

# SENECA'S MORALS OF A HAPPY LIFE, BENEFITS, ANGER AND CLEMENCY

**Lucius Annaeus Seneca**



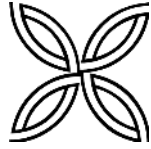
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## Table of contents

TO THE READER.

OF SENECA'S WRITINGS.

SENECA'S LIFE AND DEATH.

SENECA OF BENEFITS.

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CHAPTER I.OF BENEFITS IN GENERAL.

CHAPTER II.SEVERAL SORTS OF BENEFITS.

CHAPTER III.A SON MAY OBLIGE HIS FATHER,  
AND A SERVANT HIS MASTER.

CHAPTER IV.IT IS THE INTENTION, NOT THE  
MATTER, THAT MAKES THE BENEFIT.

CHAPTER V.THERE MUST BE JUDGMENT IN A  
BENEFIT, AS WELL AS MATTER AND INTENTION;  
AND ESPECIALLY IN THE CHOICE OF THE  
PERSON.

CHAPTER VI.THE MATTER OF OBLIGATIONS,  
WITH ITS CIRCUMSTANCES.

CHAPTER VII.THE MANNER OF OBLIGING.

CHAPTER VIII.THE DIFFERENCE AND VALUE OF  
BENEFITS.

CHAPTER IX.AN HONEST MAN CANNOT BE  
OUTDONE IN COURTESY.

CHAPTER X.THE QUESTION DISCUSSED,  
WHETHER OR NOT A MAN MAY GIVE OR RETURN  
A BENEFIT TO HIMSELF?

CHAPTER XI.HOW FAR ONE MAN MAY BE  
OBLIGED FOR A BENEFIT DONE TO ANOTHER.

CHAPTER XII.THE BENEFACTOR MUST HAVE NO  
BY-ENDS.

CHAPTER XIII.THERE ARE MANY CASES WHEREIN  
A MAN MAY BE MINDED OF A BENEFIT, BUT IT IS  
VERY RARELY TO BE CHALLENGED, AND NEVER  
TO BE UPBRAIDED.

CHAPTER XIV.HOW FAR TO OBLIGE OR REQUITE  
A WICKED MAN.

CHAPTER XV.A GENERAL VIEW OF THE PARTS  
AND DUTIES OF THE BENEFACTOR.

CHAPTER XVI.HOW THE RECEIVER OUGHT TO  
BEHAVE HIMSELF.

CHAPTER XVII.OF GRATITUDE.

CHAPTER XVIII.GRATITUDE MISTAKEN.

CHAPTER XIX.OF INGRATITUDE.

CHAPTER XX.THERE CAN BE NO LAW AGAINST  
INGRATITUDE.

SENECA OF A HAPPY LIFE.

---

CHAPTER I.OF A HAPPY LIFE, AND WHEREIN IT  
CONSISTS.

CHAPTER II.HUMAN HAPPINESS IS FOUNDED  
UPON WISDOM AND VIRTUE; AND FIRST, OF  
WISDOM.

CHAPTER III.THERE CAN BE NO HAPPINESS  
WITHOUT VIRTUE.

CHAPTER IV.PHILOSOPHY IS THE GUIDE OF LIFE.

CHAPTER V.THE FORCE OF PRECEPTS.

CHAPTER VI.NO FELICITY LIKE PEACE OF  
CONSCIENCE.



CHAPTER VII.A GOOD MAN CAN NEVER BE MISERABLE, NOR A WICKED MAN HAPPY.

CHAPTER VIII.THE DUE CONTEMPLATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS THE CERTAIN CURE OF ALL MISFORTUNES.

CHAPTER IX.OF LEVITY OF MIND, AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTS OF A HAPPY LIFE.

CHAPTER X.HE THAT SETS UP HIS REST UPON CONTINGENCIES SHALL NEVER BE QUIET.

CHAPTER XI.A SENSUAL LIFE IS A MISERABLE LIFE.

CHAPTER XII.AVARICE AND AMBITION ARE INSATIABLE AND RESTLESS.

CHAPTER XIII.HOPE AND FEAR ARE THE BANE OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER XIV.IT IS ACCORDING TO THE TRUE OR FALSE ESTIMATE OF THINGS THAT WE ARE HAPPY OR MISERABLE.

CHAPTER XV.THE BLESSINGS OF TEMPERANCE AND MODERATION.

CHAPTER XVI.CONSTANCY OF MIND GIVES A  
MAN REPUTATION, AND MAKES HIM HAPPY IN  
DESPITE OF ALL MISFORTUNE.

CHAPTER XVII.OUR HAPPINESS DEPENDS IN A  
GREAT MEASURE UPON THE CHOICE OF OUR  
COMPANY.

CHAPTER XVIII.THE BLESSINGS OF FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER XIX.HE THAT WOULD BE HAPPY MUST  
TAKE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS TIME.

CHAPTER XX.HAPPY IS THE MAN THAT MAY  
CHOOSE HIS OWN BUSINESS.

CHAPTER XXI.THE CONTEMPT OF DEATH MAKES  
ALL THE MISERIES OF LIFE EASY TO US.

CHAPTER XXII.CONSOATIONS AGAINST DEATH,  
FROM THE PROVIDENCE AND THE NECESSITY OF  
IT.

CHAPTER XXIII.AGAINST IMMODERATE SORROW  
FOR THE DEATH OF FRIENDS.

CHAPTER XXIV.CONSOATION AGAINST  
BANISHMENT AND BODILY PAIN.

CHAPTER XXV. POVERTY TO A WISE MAN IS  
RATHER A BLESSING THAN A MISFORTUNE.

SENECA OF ANGER.

---

CHAPTER I. ANGER DESCRIBED, IT IS AGAINST  
NATURE, AND ONLY TO BE FOUND IN MAN.

CHAPTER II. THE RISE OF ANGER.

CHAPTER III. ANGER MAY BE SUPPRESSED.

CHAPTER IV. IT IS A SHORT MADNESS, AND A  
DEFORMED VICE.

CHAPTER V. ANGER IS NEITHER WARRANTABLE  
NOR USEFUL.

CHAPTER VI. ANGER IN GENERAL, WITH THE  
DANGER AND EFFECTS OF IT.

CHAPTER VII. THE ORDINARY GROUNDS AND  
OCCASIONS OF ANGER.

CHAPTER VIII. ADVICE IN THE CASES OF  
CONTUMELY AND REVENGE.

CHAPTER IX. CAUTIONS AGAINST ANGER IN THE  
MATTER OF EDUCATION, CONVERSE, AND OTHER  
GENERAL RULES OF PREVENTING IT, BOTH IN  
OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

CHAPTER X.AGAINST RASH JUDGMENT.

CHAPTER XI.TAKE NOTHING ILL FROM ANOTHER  
MAN, UNTIL YOU HAVE MADE IT YOUR OWN  
CASE.

CHAPTER XII.OF CRUELTY.

SENECA OF CLEMENCY.

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# TO THE READER.

It has been a long time my thought to turn Seneca into English; but whether as a *translation* or an *abstract*, was the question. A *translation*, I perceive, it must not be, at last, for several reasons. First, it is a thing already done to my hand, and of above sixty years' standing; though with as little *credit*, perhaps, to the Author, as *satisfaction* to the Reader. Secondly, There is a great deal in him, that is wholly foreign to my business: as his philosophical treatises of *Meteors*, *Earthquakes*, the Original of *Rivers*, several frivolous disputes betwixt the Epicureans and the Stoics, etc., to say nothing of his frequent repetitions of the same thing again in other words, (wherein he very handsomely excuses himself, by saying, "That he does but inculcate over and over the same counsels to those that over and over commit the same faults.") Thirdly, His excellency consists rather in a rhapsody of divine and extraordinary *hints* and *notions*, than in any regulated method of discourse; so that to take him as he lies, and so to go through with him, were utterly inconsistent with

the order and brevity which I propound; my principal design, being only to digest, and commonplace his *Morals* , in such sort, that any man, upon occasion, may know where to find them. And I have kept myself so close to this proposition, that I have reduced all his scattered Ethics to their *proper heads* , without any additions of my own, more than of absolute necessity for the tacking of them together. Some other man in my place would perhaps make you twenty apologies for his want of skill and address, in governing this affair; but these are formal and pedantic fooleries, as if any man that first takes himself for a coxcomb in his own heart, would afterwards make himself one in print too. This *Abstract* , such as it is, you are extremely welcome to; and I am sorry it is no better, both for your sakes and my own, for if it were written up to the spirit of the original, it would be one of the most valuable presents that ever any private man bestowed upon the public; and this, too, even in the judgment of both parties, as well Christian as Heathen, of which in its due place.

Next to my choice of the *Author* and of the *subject* , together with the manner of handling it, I have likewise had some regard, in this publication, to the *timing* of it, and to the preference of this topic of *Benefits* above all others, for the groundwork of my *first essay* . We are fallen into an age of *vain philosophy* (as the holy apostle calls it) and so desperately overrun with Drolls and

Sceptics, that there is hardly any thing so certain or so sacred, that is not exposed to question and contempt, insomuch, that betwixt the hypocrite and the Atheist, the very foundations of religion and good manners are shaken, and the two tables of the *Decalogue* dashed to pieces the one against the other; the laws of government are subjected to the fancies of the vulgar; public authority to the private passions and opinions of the people; and the supernatural motions of grace confounded with the common dictates of nature. In this state of corruption, who so fit as a good honest Christian Pagan for a moderator among Pagan Christians?

To pass now from the general scope of the whole work to the particular argument of the first part of it, I pitched upon the theme of *Benefits* , *Gratitude* , and *Ingratitude* , to begin withal, as an earnest of the rest, and a lecture expressly calculated for the unthankfulness of these times; the foulest undoubtedly, and the most execrable of all others, since the very apostasy of the angels: nay, if I durst but suppose a possibility of mercy for those damned spirits, and that they might ever be taken into favor again, my charity would hope even better for them than we have found from some of our revoltors, and that they would so behave themselves as not to incur a second forfeiture. And to carry the resemblance yet one point farther, they do both of them agree in an implacable malice against those of their fellows that keep their



stations. But, alas! what could *Ingratitude* do without *Hypocrisy*, the inseparable companion of it, and, in effect, the bolder and blacker devil of the two? for Lucifer himself never had the face to lift up his eyes to heaven, and talk to the Almighty at the familiar rate of our pretended patriots and zealots, and at the same time to make him party to a cheat. It is not for nothing that the Holy Ghost has denounced so many woes, and redoubled so many cautions against *hypocrites*; plainly intimating at once how dangerous a snare they are to mankind, and no less odious to God himself; which is sufficiently denoted in the force of that dreadful expression, *And your portion shall be with hypocrites*. You will find in the holy scriptures (as I have formerly observed) that God has given the grace of repentance to *persecutors*, *idolaters*, *murderers*, *adulterers*, etc., but I am mistaken if the whole Bible affords you any one instance of a *converted hypocrite*.

To descend now from truth itself to our own experience have we not seen, even in our days, a most pious (and almost faultless) Prince brought to the scaffold by his own subjects? The most glorious constitution upon the face of the earth, both ecclesiastical and civil, torn to pieces and dissolved? The happiest people under the sun enslaved? Our temples sacrilegiously profaned, and a license given to all sorts of heresy and outrage? And by whom but by a race of *hypocrites*? who had nothing in their mouths all this while but *the purity of the gospel*, *the honor of the king*,

and *the liberty of the people* , assisted underhand with *defamatory papers* , which were levelled at the *king* himself through the sides of his most faithful *ministers* . This PROJECT succeeded so well against one government, that it is now again set afoot against another; and by some of the very actors too in that TRAGEDY, and after a most gracious pardon also, when Providence had laid their necks and their fortunes at his majesty's feet. It is a wonderful thing that *libels* and *libellers* , the most *infamous* of *practices* and of *men* ; the most *unmanly sneaking methods* and *instruments* of *mischiefs* ; the very bane of *human society* , and the *plague* of all *governments* ; it is a wonderful thing (I say) that these engines and engineers should ever find credit enough in the world to engage a party; but it would be still more wonderful if the *same trick* should pass twice upon the *same people* , in the *same age* , and from the *same IMPOSTORS*. This contemplation has carried me a little out of my way, but it has at length brought me to my text again, for there is in the bottom of it the highest opposition imaginable of *ingratitude* and *obligation* .

The reader will, in some measure, be able to judge by this taste what he is farther to expect; that is to say, as to the cast of my design, and the simplicity of the style and dress; for that will still be the same, only accompanied with variety of matter. Whether it pleases the world or no, the care is taken; and yet I could wish that it might be as delightful to others upon the perusal, as it has been to

me in the speculation. Next to the gospel itself, I do look upon it as the most sovereign remedy against the miseries of human nature: and I have ever found it so, in all the injuries and distresses of an unfortunate life. You may read more of him, if you please, in the *Appendix* , which I have here subjoined to this Preface, concerning the authority of his *writings* , and the circumstances of his *life* ; as I have extracted them out of Lipsius.

# OF SENECA'S WRITINGS.

It appears that our author had among the ancients three professed enemies. In the first place Caligula, who called his writings, *sand without lime* ; alluding to the starts of his fancy, and the incoherence of his sentences. But Seneca was never the worse for the censure of a person that propounded even the suppressing of Homer himself; and of casting Virgil and Livy out of all *public libraries* . The next was Fabius, who taxes him for being too bold with the eloquence of former times, and failing in that point himself; and likewise for being too quaint and finical in his expressions; which Tacitus imputes, in part to the freedom of his own particular inclination, and partly to the humor of the times. He is also charged by Fabius as no profound philosopher; but with all this, he allows him to be a man very studious and learned, of great wit and invention, and well read in all sorts of literature; a severe reprovor of vice; most divinely sententious; and well worth the reading, if it were only for his morals; adding, that if his judgment had been

answerable to his wit, it had been much the more for his reputation; but he wrote whatever came next; so that I would advise the reader (says he) to distinguish where he *himself* did not, for there are many things in him, not only to be approved, but admired; and it was great pity that he that could do what he would, should not always make the best choice. His third adversary is Agellius, who falls upon him for his style, and a kind of tinkling in his sentences, but yet commends him for his piety and good counsels. On the other side, Columela calls him *a man of excellent wit and learning* ; Pliny, *the prince of erudition*; Tacitus gives him the character of *a wise man, and a fit tutor for a prince* ; Dio reports him to have been *the greatest man of his age* .

Of those pieces of his that are extant, we shall not need to give any particular account: and of those that are lost, we cannot, any farther than by lights to them from other authors, as we find them cited much to his honor; and we may reasonably compute them to be the greater part of his works. That he wrote several *poems* in his banishment, may be gathered partly from himself, but more expressly out of Tacitus, who says, “that he was reproached with his applying himself to poetry, after he saw that Nero took pleasure in it, out of a design to curry favor.” St. Jerome refers to a discourse of his concerning matrimony. Lactantius takes notice of his history, and his books of Moralities: St. Augustine quotes some passages of his out

of a book of Superstition; some references we meet with to his books of Exhortations: Fabius makes mention of his Dialogues: and he himself speaks of a treatise of his own concerning Earthquakes, which he wrote in his youth, but the opinion of an epistolary correspondence that he had with St. Paul, does not seem to have much color for it.

Some few fragments, however, of those books of his that are wanting, are yet preserved in the writings of other eminent authors, sufficient to show the world how great a treasure they have lost by the excellency of that little that is left.

Seneca, says Lactantius, that was the sharpest of all the Stoics, how great a veneration has he for the Almighty! as for instance, discoursing of a violent death; “Do you not understand?” says he, “the majesty and the authority of your Judge; he is the supreme Governor of heaven and earth, and the God of all your gods; and it is upon him that all those powers depend which we worship for deities.” Moreover, in his Exhortations, “This God,” says he, “when he laid the foundations of the universe, and entered upon the greatest and the best work in nature, in the ordering of the government of the world, though he was himself All in all, yet he substituted other subordinate ministers, as the servants of his commands.” And how many other things does this Heathen speak of God like one of us!

Which the acute Seneca, says Lactantius again, saw in his Exhortations. “We,” says he, “have our dependence elsewhere, and should look up to that power, to which we are indebted for all that we can pretend to that is good.”

And again, Seneca says very well in his Morals, “They worship the images of the God,” says he, “kneel to them, and adore them, they are hardly ever from them, either plying them with offerings or sacrifices, and yet, after all this reverence to the image, they have no regard at all to the workman that made it.”

Lactantius again. “An invective,” says Seneca in his Exhortations, “is the masterpiece of most of our philosophers; and if they fall upon the subject of *avarice*, *lust*, *ambition*, they lash out into such excess of bitterness, as if railing were a mark of their profession. They make me think of gallipots in an apothecary’s shop, that have remedies without and poison within.”

Lactantius still. “He that would know all things, let him read Seneca; the most lively describer of public vices and manners, and the smartest reprehender of them.”

And again; as Seneca has it in the books of Moral Philosophy, “He is the brave man, whose splendor and authority is the least part of his greatness, that can look death in the face without trouble or surprise; who, if his body were to be broken upon the wheel, or melted lead to be poured down his throat, would be less concerned for the pain itself, than for the dignity of bearing it.”



Let no man, says Lactantius, think himself the safer in his wickedness for want of a witness; for God is omniscient, and to him nothing can be a secret. It is an admirable sentence that Seneca concludes his Exhortations withal: "God," says he, "is a great, (I know not what), an incomprehensible Power; it is to him that we live, and to him that we must approve ourselves. What does it avail us that our consciences are hidden from men, when our souls lie open to God?" What could a Christian have spoken more to the purpose in this case than this divine Pagan? And in the beginning of the same work, says Seneca, "What is it that we do? to what end is it to stand contriving, and to hide ourselves? We are under a guard, and there is no escaping from our keeper. One man may be parted from another by travel, death, sickness; but there is no dividing us from ourselves. It is to no purpose to creep into a corner where nobody shall see us. Ridiculous madness! Make it the case, that no mortal eye could find us out, he that has a conscience gives evidence against himself."

It is truly and excellently spoken of Seneca, says Lactantius, once again; "Consider," says he "the majesty, the goodness, and the venerable mercies of the Almighty; a friend that is always at hand. What delight can it be to him the slaughter of innocent creatures or the worship of bloody sacrifices? Let us purge our minds, and lead virtuous and honest lives. His pleasure lies not in the

magnificence of temples made with stone, but in the pity and devotion of consecrated hearts.”

In the book that Seneca wrote against Superstitions, treating of images, says St. Austin, he writes thus: “They represent the holy, the immortal, and the inviolable gods in the basest matter, and without life or motion; in the forms of men, beasts, fishes, some of mixed bodies, and those figures they call deities, which, if they were but animated, would affright a man, and pass for monsters.” And then, a little farther, treating of Natural Theology, after citing the opinions of philosophers, he supposes an objection against himself: “Somebody will perhaps ask me, would you have me then to believe the heavens and the earth to be gods, and some of them above the moon, and some below it? Shall I ever be brought to the opinion of Plato, or of Strabo the Peripatetic? the one of which would have God to be without a body, and the other without a mind.” To which he replies, “And do you give more credit then to the dreams of T. Tatius, Romulus, Hostilius, who caused, among other deities, even Fear and Paleness to be worshipped? the vilest of human affections; the one being the motion of an affrighted mind, and the other not so much the disease as the color of a disordered body. Are these the deities that you will rather put your faith in, and place in the heavens?” And speaking afterward of their abominable customs, with what liberty does he write! “One,” says he, “out of zeal,

makes himself an eunuch, another lances his arms; if this be the way to *please* their gods, what should a man do if he had a mind to *anger* them? or, if this be the way to please them, they do certainly deserve not to be worshipped at all. What a frenzy is this to imagine that the gods can be delighted with such cruelties, as even the worst of men would make a conscience to inflict! The most barbarous and notorious of tyrants, some of them have perhaps done it themselves, or ordered the tearing of men to pieces by others; but they never went so far as to command any man to torment himself. We have heard of those that have suffered castration to gratify the lust of their imperious masters, but never any man that was forced to act it upon himself. They murder themselves in their very temples, and their prayers are offered up in blood. Whosoever shall but observe what they do, and what they suffer, will find it so misbecoming an honest man, so unworthy of a freeman, and so inconsistent with the action of a man in his wits, that he must conclude them all to be mad, if it were not that there are so many of them; for only their number is their justification and their protection.”

When he comes to reflect, says St. Augustine, upon those passages which he himself had seen in the Capitol, he censures them with liberty and resolution; and no man will believe that such things would be done unless in mockery or frenzy. What lamentation is there in the

Egyptian sacrifices for the loss of Osiris? and then what joy for the finding of him again? Which he makes himself sport with; for in truth it is all a fiction; and yet those people that neither lost any thing nor found any thing, must express their sorrows and their rejoicings to the highest degree. “But there is only a certain time,” says he, “for this freak, and once in a year people may be allowed to be mad. I came into the Capitol,” says Seneca, “where the several deities had their several servants and attendants, their lictors, their dressers, and all in posture and action, as if they were executing their offices; some to hold the glass, others to comb out Juno’s and Minerva’s hair; one to tell Jupiter what o’clock it is; some lasses there are that sit gazing upon the image, and fancy Jupiter has a kindness for them. All these things,” says Seneca, a while after, “a wise man will observe for the law’s sake more than for the gods; and all this rabble of deities, which the superstition of many ages has gathered together, we are in such manner to adore, as to consider the worship to be rather matter of custom than of conscience.” Whereupon St. Augustine observes, that this illustrious senator worshipped what he reprov’d, acted what he disliked, and adored what he condemned.



# SENECA'S LIFE AND DEATH.

It has been an ancient custom to record the actions and the writings of eminent men, with all their circumstances, and it is but a right that we owe to the memory of our famous author. Seneca was by birth a Spaniard of Cordova, (a Roman colony of great fame and antiquity.) He was of the family of Annæus, of the order of knights; and the father, Lucius Annæus Seneca, was distinguished from the son, by the name of *the Orator* . His mother's name was Helvia, a woman of excellent qualities. His father came to Rome in the time of Augustus, and his wife and children soon followed him, our Seneca yet being in his infancy. There were three brothers of them, and never a sister. Marcus Annæus Novatus, Lucius Annæus Seneca, and Lucius Annæus Mela; the first of these changed his name for Junius Gallio, who adopted him; to him it was that he dedicated his treatise of Anger, whom he calls Novatus too; and he

also dedicated his discourse of a *Happy Life* to his brother Gallio. The youngest brother (Annæus Mela) was Lucan's father. Seneca was about twenty years of age in the *fifth year* of Tiberius, when the Jews were expelled from Rome. His father trained him up to *rhetoric*, but his genius led him rather to *philosophy*; and he applied his wit to *morality* and *virtue* . He was a great hearer of the celebrated men of those times; as Attalus, Sotion, Papirius, Fabianus, (of whom he makes often mention,) and he was much an admirer also of Demetrius the Cynic, whose conversation he had afterwards in the Court, and both at home also and abroad, for they often travelled together. His father was not at all pleased with his humor of *philosophy* , but forced him upon the *law* , and for a while he practiced *pleading* . After which he would needs put him upon *public employment*: and he came first to be *quæstor* , then *prætor*, and some will have it that he was chosen *consul* ; but this is doubtful.

Seneca finding that he had ill offices done him at court, and that Nero's favor began to cool, he went directly and resolutely to Nero, with an offer to refund all that he had gotten, which Nero would not receive; but however, from that time he changed his course of life, received few visits, shunned company, went little abroad; still pretending to be kept at home, either by indisposition or by his study. Being Nero's tutor and governor, all things were well so long as Nero followed his counsel. His two



chief favorites were Burrhus and Seneca, who were both of them excellent in their ways: Burrhus, in his care of *military* affairs, and severity of *discipline* ; Seneca for his *precepts* and *good advice* in the matter of *eloquence*, and the *gentleness* of an *honest mind* ; assisting one another, in that slippery age of the prince (says Tacitus) to invite him, by the allowance of lawful pleasures, to the love of virtue. Seneca had two wives; the name of the first is not mentioned; his second was Paulina, whom he often speaks of with great passion. By the former he had his son Marcus.

In the first year of Claudius he was banished into Corsica, when Julia, the daughter of Germanicus, was accused by Messalina of adultery and banished too, Seneca being charged as one of the adulterers. After a matter of eight years or upwards in exile, he was called back, and as much in favor again as ever. His estate was partly patrimonial, but the greatest part of it was the bounty of his prince. His gardens, villas, lands, possessions, and incredible sums of money, are agreed upon at all hands; which drew an envy upon him. Dio reports him to have had 250,000 *l.* sterling at interest in Britanny alone, which he called in all at a sum. The Court itself could not bring him to flattery; and for his piety, submission, and virtue, the practice of his whole life witnesses for him. "So soon," says he, "as the candle is taken away, my wife, that knows my custom, lies still, without a word speaking,