

**THE LETTERS OF SIDONIUS;
TRANSLATED, WITH
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES,
IN TWO VOLUMES, VOLUME II**

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Apollinaris Sidonius & O. M. Dalton

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BOOK IV

I

To his friend Probus

A. D. 461-7

You married my cousin ¹, whence the first and principal tie between us; the cousinly relationship often leads to a stronger, purer, and more unmixed affection than that between two brothers. For when brothers' quarrels over property are once appeased, their children have no longer cause for disagreement, and so it often happens that cousins are the more deeply attached; the enmities arising from the partition of estates are over, the tie of blood relationship remains. The second link between us is intellectual, and formed by a similarity of studies; our literary taste is identical; we praise and blame the same things; a style approved or disapproved by one produces the same impression on the other. But I am ² presumptuous in venturing a comparison between my judgement and yours. It is common knowledge among young and old that you were my real master, though we were nominally both pupils of another. You were everybody's teacher in every branch of literature. All of us learned from you, except those who had not the brains, or could not do themselves proper justice: our epic poets derived from you their lofty vein, our comic poets their humour, our lyric poets their musical art; from

- you the orator drew his rhetoric, the historian his respect for truth, the satirist his pictorial gift, the grammarian his fidelity to rule, the panegyrist his plausibility, the sophist his gravity of style, the writer of epigram his petulance and point, the commentator his lucid method, the lawyer his obscurity. Heavens! how proud our respective fathers used to be when they saw that Christ had given you grace to teach and me to learn, that you not only did what lay within your power but also enjoyed the doing of it, and so deserved a name
- 3 for goodness no less than a learned reputation. And indeed in your case Eusebius' house¹ proved a veritable mint of the sciences and arts; you were there struck on a philosophical die, and to the delight of your own instructor were able to impart to the rest of us every phase of knowledge and of eloquent expression. Just as Plato the pupil was more expert than Socrates, so did you excel our good Eusebius. While he was maturing our tender, unformed and plastic youth with ruthless floggings, or trying to ground it on wholesome principles, there you were, a dialectician born, moving with Attic ease through all the categories of Aristotle.
- 4 Yet how admirable his principles were after all, how precious in possession! If only some migratory philosopher could export them to the Sigambri on their marshes, or the Alans of the Caucasus, or the mare-milking Geloni, the horny hearts of all these stark and brutal folks, yes and all their frozen fibres, were surely thawed and softened, while we should cease to sneer and scoff, and tremble by turns at their stolidity and their ferocious natures, which now brood in bestial

dullness, now burst into swift flame. Since, then, our 5 family connexion and our studies thus unite us, preserve the laws of friendship unshaken, wherever your abode may be; though my home is far from yours, let our hearts draw nearer by virtue of this affection, which I for my part will keep inviolate as long as breath remains in my body. Farewell.

II

*Claudianus [Mamertus¹] to the Lord
Bishop Sidonius*

A. D. 472

If I could only meet you now and again, my dear 1 lord, were it only for a short time, I should not have to look about on all sides for any kind of messenger whose goodwill or necessities might help me pay the debt of correspondence owed you. Numerous causes, all sad ones, prevent me from seeing you again; even an opportunity of writing comes rarely or not at all. Whether all this excuses me or not, you yourself must judge.

But in often favouring with your letters persons who 2 either do not expect them, or deserve to get them less than I, you on your side are guilty of an offence against the laws of friendship which may not be committed with impunity. Though I have said little, I confess that it has wounded me never to have received from you any acknowledgement of the book ² which you have deigned to allow me to publish under the auspices of your illustrious name. But perhaps you cannot spare even

a few short moments for a friendship of such long standing as ours?

- 3 I wonder if you will ever involve yourself in any interest which does not turn to other folks' advantage. When you propitiate God by prayer, you entreat Him not only for your friends but for men you have never seen; when you search out the mysteries of Holy Writ, the more deeply your own mind is imbued with doctrine, the fuller the stream which you impart to others. When you lavish your goods upon the poor, there is a sense in which you may be said to serve yourself, but your aim is the service of others. Not a single action of yours is so barren as to yield abundant fruit to your sole self and not to a host of other people
- 4 as well. No possible pretext, then, can be alleged by any stretch of fancy on which an intimate friend like myself should be deprived of his own especial fruit, while strangers in scores are allowed to eat of it in plenty. I suppose you follow the precedent of the giver in the Gospel, and accord to the unworthy but importunate what you deny to a hungry friend. But if you allow yourself to grow hardened in this habit, I shall take measures to assure your repentance. For if your taciturnity exceeds all reason, my communications shall do the same. It is quite evident that you will have to be punished by my letters, as I myself am punished by your silence. Farewell.

III

To Claudianus [Mamertus]

A. D. 472

You declare, most honoured master, that I have 1
offended against the laws of friendship: you allege that
though it is my turn to give you epistolary greeting,
I have let my tablets and stylus lie, and no traveller's
hand has been burdened with papyrus of mine inscribed
with my assiduous wishes for your welfare. The sugges-
tion is unfair; you cannot really suppose that any man
on earth, with the least devotion to Latin letters, would
lightly submit his compositions to the ordeal of being
read to you; you, with whose accomplishments, but for
the overwhelming privilege of antiquity, I should never
rank either Fronto's gravity, or the fulminating force
of Apuleius; for compared with you the Varros, both
he of the Atax and he of Reate, and the Plinies, uncle
and nephew, will always seem provincial. In support of 2
this opinion I have only to mention your new volume on
the nature of the Soul, with all its wealth of evidence
and mastery of diction. The dedication to me I regarded
as an inestimable gift: the fame which my own books
would never keep alive, would now be immortalized by
yours. Great God! what a wonderful book it is, and of
what authority! abstruse in subject, in exposition clear
as day; in statement serried, expansive in discussion,
and though barbed with many a point of syllogism, yet
soft with vernal flowers of eloquence! You have found 3
ancient words which by their very age regain the charm of
novelty; compared with these even a classic vocabulary

seems obsolete. And what is more, the style, so succinct in its short clauses, has yet an even flow; loaded with facts, concise in comment, these pages do not merely propound—they inform. It was once, and rightly, held the highest part of eloquence to condense much matter into a small space and aim at exhausting the
4 subject before the paper. And what a charming feature it is in your books, when you allow some relaxation in the sustained display of mastery and interpose most welcome graces amid the severities of argument; by this means the reader's attention, strained by following that exhaustive analysis of doctrine and philosophy, is suddenly relieved by the most delightful of digressions, comforting as harbours after open seas. O work of endless excellences! O worthy expression of a genius subtle
5 without tenuity, which neither freshets of hyperbole swell, nor mean terms minish and abase! And then the unrivalled, the unique learning conspicuous in so many fields, and used to hold its own with the great masters in the discussion of every art. It does not hesitate, if need be, to wield the plectrum with Orpheus himself, or the staff with Aesculapius, or the rule with Archimedes, the horoscope with Euphrates, the compasses with Perdix, the plummet with Vitruvius; it never ceases to explore the ages with Thales, or the stars with Atlas; to study weight with Zetus, number with Chrysippus, or measure
6 with Euclid.¹ I can only say that no man of our times produces his knowledge with more effect, in the stress of conflict with the adversary can point with more justice to his own share in maintaining the spirit and the letters of Greece and Rome. Here is a writer who has the perception of Pythagoras, the clear logic