

**ON BENEFITS:  
ADDRESSED TO  
AEBUTIUS LIBERALIS**

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On Benefits: Addressed to Aebutius Liberalis by L. Annaeus Seneca & Aubrey Stewart

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**L. ANNAEUS SENECA & AUBREY STEWART**

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O N B E N E F I T S

ADDRESSED TO

AEBUTUS LIBERALIS

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LONDON GEORGE BELL AND SONS YORK STREET  
COVENT GARDEN

1887

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## PREFACE.

SENECA, the favourite classic of the early fathers of the church and of the Middle Ages, whom Jerome, Tertullian, and Augustine speak of as "Seneca noster," who was believed to have corresponded with St. Paul, and upon whom<sup>1</sup> Calvin wrote a commentary, seems almost forgotten in modern times. Perhaps some of his popularity may have been due to his being supposed to be the author of those tragedies which the world has long ceased to read, but which delighted a period that preferred Euripides to Aeschylus: while casuists must have found congenial matter in an author whose fantastic cases of conscience are often worthy of Sanchez or Escobar. Yet Seneca's morality is always pure, and from him we gain, albeit at second hand, an insight into the doctrines of the Greek philosophers, Zeno, Epicurus, Chrysippus, &c., whose precepts and system of religious thought had in cultivated Roman society taken the place of the old worship of Jupiter and Quirinus.

Since Lodge's edition (fol. 1614), no complete translation of Seneca has been published in England, though Sir Roger L'Estrange wrote paraphrases of several Dialogues, which seem to have been enormously popular, running through more than sixteen editions. I think we may conjecture that Shakespeare had seen Lodge's translation,

<sup>1</sup> On the "De Clementia," an odd subject for the man who burned Servetus alive for differing with him.

from several allusions to philosophy, to that impossible conception "the wise man," and especially from a passage in "All's Well that ends Well," which seems to breathe the very spirit of "De Beneficiis."

"'Tis pity—  
That wishing well had not a body in it  
Which might be felt: that we, the poorer born,  
Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,  
Might with effects of them follow our friends  
And show what we alone must think; which never  
Returns us thanks."

*All's Well that ends Well*, Act i. sc. 1.

Though, if this will not fit the supposed date of that play, he may have taken the idea from "The Woorke of Lucius Annæus Seneca concerning Benefyting, that is too say, the dooing, receyving, and requyting of good turnes, translated out of Latin by A. Golding. J. Day, London, 1578." And even during the Restoration, Pepys's ideal of virtuous and lettered seclusion is a country house in whose garden he might sit on summer afternoons with his friend, Sir W. Coventry, "it maybe, to read a chapter of Seneca." In sharp contrast to this is Vahlen's preface to the minor Dialogues, which he edited after the death of his friend Koch, who had begun that work, in which he remarks that "he has read much of this writer, in order to perfect his knowledge of Latin, for otherwise he neither admires his artificial subtleties of thought, nor his childish mannerisms of style" (Vahlen, preface, p. v., ed. 1879, Jena).

Yet by the student of the history of Rome under the Cæsars, Seneca is not to be neglected, because, whatever may be thought of the intrinsic merit of his speculations, he represents, more perhaps even than Tacitus, the intellectual characteristics of his age, and the tone of society in Rome—nor could we well spare the gossiping stories which we find imbedded in his graver dissertations. The follow-



ing extract from Dean Merivale's "History of the Romans under the Empire" will show the estimate of him which has been formed by that accomplished writer:—

"At Rome, we have no reason to suppose that Christianity was only the refuge of the afflicted and miserable; rather, if we may lay any stress on the documents above referred to, it was first embraced by persons in a certain grade of comfort and respectability; by persons approaching to what we should call the *middle classes* in their condition, their education, and their moral views. Of this class Seneca himself was the idol, the oracle; he was, so to speak, the favourite preacher of the more intelligent and humane disciples of nature and virtue. Now the writings of Seneca show, in their way, a real anxiety among this class to raise the moral tone of mankind around them; a spirit of reform, a zeal for the conversion of souls, which, though it never rose, indeed, under the teaching of the philosophers, to boiling heat, still simmered with genial warmth on the surface of society. Far different as was their social standing-point, far different as were the foundations and the presumed sanctions of their teaching respectively, Seneca and St. Paul were both moral reformers; both, be it said with reverence, were fellow-workers in the cause of humanity, though the Christian could look beyond the proximate aims of morality and prepare men for a final development on which the Stoic could not venture to gaze. Hence there is so much in their principles, so much even in their language, which agrees together, so that the one has been thought, though it must be allowed without adequate reason, to have borrowed directly from the other.<sup>1</sup> But the philosopher,

<sup>1</sup> It is hardly necessary to refer to the pretended letters between St. Paul and Seneca. Besides the evidence from style, some of the dates they contain are quite sufficient to condemn them as clumsy forgeries. They are mentioned, but with no expression of belief in

be it remembered, discoursed to a large and not inattentive audience, and surely the soil was not all unfruitful on which his seed was scattered when he proclaimed that *God dwells not in temples of wood and stone, nor wants the ministrations of human hands*:<sup>1</sup> *that He has no delight in the blood of victims*:<sup>2</sup> *that He is near to all His creatures*:<sup>3</sup> *that His Spirit resides in men's hearts*:<sup>4</sup> *that all men are truly His offspring*:<sup>5</sup> *that we are members of one body, which is God or Nature*:<sup>6</sup> *that men must believe in God before they can approach Him*:<sup>7</sup> *that the true service of God is to be like unto Him*:<sup>8</sup> *that all men have sinned, and none performed all the works of the law*:<sup>9</sup> *that God is no respecter of nations, ranks, or conditions, but all, barbarian and Roman, bond and free, are alike under His all-seeing Providence.*<sup>10</sup>

"St. Paul enjoined submission and obedience even to the tyranny of Nero, and Seneca fosters no ideas subversive of political subjection. Endurance is the paramount virtue of the Stoic. To forms of government the wise man was their gentleness, by Jerome and Augustine. See Jones, "On the Canon," ii. 80.

<sup>1</sup> Sen., Ep. 95, and in Lactantius, Inst. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. 116: "Colitur Deus non tauris sed pia et recta voluntate."

<sup>3</sup> Ep. 41, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Ep. 46: "Sacer intra nos spiritus sedet."

<sup>5</sup> "De Prov.," i.

<sup>6</sup> Ep. 93, 95: "Membra sumus magni corporis."

<sup>7</sup> Ep. 95: "Primus Deorum cultus est Deos credere."

<sup>8</sup> Ep. 95: "Satis coluit quisquis imitatus est."

<sup>9</sup> Sen. de Ira. i. 14; ii. 27: "Quis est iste qui se profitetur omnibus legibus innocentem?"

<sup>10</sup> "De Benef.," iii. 18: "Virtus omnes admittit, libertinos, servos, reges." These and many other passages are collected by Champagny, ii. 546, after Fabricius and others, and compared with well-known texts of Scripture. The version of the Vulgate shows a great deal of verbal correspondence. M. Troplong remarks, after De Maistre, that Seneca has written a fine book on Providence, for which there was not even a name at Rome in the time of Cicero.—"L'Influence du Christianisme," &c., i., ch. 4.

wholly indifferent; they were among the external circumstances above which his spirit soared in serene self-contemplation. We trace in Seneca no yearning for a restoration of political freedom, nor does he even point to the senate, after the manner of the patriots of the day, as a legitimate check to the autocracy of the despot. The only mode, in his view, of tempering tyranny is to educate the tyrant himself in virtue. His was the self-denial of the Christians, but without their anticipated compensation. It seems impossible to doubt that in his highest flights of rhetoric—and no man ever recommended the unattainable with a finer grace—Seneca must have felt that he was labouring to build up a house without foundations; that his system, as Caius said of his style, was sand without lime. He was surely not unconscious of the inconsistency of his own position, as a public man and a minister, with the theories to which he had wedded himself; and of the impossibility of preserving in it the purity of his character as a philosopher or a man. He was aware that in the existing state of society at Rome, wealth was necessary to men high in station; wealth alone could retain influence, and a poor minister became at once contemptible. The distributor of the Imperial favours must have his banquets, his receptions, his slaves and freedmen; he must possess the means of attracting if not of bribing; he must not seem too virtuous, too austere, among an evil generation; in order to do good at all he must swim with the stream, however polluted it might be. All this inconsistency Seneca must have contemplated without blenching; and there is something touching in the serenity he preserved amidst the conflict that must have perpetually raged between his natural sense and his acquired principles. Both Cicero and Seneca were men of many weaknesses, and we remark them the more because both were pretenders to unusual strength of character; but while Cicero lapsed