

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

hominem involutum aestimas? Mangones quicquid est, quod displiceat, aliquo lenocinio abscondunt, itaque ementibus ornamenta ipsa suspecta sunt. Sive crus alligatum sive brachium aspiceres, nudari iuberet
10 et ipsum tibi corpus ostendi. Vides illum Scythiae Sarmatiaeve regem insigni capitis decorum? Si vis illum aestimare totumque scire, qualis sit, fasciam solve; multum mali sub illa latet. Quid de aliis loquor? Si perpendere te voles, sepone pecuniam, domum, dignitatem, intus te ipse considera. Nunc qualis sis, aliis credis. VALE

LXXXI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Quereris incidisse te in hominem ingratum. Si hoc nunc primum, age aut fortunae aut diligentiae tuae gratias. Sed nihil facere hoc loco diligentia potest nisi te malignum. Nam si hoc periculum vitare volueris, non dabis beneficia; ita ne apud alium pereant, apud te peribunt.

Non respondeant potius quam non dentur. Est post malam segetem serendum est; saepe quicquid perierat adsidua infelicis soli sterilitate, unius anni
2 restituit ubertas. Est tanti, ut gratum invenias, experiri et ingratos. Nemo habet tam certam in

^a A favourite trick; cf. Quintil. ii. 15. 25 mangones, qui colorem fuco et verum robur inani sagina mentiuntur.

^b The reader will be interested to compare this letter with the treatise (or essay) *Of Benefits*, translated by Thomas Lodge in 1614 from Seneca's work *De Beneficiis*, which was dedicated to Aebutius Liberalis, the subject of *Ep. xci.*

EPISTLES LXXX., LXXXI.

judge him when he is wrapped in a disguise? Slave-dealers hide under some sort of finery any defect which may give offence,^a and for that reason the very trappings arouse the suspicion of the buyer. If you catch sight of a leg or an arm that is bound up in cloths, you demand that it be stripped and that the body itself be revealed to you. Do you see yonder Scythian or Sarmatian king, his head adorned with the badge of his office? If you wish to see what he amounts to, and to know his full worth, take off his diadem; much evil lurks beneath it. But why do I speak of others? If you wish to set a value on yourself, put away your money, your estates, your honours, and look into your own soul. At present, you are taking the word of others for what you are. Farewell.

LXXXI. ON BENEFITS.^b

You complain that you have met with an ungrateful person. If this is your first experience of that sort, you should offer thanks either to your good luck or to your caution. In this case, however, caution can effect nothing but to make you ungenerous. For if you wish to avoid such a danger, you will not confer benefits; and so, that benefits may not be lost with another man, they will be lost to yourself.

It is better, however, to get no return than to confer no benefits. Even after a poor crop one should sow again; for often losses due to continued barrenness of an unproductive soil have been made good by one year's fertility. In order to discover one grateful person, it is worth while to make trial of many ungrateful ones. No man has so unerring

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

beneficiis manum, ut non saepe fallatur; aberrent, ut aliquando haereant. Post naufragium maria temptantur. Faeneratorem non fugat a foro decoctor.¹ Cito inertī otio vita torpebit, si relinquendum est, quicquid offendit; te vero benigniorem haec ipsa res faciat. Nam cuius rei eventus incertus est, id ut
 3 aliquando procedat, saepe temptandum est. Sed de isto satis multa in iis libris locuti sumus, qui de beneficiis inscribuntur.

Illud magis quaerendum videtur, quod non satis, ut existimo, explicatum est, an is, qui² profuit nobis, si postea nocuit, paria fecerit et nos debito solverit. Adice, si vis, et illud: multo plus postea nocuit quam
 4 ante profuerat. Si rectam illam rigidi iudicis sententiam quaeris, alterum ab altero absolvet et dicet: "Quamvis iniuriae praeponderent, tamen beneficii donetur, quod ex iniuria superest." Plus nocuit; sed prius³ profuit. Itaque habeatur et temporis ratio.
 5 Iam illa manifestiora sunt, quam ut admoneri debeas quaerendum esse, quam libenter profuerit, quam invitus nocuerit, quoniam animo et beneficia et iniuriae constant. "Nolui beneficium dare; victus

¹ *decoctor* Muretus, "from an old MS. "; *coctor*, *coactor*, *tortor*, various hands of VPb.

² *is qui* later MSS. ; *id quod* VPb.

³ *prius* Pincianus ; *pius* or *plus* MSS.

^a See *De Ben.* i. 1. 9 f. *non est autem quod tardiores faciat ad bene merendum turba ingratorum.*

EPISTLE LXXXI.

a hand when he confers benefits that he is not frequently deceived; it is well for the traveller to wander, that he may again cleave to the path. After a shipwreck, sailors try the sea again. The banker is not frightened away from the forum by the swindler. If one were compelled to drop everything that caused trouble, life would soon grow dull amid sluggish idleness; but in your case this very condition may prompt you to become more charitable. For when the outcome of any undertaking is unsure, you must try again and again, in order to succeed ultimately. I have, however, discussed the matter with sufficient fulness in the volumes which I have written, entitled "On Benefits." ^a

What I think should rather be investigated is this,—a question which I feel has not been made sufficiently clear: "Whether he who has helped us has squared the account and has freed us from our debt, if he has done us harm later." You may add this question also, if you like: "when the harm done later has been more than the help rendered previously." If you are seeking for the formal and just decision of a strict judge, you will find that he checks off one act by the other, and declares: "Though the injuries outweigh the benefits, yet we should credit to the benefits anything that stands over even after the injury." The harm done was indeed greater, but the helpful act was done first. Hence the time also should be taken into account. Other cases are so clear that I need not remind you that you should also look into such points as: How gladly was the help offered, and how reluctantly was the harm done,—since benefits, as well as injuries, depend on the spirit. "I did not wish to confer the benefit; but I was won over by my

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

sum aut verecundia aut instantis pertinacia aut spe.”
 6 Eo animo quidque debetur, quo datur, nec quantum sit, sed a quali profectum voluntate, perpenditur. Nunc coniectura tollatur; et illud beneficium fuit et hoc, quod modum beneficii prioris excessit, iniuria est. Vir bonus utrosque calculos sic ponit, ut se ipse circumscribat; beneficio adicit, iniuriae demit.

Alter ille remissior iudex, quem esse me malo,
 7 iniuriae oblivisci iubebit,¹ officii meminisse. “Hoc certe,” inquis,² “iustitiae convenit, suum cuique reddere, beneficio gratiam, iniuriae talionem aut certe malam gratiam.” Verum erit istud, cum alius iniuriam fecerit, alius beneficium dederit; nam si idem est, beneficio vis iniuriae extinguitur. Nam cui, etiam si merita non antecessissent, oportebat ignosci, post beneficia laedenti plus quam venia debetur. Non pono utrique par pretium. Pluris aestimo beneficium quam iniuriam. Non omnes grati sciunt debere beneficium; potest etiam imprudens et rudis et unus e turba, utique dum prope est ab accepto; ignorat autem, quantum pro eo debeat. Uni sapienti notum est, quanti res quaeque taxanda sit. Nam

¹ *iubebit* Gertz; *debebit* VPb.

² *inquis* later MSS.; *inquam* VPb.

^a *Calculi* were counters, spread out on the *abacus*, or counting-board; they ran in columns, by millions, hundred thousands, etc.

^b *Talio* (from *talis*, “just so much”) is the old Roman law of “eye for eye and tooth for tooth.” As law became less crude, it gave way to fines.

EPISTLE LXXXI.

respect for the man, or by the importunity of his request, or by hope." Our feeling about every obligation depends in each case upon the spirit in which the benefit is conferred; we weigh not the bulk of the gift, but the quality of the good-will which prompted it. So now let us do away with guess-work; the former deed was a benefit, and the latter, which transcended the earlier benefit, is an injury. The good man so arranges the two sides of his ledger^a that he voluntarily cheats himself by adding to the benefit and subtracting from the injury.

The more indulgent magistrate, however (and I should rather be such a one), will order us to forget the injury and remember the accommodation. "But surely," you say, "it is the part of justice to render to each that which is his due,—thanks in return for a benefit, and retribution,^b or at any rate ill-will, in return for an injury!" This, I say, will be true when it is one man who has inflicted the injury, and a different man who has conferred the benefit; for if it is the same man, the force of the injury is nullified by the benefit conferred. Indeed, a man who ought to be pardoned, even though there were no good deeds credited to him in the past, should receive something more than mere leniency if he commits a wrong when he has a benefit to his credit. I do not set an equal value on benefits and injuries. I reckon a benefit at a higher rate than an injury. Not all grateful persons know what it involves to be in debt for a benefit; even a thoughtless, crude fellow, one of the common herd, may know, especially soon after he has received the gift; but he does not know how deeply he stands in debt therefor. Only the wise man knows exactly what value should be put

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

ille, de quo loquebar modo, stultus etiam si bonae voluntatis est, aut minus quam debet aut alio quam debet tempore¹ aut quo non debet loco reddit. Id
 9 quod referendum est, effundit atque abicit. Mira in quibusdam rebus verborum proprietas est et consuetudo sermonis antiqui quaedam efficacissimis et officia docentibus notis signat. Sic certe solemus loqui: "ille illi gratiam rettulit." Referre est ultro, quod debeas, adferre. Non dicimus "gratiam reddidit," reddunt enim et qui repossuntur et qui inviti et qui ubilibet et qui per alium. Non dicimus "repossuit beneficium" aut "solvit"; nullum nobis
 10 placuit, quod aeri alieno convenit, verbum. Referre est ad eum, a quo acceperis, rem ferre. Haec vox significat voluntariam relationem; qui rettulit, ipse se appellavit.

Sapiens omnia examinabit secum: quantum acceperit, a quo, quando, ubi, quemadmodum. Itaque negamus quemquam scire gratiam referre nisi sapientem; non magis quam beneficium dare quisquam scit nisi sapiens, hic scilicet, qui magis dato gaudet quam
 11 alius accepto. Hoc aliquis inter illa numerat, quae

¹ *aut alio quam debet tempore* Buecheler; *aut tempore* MSS.

^a This "long-established terminology" applies to the *verborum proprietas* of philosophic diction, with especial reference to τὰ καθήκοντα, the appropriate duties of the philosopher and the seeker after wisdom. Thus, *referre* is distinguished from *reddere*, *reponere*, *solvere*, and other financial terms.

^b *i.e.*, the Stoics.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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