**Plutarch, *Cato the Elder***

*The censors held great power. Cato the Elder made full use of it during his censorship in 184 BCE*

17 1 As censor, then, Cato made Lucius Valerius Flaccus, his colleague and friend, chief senator. He also expelled many members of the Senate, including Lucius Quintius. This man had been consul seven years before, and, a thing which gave him more reputation than the consulship even, was brother of the Titus Flamininus who conquered King Philip. 2 The reason for his expulsion was the following. There was a youth who, ever since his boyhood, had been the favourite of Lucius. This youth Lucius kept ever about him, and took with him on his campaigns in greater honour and power than any one of his nearest friends and kinsmen had. He was once administering the affairs of his consular province, and at a certain banquet this youth, as was his wont, reclined at his side, and began to pay his flatteries to a man who, in his cups, was too easily led about. "I love you so much," he said, "that once, when there was a gladiatorial show at home, a thing which I had never seen, I rushed away from it to join you, although my heart was set on seeing a man slaughtered." 3 "Well, for that matter," said Lucius, "don't lie there with any grudge against me, for I will cure it." Thereupon he commanded that one of the men who were lying under sentence of death be brought to the banquet, and that a lictor with an axe stand by his side. Then he asked his beloved if he wished to see the man killed. The youth said he did, and Lucius ordered the man's head to be cut off.

4 This is the version which most writers give of the affair, and so Cicero has represented Cato himself as telling the story in his dialogue "On Old Age." But Livy says the victim was a Gallic deserter, and that Lucius did not have the man slain by a lictor, but smote him with his own hand, and that this is the version of the story in a speech of Cato's.

5 On the expulsion of Lucius from the Senate by Cato, his brother was greatly indignant, and appealed to the people, urging that Cato state his reasons for the expulsion. Cato did so, narrating the incident of the banquet. Lucius attempted to make denial, but when Cato challenged him to a formal trial of the case with a wager of money upon it, he declined. 6 Then the justice of his punishment was recognized. But once when a spectacle was given in the theatre, he passed along by the senatorial seats, and took his place as far away from them as he could. Then the people took pity upon him and shouted till they had forced him to change his seat, thus rectifying, as far as was possible, and alleviating the situation.

7 Cato expelled another senator who was thought to have good prospects for the consulship, namely, Manilius, because he embraced his wife in open day before the eyes of his daughter. For his own part, he said, he never embraced his wife unless it thundered loudly; and it was a joke of his to remark that he was a happy man when it thundered.

18 1 Cato was rather bitterly censured for his treatment of Lucius, the brother of Scipio, whom, though he had achieved the honour of a triumph, he expelled from the equestrian order. He was thought to have done this as an insult to the memory of Scipio Africanus. But he was most obnoxious to the majority of his enemies because he lopped off extravagance in living. This could not be done away with outright, since most of the people were already infected and corrupted by it, and so he took a roundabout way. 2 He had all apparel, equipages, jewellery, furniture and plate, the value of which in any case exceeded fifteen hundred drachmas, assessed at ten times its worth, wishing by means of larger assessments to make the owners' taxes also larger. Then he laid a tax of three on every thousand asses thus assessed, in order that such property holders, burdened by their charges, and seeing that people of equal wealth who led modest and simple lives paid less into the public treasury, might desist from their extravagance. 3 As a result, both classes were incensed against them, but those who endured the taxes for the sake of their luxury, and those no less who put away their luxury because of the taxes. For most men think themselves robbed of their wealth if they are prevented from displaying it, and that display of it is made in the superfluities, not in the necessaries of life. This, we are told, is what most astonished Ariston the philosopher, namely, that those possessed of the superfluities of life should be counted happy, rather than those well provided with life's necessary and useful things. 4 Scopas the Thessalian, when one of his friends asked for something of his which was of no great service to him, with the remark that he asked for nothing that was necessary and useful, replied: "And yet my wealth and happiness are based on just such useless and superfluous things." Thus the desire for wealth is no natural adjunct of the soul, but is imposed upon it by the false opinions of the outside world.

19 1 However, Cato paid not the slightest heed to his accusers, but grew still more strict. He cut off the pipes by which people conveyed part of the public water into their private houses and gardens;f he upset and demolished all buildings that encroached on public land; he reduced the cost of public works to the lowest, and forced the rent of public lands to the highest possible figure. 2 All these thingsº brought much odium upon him. Titus Flamininus headed a party against him which induced the Senate to annul as useless the outlays and payments which he had authorised for temples and public works, and incited the boldest of the tribunes to call him to account before the people and fine him two talents. The Senate also strongly opposed the erection of the basilica which he built at the public cost below the council-house in the Forum, and which was called the Basilica Porcia.

3 Still, it appears that the people approved of his censorship to an amazing extent. At any rate, after erecting a statue to his honour in the temple of Health, they commemorated in the inscription upon it, not the military commands nor the triumph of Cato, but, as the inscription may be translated, the fact "that when the Roman state was tottering to its fall, he was made censor, and by helpful guidance, wise restraints, and sound teachings, restored it again." 4 And yet, before this time he used to laugh at those who delighted in such honours, saying that, although they knew it not, their pride was based simply on the work of statuaries and painters, whereas his own images, of the most exquisite workmanship, were borne about in the hearts of his fellow citizens. And to those who expressed their amazement that many men of no fame had statues, while he had none, he used to say: "I would much rather have men ask why I have no statue, than why I have one." 5 In short, he thought a good citizen should not even allow himself to be praised, unless such praise was beneficial to the commonwealth.

And yet of all men he has heaped most praises upon himself. He tells us that men of self-indulgent lives, when rebuked for it, used to say; "We ought not to be blamed; we are no Catos." Also that those who imitated some of his practices and did it clumsily, were called "left-handed Catos." 6 Also that the Senate looked to him in the most dangerous crises as seafarers to their helmsman, and often, if he was not present, postponed its most serious business. These boasts of his are confirmed, it is true, by other witnesses, for he had great authority in the city, alike for his life, his eloquence, and his age.