

ECHION'S SON AND HIS TUTORS; PETRONIUS 46, 3-8

Echion has proudly proclaimed that his son is a hard worker and has a good brain, even though (as natural for a boy) he is sometimes distracted by other amusements (*quicquid illi vacat, caput de tabula non tollit. ingeniosus est et bono filo, etiamsi in aves morbosus est* etc. § 3). He has learnt some elementary mathematics of practical value (*iam quattuor partes dicit* § 3) and has made satisfactory progress in Greek and a good start in Latin (§ 5). But Echion, in spite of his *litterae thesaurum est* (§ 8), clearly takes a more practical view of education than many commentators have claimed, and prefers a professional training which will ensure a

livelihood (§§ 7, 8; note especially the use of the verb *inquinatus* in reference to literary studies); he is not convinced that his son's chief tutor has played a full part in the rapid completion of training in the desirable, but ultimately unprofitable, study of *litterae*. That the tutor is a good scholar, but a poor teacher, is implied in the description of the second *magister* as *non quidem doctus, sed curiosus, qui plus docet quam scit* (§ 6), and this — with the explicit complaint that he is unduly proud of himself and his attainments (*sibi placens* § 5) — suggests a self-centred person who has not been able, or has not troubled, to get to know his pupil properly. To Echion this would be a source of annoyance not only because the money paid to the tutor was being wasted (contrast *quicquid dederis, contentus est* of the second *magister*, § 6), but also because it was contrary to his own pompous insistence on the need for regular study (*ideo illi cotidie clamo* etc. § 8).

It is with such considerations in mind that one should seek to interpret Echion's words, *nec uno loco consistit sed venit dem litteras, sed non vult laborare* (§ 5), about which editors have held widely differing views. It seems reasonable to assume that *litteras* here means „literary studies“, as elsewhere in this passage, in contrast with *artificium*, the practical training for a professional career. The boy has clearly progressed beyond the need for ivory letters used for learning to read (Baehrens), and the explanations that Echion also uses the tutor as a private secretary (Buecheler, 1862), or gives him a „cheque“ for salary at his request (Lamer), or gives him books to read to improve his own knowledge (Marmorale), are far-fetched and unsatisfactory in the context. I suggest that Echion is complaining about the tutor throughout and is quoting two of his comments on the boy in order to show how little he is interested in him or understands him, in contrast with the results obtained by the second *magister* who is mentioned immediately afterwards. The sentence should therefore be punctuated thus: *nec uno loco consistit, sed 'venit, dem litteras', sed 'non vult laborare' — i. e.,* „(the tutor) does not take a firm stand (in dealing with the boy's progress), but (says to me) 'he comes asking me to prescribe literary studies', but (yet he also says) 'he does not want to work'“. On this interpretation *nec uno loco consistit* is almost equivalent to *nec sibi constat* in reference to the tutor's self-complacency and weakness; the use of the double *sed* is a natural one in such a context and there is no need for any emendation or for the assumption of a lacuna.