the vital principle of Stoicism and Epicureanism. Each school in its own way sought the plane of the ideal man, the wise man, who was no longer bound to earth by desires and passions, but lived in perfect calm, unaffected by any external circumstance. This state Stoicism attempted to attain by stifling natural emotions and impulses, finding its enjoyment in virtue. Epicureanism sought to reach a passive state of pleasure, making enjoyment a virtue. The former, now in its third and last period, was the best and purest philosophy of the day. Naturally, being the most active of the philosophies, it was the most congenial to the old Roman spirit which yet existed in the best men of Rome, those who earnestly resisted the evil of the times.

Besides these two leading schools there existed a third, the Alexandrian school. The disciples of this school, which was midway between the East and West, formed an eclectic sect, striving to bring the philosophy of Greece into harmony with the religions of the Eastern nations, especially that of the Jews.

SOTION.

4. Under one of the philosophers of this school Seneca, according to his own statement, received some of his early lessons. "When a boy I sat at the feet of Sotion the philosopher." "Apud Sotionem philosophum puer sedi." Ep. 49, Sect. 2, and Lipsius comments; Concerning whom, Eusebius in his Chronicle of the last years of Augustus says: "Sotion, an Alexandrian philosopher, the preceptor of Seneca, is considered illustrious."

The freedom of thought thus inculcated affects the discourses of Seneca concerning the philosophy of his time.

In Ep. 108, Sect. 17, Seneca again mentions this tutor, "I shall not be ashamed to confess with what a love for Pythagoras Sotion inspired me." "Non pudebit fateri, quem mihi amorem Pythagorae injecerit Sotion."

Like the Pythagoreans, he became a vegetarian, until, as he says in the Epistle just quoted, the abstinence from certain kinds of animal food was regarded with suspicion. Then his father, influenced by fear of calumny, or from dislike of philosophy, probably the former, though commentators disagree, persuaded

him to fare better, "coenare melius," as he expresses it, and Seneca adds that he was persuaded without difficulty. Yet the doctrines of Pythagoras influenced his creed, and of this influence we shall speak hereafter.

ALLIED WITH THE STOICS.

5. When he afterwards allied himself with the school of the Stoics, as best suited to his temperament, he did not consider himself a rigid Stoic, but a disciple of truth, saying, "Shall I not tread in the footsteps of our forefathers? Surely I will make use of the old way, but if I find one shorter and plainer, I will strengthen the latter.

A DISCIPLE OF TRUTH.

6. Our predecessors who used these ways were not our masters, but our leaders. The truth is open to all; it has not yet been appropriated; much of it has even been left for our posterity. Ep. 33, Sect. 11. And again in Ep. 64, Sect. 7, he writes, "These have been gathered for me, have been provided for me. But let me act the part of a good father; let us increase what we have received; let this inheritance with interest pass from me to my descendants."

Bishop Lightfoot in his discussion on "St. Paul and Seneca," says of the latter, "In his fundamental principles, he is a disciple of Zeno." Epistle to the Philippians, Page 298. In an earlier paragraph of the same chapter he says, "Only when he deserts the Stoic platform, does Seneca approach the level of Christianity. Struck by their beauty, he adopts and embodies the maxims of other schools: but they betray their foreign origin and refuse to be incorporated into his system." Page 294.

We shall, therefore, consider the creed of Seneca as that of no particular school of philosophy, but as that of a disciple of truth, yet one who followed strictly the motto of the Stoics, "Secundum naturam." The examination of this creed will be divided into four parts, as follows:—

- I. Theology.
- II. Psychology.
- III. The Ideal man, or Education of the Soul.
- IV. The Social Relations.