Epicurean burial rites/funeral procedures?

Post by “Cassius” of April 2, 2019 at 2:25 PM

Oscar I have a couple of references to point you toward ---

Stallius Gaius has sedes Hauranus tuetur,
ex Epicureio gaudiuigente choro.

Sidebar 7.3: An Epicurean funerary epigram

Epigrams inscribed on tombs of the Roman period usually convey well-worn, conventional sentiments, and in Neapolis they tend to be written in Greek. But one, discovered in 1685 near the Chiesa della Sanità, is quite different. Composed in the first century BCE, it is written in Latin, though influenced by Greek, and—quite unusually—it celebrates the deceased man's Epicureanism.

CIL 10.2971: "Stallius Gaius Hauranus keeps watch over this place, thanks to the Epicurean chorus, alive with joy (*gaudivigens*).

Post by “Cassius” of April 2, 2019 at 2:32 PM

Elli referenced this is a post: Fragment 213 :"Sweet is the memory of this dead friend."

And of course there is this that would be relevant --

47. I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And we will not give ourselves up as captives to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that we have lived well.

OH --- I have what I think is a GREAT suggestion ---

Post by “Cassius” of April 2, 2019 at 2:36 PM

Much of Chapter Ten of A Few Days In Athens is relevant to giving consolation at death, but the part quoted here always struck me as one of the best sections of Wright's book. I included some intro, but the part starting "But there is yet a pain" that stands out for use in a funeral context

The last two paragraphs here are - to me - ***gripping****.*

Philosophy cannot change the laws of nature; but she may teach us to accommodate ourselves to them. She cannot annul pain; but she can arm us to bear it. And though the evils of fate be many, are not the evils of man's coining more! Nature afflicts us with disease; but for once that it is the infliction of nature, ninety-nine times it is the consequence of our own folly. Nature levels us with death; but how mild is the death of nature, with Philosophy to spread the pillow, and friendship to take the last sigh, to the protracted agonies of debauchery, subduing the body by inches, while Philosophy is not there to give strength, nor friendship consolation, but while the flames of fever are heated by impatience, and the stings of pain envenomed by remorse! And tell me, my sons, when the body of the sage is stretched on the couch of pain, hath he not his mind to minister delight to him? Hath he not conscience whispering that his present evil is not chargeable to his own past folly, but to the laws of nature, which no effort or foresight of his could have prevented? Hath he not memory to bring to him past pleasures, the pleasures of a well-spent life, on which he may feed even while pain racks his members, and fever consumes his vitals? Or, what if agony overpower his frame, and cripple his faculties, is there not death at hand to reach him deliverance? Here, then is death, that giant of terror, acting as a friend. But does he interrupt our enjoyments as well as our sufferings? And is it for this we fear him? Ought we not rather to rejoice, seeing that the day of life has its bright and its clouded hours, that we are laid to sleep while the sun of joy yet shines, before the storm of fate has broken our tranquillity or the evening of age bedimmed our prospect?

Death, then, is never our foe. When not a friend, he cannot be worse than indifferent. *For while we are, death is not; and when death is, we are not.* To be wise, then, death is nothing. Examine the ills of life; are they not of our own creation, or take they not their darkest hues from our passions or our ignorance? What is poverty, if "we have temperance, and can be satisfied with a crust, and a draught from the spring? — if we have modesty, and can wear a woolen garment as gladly as a tyrian robe? What is slander, if we have no vanity that it can wound, and no anger that it can kindle? What is neglect, if we have no ambition that it can disappoint, and no pride that it can mortify? What is persecution, if we have our own bosoms in which to retire, and a spot of earth to sit down and rest upon? What is death, when without superstition to clothe him with terrors, we can cover our heads, and go to sleep in his arms? What a list of human calamities are here expunged — poverty, slander, neglect, disappointment, persecution, death. What yet remains? Disease? That, too, we have shown temperance can often shun, and Philosophy can always alleviate.

But there is yet a pain, which the wisest and the best of men cannot escape; that all of us, my sons, have felt, or have to feel. Do not your hearts whisper it? Do you not tell me, that in death there is yet a sting? That ere he aim at us, he may level the beloved of our soul? The father, whose tender care hath reared our infant minds — the brother, whom the same breast hath nourished, and the same roof sheltered, with whom, side by side, we have grown like two plants by a river, sucking life from the same fountain and strength from the same sun — the child whose gay prattle delights our ears, or whose opening understanding fixes our hopes — the friend of our choice, with whom we have exchanged hearts, and shared all our pains and pleasures, whose eye hath reflected the tear of sympathy, whose hand hath smoothed the couch of sickness. Ah! my sons, here indeed is a pain — a pain that cuts into the soul. There are masters that will tell you otherwise; who will tell you that it is unworthy of a man to mourn even here. But such, my sons, speak not the truth of experience or philosophy, but the subtleties of sophistry and pride. He who feels not the loss, hath never felt the possession. He who knows not the grief, hath never known the joy. See the price of a friend in the duties we render him, and the sacrifices we make to him, and which, in making, we count not sacrifices, but pleasures. We sorrow for his sorrow; we supply his wants, or, if we cannot, we share them. We follow him to exile. We close ourselves in his prison; we soothe him in sickness; we strengthen him in death: nay, if it be possible, we throw down our life for his. Oh! What a treasure is that for which we do so much! And is it forbidden to us to mourn its loss? If it be, the power is not with us to obey.

Should we, then, to avoid the evil, forego the good? Shall we shut love from our hearts, that we may not feel the pain of his departure? No; happiness forbids it. Experience forbids it. Let him who hath laid on the pyre the dearest of his soul, who hath washed the urn with the bitterest tears of grief — let him say if his heart hath ever formed the wish that it had never shrined within it him whom he now deplores. Let him say if the pleasures of the sweet communion of his former days doth not still live in his remembrance. If he love not to recall the image of the departed, the tones of his voice, the words of his discourse, the deeds of his kindness, the amiable virtues of his life. If, while he weeps the loss of his friend, he smiles not to think that he once possessed him. He who knows not friendship, knows not the purest pleasure of earth. Yet if fate deprive us of it, though we grieve, we do not sink; Philosophy is still at hand, and she upholds us with fortitude. And think, my sons, perhaps in the very evil we dread, there is a good; perhaps the very uncertainty of the tenure gives it value in our eyes; perhaps all our pleasures take their zest from the known possibility of their interruption. What were the glories of the sun, if we knew not the gloom of darkness? What the refreshing breezes of morning and evening, if we felt not the fervors of noon? Should we value the lovely-flower, if it bloomed eternally; or the luscious fruit, if it hung always on the bough? Are not the smiles of the heavens more beautiful in contrast with their frowns, and the delights of the seasons more grateful from their vicissitudes? Let us then be slow to blame nature, for perhaps in her apparent errors there is hidden a wisdom. Let us not quarrel with fate, for perhaps in our evils lie the seeds of our good. Were our body never subject to sickness, we might be insensible to the joy of health. Were our life eternal, our tranquillity might sink into inaction. Were our

friendship not threatened with interruption, it might want much of its tenderness. This, then, my sons, is our duty, for this is our interest and our happiness; to seek our pleasures from the hands of the virtues, and for the pain which may befall us, to submit to it with patience, or bear up against it with fortitude. *To walk, in short, through life innocently and tranquilly; and to look on death as its gentle termination, which it becomes us to meet with ready minds, neither regretting the past, nor anxious for the future."*

Post by "bradley.whitley" of April 2, 2019 at 3:05 PM

And Frances Wright will now be read at my funeral.

Thanks, Cassius!

Post by "Cassius" of April 2, 2019 at 3:27 PM

I don't want to be too over the top in praising it, but that is excellent writing, and I have to think that Epicurus himself would have been proud of it.

Post by "Cassius" of April 2, 2019 at 8:19 PM

Elayne has asked a very good question about the quote from Frances Wright. Rather than hijack this thread too much, let's keep it focused on what Oscar asked, and I will start another.

Post by "Cassius" of April 3, 2019 at 5:54 AM

Oscar I hesitate to ask this because you seem very well read, but just to be sure, have you read the full poem of Lucretius? There is certainly a lot of material on death to be discussed from there too.

Post by “Hiram” of April 3, 2019 at 11:53 AM

The later Roman Epicureans had a tradition of placing this on their tombstones:

Non fui

Fui

Non Sum

Non Curo

"I was not. I was. I am not. I don't care."